



Ways to Read the Bible

MIMETIC

A literal reading
of the Text

- The text mirrors the world
- The text is a report of events and a quotation of words spoken
- The text means exactly what the text says
- The “Word” is equated with the words of the text

EXPRESSIVE

An historical
reading of the text.

- The text’s meaning is to be found in what the author intended
- The text’s meaning is connected with the historical circumstances that influenced its author and which it addressed
- The key to finding the meaning of a text is in the “world behind the text”
- Texts have a meaning that can be objectively studied and discerned in relationship to the “world behind the text”

OBJECTIVE

A literary reading
of the text

- A text is to be studied in its own right without reference to external factors like its author’s intention or its historical background
- The text’s meaning is found in its literary features: rhetorical (word repetitions, parallelisms, organizational patterns), plot, characterization, temporal features, use of direct speech, etc.
- The meaning of the text is to be discerned by entering “the world of the text”
- Some literary theory often informs this kind of reading (e.g. New Criticism-structuralism) and shapes the way a text’s meaning is

PRAGMATIC

A reader-centered
reading of the text

- A text is understood to have meaning because of its interaction with the reader
- The “place” of the reader (culturally, historically, economically, ethnically, etc.) all impact how a text is read and its meaning discerned
- The “world in front of the text” is understood to be the most important factor in how a text is understood to “mean”
- A text is understood to have multiple meanings depending upon who is