Situating *Kerygma* in the Spiritual Schemata of Northrop Frye

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Abstract

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Northrop Frye's exploration of *kerygma*, traditionally considered to be the Christian proclamation leading to salvation, is the linchpin of his study of biblical language. He situates *kerygma* within a range of interconnected theories beginning with a series of linguistic phases which determine our ability to achieve spiritual apotheosis. In this *schema*, *kerygma* is closest to poetic language and farthest from conceptual and descriptive expression which objectify the Divine and prevent authentic inter-subjective encounters. Ultimately, however, *kerygma* is argued to be from beyond the poetic since it has more spiritual potency than most secular literature which remains hypothetical. A true kerygmatic breakthrough engenders a cooperative creative vision involving the human and the Divine experienced in the human imagination. Frye considers such a breakthrough to be at least possible in non-sacred expression, exemplified by the work of Stéphane Mallarmé and Martin Buber. Frye's schemata are typically worked out through his adaptation of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. This is apparent in Frye's modes of language and Phases of Revelation, where his typological perspective is also set out. The phases culminate with the Participating Apocalypse which ideally is the reader's total and immediate apprehension of the entirety of biblical narrative and symbolism. The resulting elevation of consciousness is related to Frye's concept of Interpenetration where all aspects of reality, including the Divine, are experienced simultaneously in a full flourishing of the Spirit. Frye's *theoria* also intersects with several aspects of mainstream theology. His dialectical development of Dante's adaptation of the four senses of Scripture informs his own views of polysemous meaning, and his rejection of Bultmann's demythologization project is a stepping stone to his identification of myth as the foundation of all linguistic expression, including biblical texts. Frye also positions his theory of primary concerns in sympathetic contrast to Paul Tillich's ultimate concern. Perhaps most significantly, he posits *analogia visionis* as a potential alternative to the orthodox *analogia entis* and *analogia fidei*. Here, as throughout, Frye's views are profoundly influenced by the Romantic visionary poet William Blake who rejects many aspects of traditional religious thought. In the end, Frye considers himself to be a pure critic unrestricted by the usual categories of theology and philosophy, and it is suggested that he should be read in that light.

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Abbreviations (Works by Northrop Frye unless otherwise noted)

AC *Anatomy of Criticism*: *Four Essays.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

CR *Creation and Recreation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

DV *The Double Vision.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

EI *The Educated Imagination.* Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1963.

FS *Fearful Symmetry*: *A Study of William Blake*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.

GC *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature.* Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1982.

LN *Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks 1982-1990: Architecture of the Spiritual World*, Volumes 5 and 6 of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye.* Robert D. Denham, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

MM *Myth and Metaphor, Selected Essays, 1974-1988.* Robert D. Denham, ed. Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1990.

NFC *Northrop Frye in Conversation*, by David Cayley. Concord: Anansi, 1992

NFO *Northrop Frye and Others: Twelve Writers Who Helped Shape His Thinking,* by Robert D. Denham Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2015.

NFR *Northrop Frye on Religion,* Volume 4 of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye.* Alvin A. Lee and Jean O'Grady ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

NR *Northrop Frye's Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts,* Volume 13 of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye.* Robert D. Denham, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

TBN *The "Third* Book" *Notebooks of Northrop Frye,* Volume 9 *of The Collected Works of Northrop Frye.* Robert D. Denham ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

WP *Words with Power.* Toronto: Penguin, 1990.

Introduction and Methodology

As the 20th Century's foremost literary theorist concerning the relationship between the Bible and literature, Northrop Frye's work arguably bears considerably more attention in the fields of theology and religious studies than it has received.[1] This is especially true with respect to his last three published works: *The Great Code* (1982), *Words with Power* (1990) and *The Double Vision* (1991), where he shifts the focus of his evolving critical framework from Western Literature at large to a more specific exploration of the ways Biblical language creates spiritual meaning. Foremost among his theories is his conception of *kerygma*[2], traditionally considered to be the proclamation of the central Christian message essential for salvation. Frye's assertion is that true *kerygma* is not only the content of that message but the dynamic linguistic mechanism whereby the duality of subject and object, and the human constraints of space and time can be overcome in an apocalyptic vision available in a spiritual resurrection experienced in the here and now.

What follows will explore Frye's understanding of *kerygma* and attempt to situate it in relation to the evolution of his critical schemata. This evolution begins in earnest with *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), his monumental study of William Blake, whose ideas on the relationship between God and the human imagination become foundational for Frye's *theoria* in relation both to literature, and what he has contributed in his self-described role as "architect of the spiritual world" (*LN* 414). Frye's literary critical theories are further developed in his seminal *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). While ostensibly a treatise on secular writing, the *Anatomy* establishes principles which will also be used by Frye in his later writing on sacred literature, most notably in his use of Dante's adaptation of the traditional four senses of Scripture and Frye's own radical redefinition of literal meaning. Indeed, as Biblical writing is a form of literature, it will be shown to employ all its conventions and techniques. However, Frye asserts that the Bible is *more* than literature because it is not, like fiction, merely hypothetical: it can change lives and bring one into direct communion with God in the spirit.

In the late 1970s when, at the apex of his career, Frye focuses his critical attention on Biblical writing, he brings to bear the intellectual resources amassed over more than fifty years of continuous study and reflection. In one sense, this can be seen as a return to Frye's beginnings as a Methodist minister — a position he never officially relinquished. The results, as indicated by his last three works, are far from a mere retreat into familiar and comfortable territory. They are, rather, the rich culmination of an intellectual pilgrimage that forges a rich link, however tentatively realized, between a philosophy of language and the expansion of human consciousness into full spiritual enlightenment. The main goal of this paper is an attempt to illuminate how *kerygma* can make this possible. Unfortunately, throughout the final stages of this journey two seemingly contradictory aspects of *kerygma* arise: first, that it is indeed the linchpin of Frye's entire *theoria* — the proclamation that can indeed bring one into communion with God, and others in the spirit; but second, that in frustratingly large measure its nature is to be discerned obliquely: that is, while it is positioned at the very centre of Frye's spiritual schemata, specific references in the published works are sparse, and one must look to the frameworks within which it is operative to discern its power and characteristics.

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[1] As noted by David Gunn in his chapter "Narrative Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*. McKenzie, Steven L., and Haynes, Steven R., ed., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999, 206.

[2] For editorial consistency, occurrences of the word "*kerygma*" are italicized in this paper, but its variants are not, whether originating in this writer's text, Frye's works, or commentary from secondary sources.

Not surprisingly, Frye's concluding focus on biblical texts was controversial for scholars on both sides of the divide between theological and religious studies, and literary criticism. Many of the former quite understandably lament Frye's lack of dependence on rigorous scriptural analysis and his disinterest in historical context. And it must certainly be recognized that Frye's approach is radically and unapologetically synchronic. He is interested in the overarching symbolism and mythological narrative stretching from Genesis to Revelation. As for attempts to link biblical stories to factual events in human time, Frye notes that "the historical event, whatever it was, is out of our range: it is only the verbal event that concerns us, and the verbal event may be the starting-point in an adventure of understanding" (*DV* 76).[3] Literary scholars, for their part are prone to consider Frye's concluding positions to be more in the nature of apologetics than true unbiased criticism.[4] It is suggested that there might be room on both sides for a more expansive view of the boundaries of their disciplines allowing for new and potentially fertile starting-points.

Frye references other writers from an impressive spectrum of disciplines and across the full range of history, and many will bear noting. Other than Blake, whose influences on Frye are foundational, most are used to provide terminology or support for an analytical process that becomes part of Frye's larger *theoria*. Particular attention will be paid to the several religious and theological figures with whose ideas Frye has meaningful encounters which have influenced his work. These include John Milton, Karl Barth, Dante, Joachim of Flores, Martin Buber, Rudolph Bultmann, Martin Heidegger (whose work influenced both Bultmann and Frye), and Paul Tillich. Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, and particularly his concept of the *Aufhebung*, is also used by Frye to inform his dialectical approach to how *kerygma* creates spiritual meaning.

In addition to the primary sources listed, recourse will also be had to Frye's lectures, interviews, and other writings including Frye's extensive *Late Notebooks* (1982-90) which contain scores of ongoing reflections and related topics of significant interest, though these are often tangential or begging of further elaboration. Several of Frye's prominent commentators also provide invaluable context and insight regarding *kerygma*'s place in Frye's thought and will be referenced where helpful.

[3] Citations to Frye's main writings are by reference to the List of Abbreviations, above. This method is employed in the main commentaries to Frye's work to provide more efficient access to the works cited.

[4] Examples of these competing views can be found in *Semeia* 89 (2002), a collection of papers presented at a conference on the work of Northrop Frye at McMaster University in 2000.

The Overarching Influence of William Blake: Introduction, *Contra* Locke, *Analogia Visionis*: Frye *Contra* Barth? Creation and Recreation

Introduction

Frye's views are firmly grounded in the work of the visionary poet and engraver William Blake, as set out in the publication of *Fearful Symmetry* in 1947. This is Frye's ground-breaking work on the mythological framework of Blake's poetry which both cemented his eminent place in literary criticism and served as the crucible for his own views on language, the Bible, and the nature of creative vision as a joint project between God and man. Indeed, in reading *Fearful Symmetry* it is difficult to separate Frye's own nascent theories from his exposition of Blake's thoughts. While a fulsome discussion of Frye's analysis of Blake is not possible in this context, three influences of Blake bear highlighting, as they inform fundamental concepts in relation to Frye's understanding of kerygmatic language: Blake's rejection of the epistemology of John Locke; his radical concept of what Frye calls the *analogia visionis*, and; his insistence that all creation is essentially a form of recreation, in conjunction with God, and in essentially human terms.

Contra Locke

In *Fearful Symmetry,* Frye embraces Blake's rejection of some fundamental tenets of Enlightenment thought, specifically the epistemological positions derived from "Locke, [who] along with Bacon and Newton, is constantly in Blake's poetry a symbol of every kind of evil, superstition and tyranny" (*FS* 14). The great error for these thinkers is what Blake calls "the 'Two-Horn'd Reasoning, Cloven Fiction' of the Lockian universe" (*FS* 50), the belief that humans are perceiving, non-creative subjects that are separate and apart from objective reality, which is mediated through conceptual language, allowing only a mere representation of the "other" rather than the expression of an authentic visionary encounter. This Age of Reason view of man's relationship to nature results, for Blake, in the much-hated theological concept of Deism, and "Locke was responsible for Deism, whether he was a Deist himself or not; for his cloven fiction is the source of its separation of the divine and the human" (*FS* 53). Frye explains how, as a result, Blake was naturally drawn to the philosophical idealism of Bishop Berkeley, the most prominent eighteenth-century critic of Locke. There was, however, one significant difference between Blake and Berkeley, which highlights a second crucial pillar of Frye's thought derived from Blake:

> Berkeley's argument was that there is a reality about things apart from our perception of them, and, as all reality is mental, this reality must be an idea in the mind of God. Now God and man are different things to Berkeley, and this sudden switch from one to the other leaves a gap in the middle of his thought. *Blake, by postulating a world of imagination higher than that of sense, indicates a way of closing the gap which is completed by identifying God with the human imagination*:
>
> "Man is all imagination. God is man & exists in us & we in him."
>
> "The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is, God himself. … It

manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision)."[5]

Man in his creative acts and perceptions is God, and God is Man (*FS* 30, formatting textual, emphasis added).

For Blake and Frye, the human imagination is nothing less than the dynamic continuum by which man recreates his world in conjunction with the divine creator. Frye adds, however, that this "identity of God and man is qualified by the presence in man of the tendency to deny God by self-restriction. Thus, though God is the perfection of man, man is not wholly God: otherwise, there would be no point in bringing in the idea of God" (*FS* 31). In other words, any limitation on humanity's power to co-create equally with God is seemingly self-imposed: a vestige, perhaps, of the limitations of language that arose in Frye's (and Blake's) conception of the Fall, when the reality of space and time forced humanity into grammatically sequential thought which, arguably, reached its spiritual nadir with Locke's epistemology. A significant role of kerygmatic language, then, will be to obviate this, and all other restrictions on human-divine reunification, through the medium of the imagination.

Analogia Visionis: Frye *Contra* Barth?

A second directly related Blakean influence brings Frye into one of the 20th century's most important theological debates. It comes in the short "General Note: Blake's Mysticism," a brief addendum at the very end of *Fearful Symmetry*. Here, Frye coins the term "'a*nalogia visionis'* which, unlike the more orthodox analogies of faith and being, excludes natural religion and yet allows of a human response to revelation" (*FS* 431). It is seen by Frye to be the spiritual pinnacle posited by Blake in his poem, "Jerusalem,"[6] and is named in response to the question of whether, or in what sense, Blake should be considered a mystic. Like many mystics,[7] Blake seeks to understand the paradoxical nature of the "divine One who is all things, yet no thing, and yet not nothing; to explain how this One is identical with the self yet as different from the self as it can be" (*FS* 431). His method, as briefly described by Frye, is a type of yogic spiritual discipline in which Blake, through his visionary art, strives to free himself from his "creaturely" nature and achieve unity with the "true God" who is an "unattached Word," neither "eternal substance" nor "eternal nothingness." "This effort of vision, so-called, is to be conceived neither as a human attempt to reach God, nor a divine attempt to reach man, but as the realization in total experience of the identity of God and man in which both the human creature and the superhuman Creator disappear" (*FS* 431).

Brett David Potter observes that Frye's *analogia visionis "*seems to suggest … a third way" between the Thomistic *analogia entis*, espoused by Erich Przywara and Hans Urs von

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[5] The two quotations from Blake are noted by Frye as sourced from *The Writings of William Blake,* ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 3 vols, London, 1925. The first is from *Blake's Marginalia to Berkeley*, 219, Vol. 3, 356; the second is from "Laocoön Aphorisms," Vol. 3, 358).

[6] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* David V. Erdman, ed., Garden City, Anchor Books: 1982, p. 144.

[7] Frye favorably mentions mystics who prefer a more direct or "ecstatic" approach to God, such as Jakob Boehme, Meister Eckhardt and John van Ruysbroeck, as opposed to religious adherents "who remain within the ideological framework of its revelation, observing its laws and rituals" (*WP* 89). In his assessment of Blake, however, he notes: "If mysticism means primarily a contemplative quietism, mysticism is something abhorrent to Blake. … But if mysticism means primarily the vision of the prodigious and unthinkable metamorphosis of the mind, … then Blake is one of the mystics (*FS* 432). The obvious inference is that this is Frye's preferred approach to mysticism as well.

Balthasar, and Karl Barth's *analogia fidei.*[8] Potter notes Frye's rejection of what he posits as Barth's central error:

> We may emphasize either the divine or the human aspect of creation to the point of denying the reality of the other. For Karl Barth, God is a creator and the first moral to be drawn from this is that man is not one: man is for Barth a creature, and his primary duty is to understand what it is to be a creature of God" (*CR* 4).[9]

Frye's position is indeed distinct from Barth's but, as Potter implies, strikes something of a false dichotomy between his and Barth's perception of the relationship of God and man in the creative process (a rhetorical technique Frye will also use in relation to Rudolph Bultmann). For Potter, then, Barth's *analogia fidei* is more nuanced than Frye suggests. While Barth's position is firmly rooted in Reformed theology and insists that the divine Word can only originate from God, not man, its intersection with the human response is cooperative and ultimately, intersubjective. This is suggested by Barth himself in differentiating his position from that of Przywara:

> Our reply … is not, then, a denial of the concept of analogy. We say rather that the analogy in question is not the *analogia entis* but according to Rom. 12 the [*analogia fidei*], *the likeness of the known in the knowing, of the object in thought, of the Word of God in the word that is thought and spoken by man,* as this differentiates true Christian prophecy in faith from all false prophecy. *This analogia fidei is also the point of the remarkable passages in Paul in which man's knowledge of God is inverted into man's being known by God* (emphasis added).[10]

While Barth's terminology continues to suggest two distinct sources of the word (or Word), the dynamic process by which these sources "know" each other is characterized in a way that is not far removed from Frye's concept of co-creation. Barth's reference to Paul in the preceding passage also parallels Frye's assertion that the "motive for metaphor," a critical component of the imagination is to "identify the human mind with what goes on outside it, because the only genuine joy you can have is in those rare moments when you feel that we may know in part, as Paul says, we are also part of what we know" (*EI* 11). It should also be noted that while their intellectual motivations may have differed, Frye shared Barth's aversion to any form of natural religion which they both saw as tantamount to idolatry. For Frye, when humanity sees nature mirroring itself, society tends to degenerate into tyranny and anarchy (DV 27; cf. *CR* 21). Humanity can only progress socially, and spiritually, by continually recreating its view of itself in light of its own creations and perceptions without embracing the stark, subhuman example of nature. Further still, whatever reservations Frye had about Barth's particular dogmatic approach, it is clear that he regarded him as the victor in the *analogia* debate**,** declaring

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[8] Brett David Potter, "A Word Not Our Own: Northrop Frye and Karl Barth on Revelation and Imagination." *Literature and Theology* 28 No 4 (December 2001): 438-56, p.440.
[9] Quoted by Potter at pp 444-5.
[10] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, G.W. Bromley. and TF Torrance (eds, trans), 2nd ed, Vol 1, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, pp 243-4 (I,I S;5), quoted by Potter, pp. 446-7.

"Karl Barth, a theologian contemporary with third-phase [conceptual] language, begins his dogmatic exposition by cutting down the great ridgepole of metonymic thought, the analogy of being *analogia entis*" (*GC* 26*).*

Professor Potter's most intriguing suggestion regarding Frye's affinity with Barth comes in his reference to Barth's debate with Emil Brunner regarding the existence of the "*Anknupfungspunkt.*" Here, from Barth's perspective, the question is "whether human culture possesses a kind of inherent 'point of contact'… where the 'divine message' may take root, whereby human thought and language might be seen as simultaneously a 'source of error' (i.e. idolatry) and a Godward quest 'partly fulfilled in its own incomplete searching.'"[11] Potter then suggests that the debate could be resolved by Garret Green's assertion that this "point of contact is precisely the human imagination,"[12] a concept which, on its face is compatible with Frye. More significant still, Green's stated goal is to resolve the dilemma of "natural theology" and "positivism of revelation," by a re-examination of the philosophical language underpinning theological positions and "replacing the notion of philosophy as the foundational discipline for theology … with a more modest view of philosophy as 'descriptive grammar,' an analytical tool for investigating the logic of various human endeavours."[13] This, again, would seem to align with Frye's general views of theological language as tending towards rigid dogma and doctrine and his quest for an open-ended *theoria* which moves beyond the traditional categories of theology and philosophy and into the realm of pure criticism, the only possible forum where a full understanding of *kerygma* could obtain (*LN* 658). A full assessment of the implications of Green's work for Frye's theories on the imagination is potentially fertile ground for further study by theologians or philosophers of language. It is unfortunate that Green's book was published in 1989, only a year before Frye's *Words with Power* (and two years before his death) and that the two theorists were almost certainly unknown to each other.

Creation and Recreation

This ongoing regenerative process, first raised in *Fearful* Symmetry, is expanded in the short work, *Creation and Recreation* (CR 1980) and the concluding three Bible-based books (GC, 1982; *WP*, 1990; DV, 1991). It is a radical reinterpretation of the original Biblical Creation myth which for Blake and Frye becomes the template for the "re-creation" resulting from the *analogia visionis*, the cooperative imaginative process between the human and the divine. For Frye, visionary recreation has two distinct but related aspects, which are both prefigured in the original biblical texts: First there is an initiating destructiveness exemplified by the actions of God in the Hebrew Scriptures which were presumably intended to lead to reunification between God and wayward humanity (*CR* 21). Examples could be said to include the Great Flood of Genesis Chapters 6-8, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Blake's view, appropriated by Frye, is that religious and social mythologies have devolved from the promise of the original creation story into rigid hierarchies bent on protecting their own dominance. This, at its worst, is the world portrayed in much of Blake's poetry and art. Its god is Urizen (also called Nobodaddy), a parody of Jehovah of the Old Testament: a vulgar and spiritually impotent deity

[11] Potter, p. 447 and quoting Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, p. 27.
[12] Potter, p. 447, referencing Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and The Religious Imagination.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
[13] Green, p. 39.

who, for Blake, is an embodiment of the sterile limitations on human creativity arising from the Age of Reason.[14]

In short, it is Blake's (and Frye's) radical view of authentic human creative vision that it is first "designed to destroy *the* Creation" (*FS* 431, emphasis textual). That is, it is meant to move beyond the now stagnant template left behind by generations of misinterpretation or misapplication of the original principles of the creation story. It was also becoming clear in Blake's time that many sacrosanct concepts from earlier periods were also being replaced by uncontestable advances in cosmology and general science, undercutting the influence of waning social mythologies as well. Finally, it must be noted that this destructive initiative proposed by Blake was greatly influenced by the revolutionary fervour in Europe at the time and was seen by him as applicable in political and social realms as well as to artistic expression.[15] For both Blake and Frye, the social and artistic realms were always closely connected and, in an ideal society would be mutually supportive in a cooperative drive to foster human freedom and creativity. Both thinkers were also very much indebted to the main tenets of the Romantic movement which influenced Frye's political thinking throughout his life (*NFC* 139)[16] and his focus always remained on the general betterment of a free society. This society would always remain a work in progress and depend in large measure on authentic Christian principles, cooperatively recreated with God from the deconstructed errors of the earlier ascendant culture. As Frye starkly suggests in a Notebook entry in the early 1970s: "The real form of God's creation is man's recreation, which is God in man destroying the cycles of empire" (*NR* 213).

The second act of visionary recreation, cannot, however, emerge from any resulting vacuum, but is dependent on a return to the foundational mythology which arose out of early human consciousness, and continual reconsideration of the advancements — and errors — that humanity has recreated out of them since. For Frye, inspired by Blake, the Bible is that earliest and most important template for Western civilization; hence the title of Frye's *The Great Code,* taken from Blake's engraving of the Laocoön (*GC* 16).[17] Each of us, in Frye's view, is born into a language and culture (including religion) which provide the prototypes for the symbols and belief structures to be used in any vision:

> Now, just as the poet is brought up to speak and write one particular language, so he is brought up in the traditions of one particular religion. And his function as a poet is to concentrate on the myths of that religion, and to recreate the original imaginative life of those myths by transforming them into unique works of art" (*FS* 118).

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[14] William Blake, "The [First]Book of Urizen," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, David V. Erman ed. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982, pp. 70-89. See also Harold Bloom's commentary at pp. 906-7.

[15] Blake (1757-1827) was greatly influenced by the French Revolution (1787-1789) and the American Revolution (1775-1783) which were prominent subjects in his writing, collected in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. See, for example: "America, A Prophecy," pp. 51-59; "Europe, a Prophecy," pp. 60-66; and "The French Revolution," pp. 285-89.

[16] In conversation with David Cayley, Frye states that despite numerous offers to leave Canada, he remained at the University of Toronto largely due to his political affinity with the NDP, the successor to the socialist CCF he embraced in his youth, which had no corresponding political movement of note in the United States. In the same interview, at p. 103, Frye states: "I think Blake wraps up the whole Romantic movement inside himself, although nobody else knew it."

[17] Blake, "The Old and New Testaments are The Great Code of Art," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, p. 272.

The ensuing recreation, then, is necessarily to be realized by the imagination using the same inherited symbolism in a new revisionary way. Using an example from Milton (*FS* 118), Frye notes that the original vision of the fall of Adam and Eve, for example, unfortunately became interpreted as a static, or "frozen" myth which Milton still saw as essentially "true" and full of creative power, becoming the foundation for his visionary reinterpretation in *Paradise Lost* meant, in Milton's words, to newly "justify the ways of God to man."[18]

It is significant that Frye's Blakean concept of re-creation is not limited to re-envisioning Biblical mythology. It extends to and is, in fact, dependent on a corresponding reworking of human creative activity. As Frye argues in *The Educated Imagination*, all human endeavours are driven by an imaginative reach from what presently exists to what might be possible (*EI* 1-11). But in all the arts and sciences, as in the spiritual realm, the starting place is what we have been born into and have remade which in turn becomes the raw material of the human imagination, and "the limit of the imagination is a totally human world" (*EI* 9). For Frye, a corollary to this process is Giambattista Vico's concept of *verum factum*, which Frye translates as, "man understands only what he has made" (*GC* 164), that is, what he or she has actively participated in creating.

This biblically informed and participatory re-creativity is the product of the *analogia visionis* and is activated in the human imagination through the *kerygma* which Frye introduces in a schema adapted from Vico.

[18] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*: *The Biblically Annotated Edition*, Matthew Stallard, ed., Macon, Mercer University Press: 2011, Book I, ll. 25-6.

Kerygma and Vico's Phases of Language

While much of the intellectual foundation for Frye's concept of *kerygma* was laid out in *Fearful Symmetry,* and his second book, *Anatomy of Criticism* (more on which below**)**, it was not specifically named in a major work until the first chapter of *The Great* Code (1982), where it begins to tentatively take its place as the linchpin of Frye's entire spiritual *theoria*. Here Frye will identify *kerygma* as the most spiritually potent linguistic idiom, situating it both within his adaptation of Giambattista Vico's philosophy of language history and in stark contrast to Rudolph Bultmann's attempt to salvage its relevancy through demythologizing the New Testament. In Vico's work, Frye sees the potential for a structure that, if developed, "would provide a historical context for the Bible that I do not think has yet been examined" (*GC* 5). Frye then liberally adapts Vico's concept of the three phases of the historical cycle and reinterprets the *langage,* or type of verbal expression that each of the three ages of the cycle produces (*GC* 5-29). Vico's first, mythical, age of the gods produces poetic language which becomes, for Frye, "hieroglyphic" language. This is the language of Homer and contains the metaphorical energy between subject and object to which other phases will always return for its regenerative power (see also *CR* 68). Vico's second or aristocratic age produces heroic or noble language, which Frye terms "hieratic". This is the increasingly abstract language more prominent in developing societies. Broadly speaking, it can be classified as allegorical expression, which can occur in several related iterations. In addition to hieratic, he identifies dialectic, metonymic and rhetoric, all of which have important functions in formulating and supporting societal trends and priorities, being the dominant uses of verbal expression in culture, politics, religion, and philosophy. Vico's third age, that of the people, produces vulgar usage, which Frye denotes as "demotic" and is concerned primarily with description. It is, of course, critically important for many practical aspects of communication, but of less significance in the spiritual sphere.

Taken together these ages, or phases, constitute Frye's first iteration of the evolving linguistic landscapes within which *kerygma* would take its place. However, while each of Vico's ages is chronologically structured, ending in a *ricorso*, or the beginning of a new cycle, Frye had already begun to deemphasize this chronological aspect and specifically rejected the concept of the *ricorso* which Frye saw as a "failed spiral" (*NFR* 29)[19] indicating a falling short of a more satisfying dialectical process.

In the second chapter, Frye's terminology related to the phases shifts to illuminate his view of the way these verbal structures are employed as societies develop and the requirements of language change. In the poetic phase narratives take the form of individual stories related to metaphorically powerful gods and are devoid of abstraction or deductive reasoning. Homeric myths fit roughly within this category. As classical society progresses, these and other early mythical stories eventually coalesce into a mythology which becomes the foundation of Greek and Roman society. In this second phase, here referred to as "metonymic," these myths remain the fundamental linguistic vehicle, but are employed more argumentatively, often to advance an ascendant societal imperative concerned with maintaining order and stability. These groups of myths, exhibiting clear societal motivations, express what Frye refers to as "secondary concerns" (*GC* 50), in contrast to the more elemental, or "primary concerns" of the earlier myths involving individual struggles for survival, which will be discussed in more depth below. In the third phase, verbal structures become largely "descriptive," essentially mirroring the objectively

[19] Previously published as "The Meaning of Recreation: Humanism and Society," in *Iowa Review* 11 (Winter 1980: 1-9. Originally given as a lecture at the University of Iowa, April 12, 1979.

observable features of something purportedly external to the consciousness of describing observer.

While Frye indirectly associates Biblical language most closely with rhetoric, which he situates in Vico's second, hieratic phase, he is not content to place Biblical language in that category:

> The linguistic idiom of the Bible does not really coincide with any of our three phases of language, important as those phases have been in the history of its influence. It is not metaphorical like poetry, though it is full of metaphor, and is as poetic as it can well be without actually being a work of literature. It does not use the transcendental language of abstraction and analogy, and its use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout. It is really a fourth form of expression, for which I adopt the now well-established term, *kerygma*, proclamation. In general usage this term is largely restricted to the Gospels, but there is not enough difference between the Gospels and the rest of the Bible in the use of language to avoid extending it to the entire book (*GC* 29).

Unfortunately, this first emergence of *kerygma* in Frye's thought is only vaguely situated within his nascent framework. In a rudimentary diagram (*GC* 26), it is shown to succeed Biblical revelation which in turn is shown to be prior to the poetic or metaphorical phase, seemingly counter to Frye's suggestion that it is poetic language that allows the authentic regeneration of language in every age (*GC* 25). Notably, Frye does lament the inadequacy of the depiction, but avers that "it [revelation] has been traditionally believed to come from a time out of time, so the arrangement is not too misleading from that point of view" (*GC* 29). In fact, as we shall see, being "from a time out of time" will become an essential attribute of *kerygma* itself as Frye's *theoria* is further worked out.

For Frye, kerygmatic proclamation is largely an oratorical form of language: a spoken mode of expression used to exhort an audience to belief and/or action, so prevalent in the Bible to disqualify its being categorized as pure literature which always remains predominantly in the realm of hypothetical possibilities. The second part of this extended quotation, while somewhat more expansive, contains the last direct reference to *kerygma* for 200 pages. It does, however, set the stage for the development of Frye's complex theoretical framework that will be undertaken in the interim:

> *Kerygma* is a mode of rhetoric, though it is rhetoric of a specific kind. It is, like all rhetoric a mixture of the metaphorical and the "existential" or concerned but, unlike practically all other forms of rhetoric, it is not an argument disguised by figuration. It is the vehicle of what is traditionally called revelation, a word I use because it is traditional and I can think of no better one. But if we take this word to mean the conveying of information from an objective divine source to a subjective human receptor, we are making it a form of descriptive writing. Perhaps that is not out of the question either, but it cannot be a *simple* form of descriptive writing, as in the populist view (as we might call it) which speaks of the Bible as literally true. The Bible is far too deeply rooted in all the resources of language for any simplistic approach to its language to be adequate. Then again, the word *kerygma* is associated mainly with the theology of Bultmann, and in Bultmann's view

> *kerygma* is to be opposed to myth, which he regards as an obstacle to it. In the next chapter I shall give my reasons for saying that myth is the linguistic vehicle of *kerygma,* and that to 'demythologize' any part of the Bible would be the same thing as to obliterate it" (*GC* 29-30, emphasis textual).

Three significant aspects of *kerygma* and biblical language generally, are suggested in this long quotation and inform Frye's entire *theoria*. First, while *kerygma* uses all the techniques of literary language, it is not merely an "argument disguised by figuration," to persuade one to a conceptual point of view, like a statesman might in furtherance of some societal imperative; rather, *kerygma* is a special kind of rhetoric, concerned in an "existential" sense to impart revelation and provoke an authentic spiritual response; secondly, while Frye states here that the Bible is not literally true in a simple or "populist" sense, he obliquely alludes to the possibility of a far richer linguistic sense of literal meaning which is developed elsewhere in his schemata and which is foundational to his understanding of both secular literature and biblical writing. Thirdly, his assertion of the identification of myth with *kerygma* is not only radical in a linguistic sense, it also draws Frye into one of the most controversial debates in modern theology.

Frye *Contra* Bultmann?

Frye's adoption of *kerygma*, then, is positioned as a convenient prompt for a seemingly cavalier rejection of Rudolph Bultmann's perceived goal of demythologizing biblical texts in order to render the traditional content and meaning of *kerygma* into a form more palatable to modern sensibilities. For Bultmann, many Biblical stories, such as Jesus' miracles and the cosmological positioning of the world between a heaven in the sky and a hell below the ground have no spiritual purchase in the light of current knowledge.[20] Frye's view of myth is much broader: "As a literary critic I want to anchor the word in its literary context; so myth to me means, first of all, *mythos*, plot, narrative, in general the sequential ordering of words. As all verbal structures have some kind of sequence, … all verbal structures are mythical in this primary sense, a sense that is really a tautology" (*GC* 31).

In light of this linguistically broad, even all-inclusive, definition of myth, Frye correctly concludes that demythologization of the Bible — or any extended verbal expression — would be impossible. Unfortunately, in doing so he implicitly rejects other, more fundamental elements of Bultmann's theology, influenced by the existential thought of Martin Heidegger, which are consistent — or at least compatible — with his own theories. As John Macquarrie states, "demythologizing can only be properly understood in the light of Bultmann's general theological position. Demythologizing is only a consequence — albeit a very important one — of Bultmann's existential philosophy,"[21] which places a sharp focus on an individual's spiritual contingency in the modern world. As for Bultmann's specific views on the problematic nature of Biblical mythology, Ayman El-Desouky summarizes as follows:

> For the word of revelation to acquire its full existential force, … it should not be surrounded by a language that crudely 'objectifies' its nature. As the spoken word, which stands for the Word of God, and which reveals God's act in history, it has to enter our historical self-understanding as a possibility of existence. *On Bultmann's view, a language becomes mythological or objectifying when it obscures what he saw to be an essentially intersubjective relation between God and man.* And since this relation was finally made available to us through God's act in Christ, he set out to demythologize or reinterpret any such objectifying statement in the New Testament, stripping it down to its essential *Kerygma* (emphasis added).[22]

This insistence on the "essentially intersubjective relation between God and man*"* is also a critical element in Frye's schemata, though the mechanism linking the "subjects" is arguably

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[20] Rudolph Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate,* Hans Werner Bartsch ed. and trans., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961, pp. 1-5.

[21] John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann*, New York, Harper Torchbooks: 1960, p. 10. Macquarrie's detailed comparison of Bultmann and Heidegger's thought is especially valuable in exploring Bultmann's philosophical assumptions. He also positively assesses the viability of Bultmann's melding of existentialism with theological inquiry, noting that it is arguable that the basic message of Christianity has historically been distorted in different eras by the importation of elements of contemporary philosophical trends.

[22] Ayman El-Desouky, "*Ego Eimi*: *Kerygma* or Existential Metaphor? Frye, Bultmann and the Problem of Demythologizing," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* CRCL / RCLC (June 2007): 131-171 (135). This comparatively recent article is an excellent source for its extensive bibliographical references and its detailed comparison of central elements of Frye's and Rudolph Bultmann's conceptions of *kerygma*, especially its relation to Bultmann's connection to existential theory.

distinct from Bultmann's. As El-Desouky notes, Bultmann "insists on an irreducible ontological status to the *Kerygma*, which has … to meet us in the present moment of self-understanding and in the form of an 'existential' encounter."[23] This, then, is an encounter directly with God, in the person of Christ, through faith, necessarily expressed in human language in our concrete situation,[24] but without the mediation of supposedly extraneous figurative language. Frye posits an analogous kind of encounter but, as is always the case with Frye, it is an experience mediated through a fulsome encounter with all the literary elements of the comprising language. This is evident in his discussion of "existential metaphor" in *Words with Power* (79-86). Here, the focus is on a specific reader's earnest engagement with a literary — and, by extension, Biblical — text. Referencing Roland Barthes, Frye asserts that "all serious reading is rereading: this does not necessarily mean second reading, but reading in the perspective of the total structure, a perspective that turns a wandering through a maze of words into a directed quest" (*WP* 79).[25] This process will ultimately lead the reader to an examination of his or her authentic encounter with the text:

> The literary work, then, does not stop with being an object of study, something confronting us; sooner or later we have to study as well our own experience in reading it, the results of the merging of the work with ourselves. We are not observers but participants. … So we have to go on to consider an extension of the use of metaphor that not merely identifies one thing with another in words, but something of ourselves with both: something of what we may tentatively call existential metaphor (*WP* 79-80).

Frye notes that his term "existential metaphor" closely correlates with his interpretation of Heidegger's "ecstatic" metaphor, where the reader is drawn outside themselves: "a state in which the real self, whatever reality is and whatever the self is in this context, enters a different order of things from that of the now dispossessed ego" (*WP* 85-6). In *Creation and Recreation* Frye reaches for the Heideggerian concept of "thrownness" to describe a state of existential disorientation or "paranoia" that occurs when one is temporarily compelled to see through the "cultural insulation that separates us from nature," in our usual conscious state (*CR* 6). This averred affinity with Heidegger's existential train of thought suggests further possible sympathies with Bultmann, but these are unfortunately never directly explored to any satisfying depth by Frye. Again, for Frye, unlike Bultmann, the linguistic aspect of the encounter never recedes into the background but remains a fundamental element of the kerygmatic experience which transports us out of our accustomed spatio-temporal realm. In a 1984 address, six years before *Words with Power* Frye, using terminology adapted from the poet Wallace Stevens, refers to a reader's authentic experience of the kerygmatic text as entering "a description without place, a description he [Stevens] identifies with revelation or apocalypse. In this risen presence text and reader are equally involved. The reader is a whole of which the text is a part: the text is a whole of which the reader is a part."[26] Indeed, for Frye, the intersubjective experience between the

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[23] El-DeSouky, p. 136.
[24] Macquarrie, p. 235.
[25] Frye's reference is to Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero*, Lavers and Smith trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
[26] Delivered at the MLA annual meeting (December 27, 1983), first published in *PMLA* 99 (Oct. 1984): 990-95 and reprinted under the title "Literary and Linguistic Scholarship in a Postliterate World" (*MM* 26), referenced by El-DeSouky at 148. Cf. *WP* 226 where, one year later, Frye states "that literary metaphor, which is purely hypothetical, grows out of an existential metaphor, as we might call it, where a subject does identify itself with something not

human and the Divine is always — and necessarily — an encounter occurring through the vehicle of language. Shortly before his death, Frye was asked in an interview to respond to a critic's accusation that he seemed to believe there was no reality to Christianity outside of our imaginations and denied the "objectivity of God," perceiving the Divine to be merely a "linguistic event". He replied: "It comes to us as a linguistic event. There is nothing we get from Christianity except a body of words, and they become transmuted into experience. I wouldn't talk about the objectivity of God. I'd talk about the transcendence of God" (NFC 188-9).[27]

himself, in an experience that has no further need for language, although it has also fulfilled the entire function for language," from "The Journey as Metaphor" (*MM* 212-226), originally presented as a lecture at the Applewood Centre, Toronto, Oct. 8, 1985. Referenced at El-DeSouky, p. 151.

[27] Here, Frye and David Cayley are discussing a 1995 article by William O. Fennel, "Theology and Frye: Some implications of *The Great Code*," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1/1, 1985, pp. 113-21.

Primary Concerns: The Progenitors of All Verbal Expression

"Linguistic events" are indeed fundamental concepts in Frye's *theoria* as is his insistence that "myth is the vehicle of *kerygma*." Moreover, the process of myth formation is at the root of all conscious human response to our original, contingent condition in the world. In *Words with Power,* Frye identifies four specific "primary" concerns which provide both the motivation and foundational content of all linguistic expressions in response to that situation, which are set out in mythical terms. These primary concerns are both universal and essential for human survival: **"**the concern to make and create, the concern to love, the concern to sustain oneself and assimilate the environment, … and the concern to escape from slavery and restraint" (*WP* 135, cf *DV* 6). If these basic concerns, which we share with animals, are not satisfied, neither individual human life nor any type of sustainable community is possible. These concerns involve an inherent spiritual dimension which is exemplified, for Frye, by Jesus' insistence that "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, KJV, referenced by Frye at *DV* 7). These are the concerns that faced humanity at the dawn of consciousness as people realized that they were now vulnerable, subjective entities set off against an external, and very threatening, objective world (*DV*, 25). The first primitive myths, then, developed as responses growing out of anxiety about not being able to meet those primary concerns (*WP* 51, 236). They provide the archetypal patterns from which all verbal structures and mythologies derive, including later, derivative mythologies which will arise to support more sophisticated social structures.

As societies develop, mythology that supports it evolves as well. At the very outset of human language, the emergent stories directly relate to understanding and fulfilling the primary concerns. As a society becomes more sophisticated, ideally progressing towards maturity in its support of individual freedoms, its mythologies adapt to support "secondary" or "ideological" (*DV* 6) concerns, namely the ascendant cultural forces that sustain that society. In the broadest sense, these secondary concerns are necessary to provide the framework within which the primary concerns can be efficiently addressed; the rule of law arising from a recognized social contract, being a prime example (*WP* 280). These "secondary" mythologies are expressed in all fundamental aspects of society: philosophy, literature, religion, and politics. Unfortunately, in each of these connected spheres, especially the latter two, developing trends become entrenched and attain a gravitas that discourages divergence by individuals, limiting their creative freedom. In religion, the ascendant societal trend is towards an increasing rigidity in doctrine. In the political realm, this secondary mythology usually develops in ways that bring into conflict with competing social mythologies which too often lead to repression in the domestic realm and to armed conflict abroad. Eventually, the trajectory towards a mature society of individual freedom and creativity fails and there is a chaotic reversion to a primitive state (*WP*, 280-283), an eventuality borne out through human history. Remediating this process necessitates a rejuvenation of the basic mythology arising from primary concerns.

It is notable that Frye's primary concerns involve another potentially important but underdeveloped link between Frye's *theoria* and modern theology influenced by existential philosophy. Regarding Rudolph Bultmann, we have seen that the connection was with Frye's tentative choice of the term *kerygma* for authentic biblical proclamation, a concept Frye insists is completely grounded in myth, in purported opposition to Bultmann's project to demythologize the New Testament so that true *kerygma* can emerge. A second link is to Paul Tillich's

"ultimate" concern,[28] a concept Frye struggles to reconcile with his notion of primary concern. In his preparatory notes to *Words with Power* he states: "Religion may be an 'ultimate' concern as Tillich says: it can't be a primary one. We can't live a day without being concerned about food, but we can live all our lives without being concerned about God, impoverished as such a life would be" (*LN* 103; cf. *LN* 543). Later, in the same set of notebooks, he tentatively reverses course, provided the ultimate concern is expressed in kerygmatic terms more authentic than those offered by an institutional church: "I'm wrong about religion as an ultimate but not a primary concern. Where did I come from and where am I going are primary concerns, even if we don't believe there are any answers. But if only the social institution answers, the answer is ideological only" (*LN* 121-22).[29] His final position, stated on the penultimate page of *Words with Power* comes in his concluding analysis on the book of Job. For Frye, Job has a conventionally comic structure, due to its "happy ending" (*GC*, 196-7), and the last several chapters are a working out of Job's purgatorial struggle (*WP* 283-7). In the end, Job's restoration to health and prosperity is also an apotheosis, an individual experience of full spiritual enlightenment. However, in the context in which it occurs, it is more than that: "What is finally restored at the end of the story … is a society" (*WP* 284). In Frye's view, Job's speech at the end of Chapter 31, is neither addressed directly to Job's friends who have been reasoning with him in his grief, nor to God who has ostensibly been recounting Job's place in the context of creation; Rather:

> what the speech expresses is a pure human primary concern, a concern for freedom against servitude, for happiness against misery, for health against disease. … The answer of God, the reversing movement of the voice of prophecy or *kerygma*, does not really answer anything: as ordinary rhetoric it is eloquent but pointless. *What it does is to put Job's primary concerns into a larger context of what Paul Tillich calls ultimate concern. The mysteries represented in metaphor by the first creation in Genesis, the mysteries of birth and death and "thrownness" can never be understood because they can never be objectified* (*WP* 285, emphasis added).

For Frye, the nature of this dramatic encounter between Job, his friends and counselors, and God the Creator, suggests a subtle interplay between the primary concerns emphasized by Job in Chapter 31, and religion — the purported ultimate concern of Tillich — which Frye has suggested is a secondary or merely ideological concept once removed from the existential urgency of the four essential concerns. This interplay between primary and secondary concerns is also implicit in Frye's overarching assertion that we all are born into and live in a completely human world, and that we recognize ourselves as part of a larger human society, necessarily dictated by an established social mythology, before we recognize ourselves as autonomous individuals within that society. Unfortunately, the state of most societies is such that we are born as passive recipients of the limiting ideologies which we must overcome to achieve fulfilment. (*DV* 8). In the present context, however, Job's "happy ending," occurring as it does in the company of his friends and miraculously restored family, and presided over by God, is not specific to him, but represents the establishment of an entirely new order — a completion of the regenerative comic structure, expressed in authentic, if ultimately indeterminate kerygmatic

[28] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63, I:211-15.
[29] Cf. p. 165, where Frye states "I should start thinking in terms of primary anxieties: they help to show how Tillich's 'ultimate concern" is also a primary one."

language. It arises from a giving over of contrived expectations and grievances and the willingness to embrace a collective vision which will indeed satisfy one's highest longing for freedom within a truly mature society.

It is instructive to note that Frye's prioritizing of primary concerns has attracted the critical attention of comparative mythologist Glen Robert Gill who sets out to situate Frye's conception of the ultimate nature of myth within a phenomenological framework, involving a comparison of his positions to those of the other notable twentieth century mythographers: Mircea Eliade, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell.[30] Gill's assertion is that, from a phenomenological perspective, Frye's position is the most satisfying and robust, as it ultimately posits myth as fundamentally a construct of human consciousness, eliminating the necessity of seeing it as something "other" or external to the perceiving subject.[31]

Consistent with his interest in phenomenology, Professor Gill's concluding chapter explores the implications of Frye's notebook entry on *Words with Power* that "the whole book turns on the thesis that the spirit is substantial; it's the realizing of primary concerns out of the language (Word) of primary mythology" (*LN* 9).[32] He shows how Frye's late-career interest in the Bible as "literature plus" grew out of a realization that the figurative language employed there was not simply rhetorical or hypothetical, but was, in essence "ecstatic" or "phenomenological" metaphor: "[Frye's] first principle … is that mytho-metaphorical thinking, despite all arguments to the contrary, 'cannot be superseded, because it forms the ... context of all thinking.'"[33] What follows is Gill's analysis of how, from a specifically phenomenological perspective this "reality" informs the progression of Frye's theory from his adaptation of the Viconian phases from *The Great Code*, discussed above, through their evolution to the modes in *Words with Power* which will be discussed in more depth below. Gill's conclusion, in part, asserts that "the phenomenological guarantor of this process … is the deceptively simple notion of 'primary concern.'"[34] He explains Frye's suggestion that there is an "array" of universal symbols that underlie mythical archetypes grounded in existential experience to which concern is addressed and form the content of that myth. Professor Gill's unique approach sheds light on the potential of a substantive connection between primary concerns and *kerygma* that can both obviate the problem of subject-object separation and undergird Frye's theory that true kerygmatic language has undeniable spiritual potency in a substantial form.

[30] Glen Robert Gill, *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
[31] Gill, 12-19.
[32] Quoted at Gill, 179. Here, Gill also quotes a related entry from over 700 pages later in the notes: "For a long time I've been preoccupied by the theme of the reality of the spiritual world, including its substantial reality.
[33] Gill, 180, quoting *WP* 7-8.
[34] Gill, 182.

Dante's Polysemous Meaning and the Influence of Hegel's *Aufhebung*

As noted, in relation to Vico's secular-based phases of language, Frye attempts in "Language I," the first chapter of *The Great Code*, to situate *kerygma* within a scheme that will explain how language creates meaning in a predominantly sacred realm. He returns to this theme in the last chapter, "Language II," completing the mirror structure of *The Great Code*, a metaphor prominent throughout Frye's work.[35] Frye's assertion is that any "deeply serious writing" contains multiple levels of meaning which can become apparent to the diligent reader upon serious reflection, — perhaps over the course of several re-readings — and informed by the reader's critical experience (*GC* 221). Frye's model for this idea is Dante's concept of "polysemous" meaning, derived from the four senses of Scripture, which Frye first relies on in his theory of symbols in *Anatomy of Criticism* (*AC* 72 ff.). For Frye, this critical insight, though practically ignored since the Middle Ages "is not a theory any more, still less an exploded superstition, but an established fact" (*AC* 72). It is interesting that in *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye's analysis of polysemous meaning is not addressed to sacred writing, but to serious secular literature. When, however, he returns to the topic in *The Great Code*, it is in relation to substantiating his insistence "that the Bible is 'more' than a work of literature" (GC 220), and to determine what this "more" means. This effort, in its broadest sense, is his attempt to support the assertion in his last three books that biblical literature, especially, has a spiritual potency embodied in "words with power." As implied by Frye's argumentation in the *Anatomy* and elsewhere, however, this kerygmatic power can also obtain in serious writing beyond biblical texts, as will be explored below**.** For Dante, of course, the interpretive scheme of the traditional four senses would be circumscribed by prevailing Church doctrine and limited to application in the sacred realm (*GC* 223). Frye helpfully provides context here with an extended quotation from Dante's *Epistola X* to Can Grande which he characterizes as "a concise and useful summary of the most familiar version of the whole scheme."[36] Dante's levels therein set out refer to the traditional literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses, the latter three of which Frye's understanding is in broad agreement with Dante (though not, of course with the limitations imposed by the prevailing dogma of Dante's time). As will become evident, however, Frye's schematic breakthrough, comes with his radical definition of the first level, or "literal" meaning, which will be applicable across verbal structures in both the literary and sacred realms.

Significantly, in an apparent break from Milton, another of his most powerful influences, Frye specifies that one is not to consider "polysemous" as preferring one of several possible meanings, exclusive to others. Rather:

> For Dante, "polysemous" does not really imply different meanings, suggesting that the chosen meaning of a given passage is purely relative, nor is there any question of a superimposed series of different contents of understanding, where we move from one level to the next like grades

[35] *GC* 78. Here, Frye sets out his typological view of the Bible: "The two testaments form a double mirror, each reflecting the other but neither the world outside." See also *NFR* 85; *DV* 195: "The mirror, where an object sees an object which is both itself and not itself, is a central metaphor of knowledge, and such words as 'speculation' and 'reflection' point to its importance;" See also *CR* 6, noted above p.7, where our accustomed human perspective is seen as viewing nature in the mirror of the culturally determined structure we are born into.

[36] Quoted by Frye, *GC* 220-21, the note to which at p. 244 also suggests a comparison with a "very similar passage in the *Convivio*, II, I"

> in a school. What is implied is a single process growing in subtlety and comprehensiveness, not different senses, but different intensities or wider contexts of a continuous sense, unfolding like a plant out of a seed (*GC* 220-221; *see also AC* 72-3).

Here, Frye introduces the concept of Hegel's *Aufhebung* as an illuminating principle of polysemous meaning (*GC* 222), carefully distinguishing his (Frye's) interpretation of Hegelian dialectic from the reductive popularized version, using similar imagery to that just quoted:

> What Hegel means by dialectic is not anything reducible to a patented formula, like the "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" one so often attached to him, nor can it be anything predictive. *It is a much more complex operation of a form of understanding combining with its own otherness or opposite, in a way that negates itself and yet passes through that negation into a new stage, preserving its essence in a broader context,* and abandoning the one just completed like the chrysalis of a butterfly. or a crustacean's outgrown shell (*GC* 222, emphasis added).

As Robert Denham notes, Frye too is a "dialectical thinker,"[37] and it becomes clear early on in the investigation of his work that his entire critical framework relies in one way or another, on this aspect of Hegelian thought.[38] Indeed, the term "dialectical" becomes for Frye a sort of shorthand for a recurrent and essential part of his schemata, whereby confrontations with binary choices are eschewed for possibilities which allow for the full integration of opposing views without denigration of the total frameworks from which either has emerged. As Denham states: "Frye always resists the Kierkegaardian either-or solution. But unity is not achieved at the expense of variety and, in his notebooks, he never tires of insisting that opposites are never resolved by reconciliation, harmony, or agreement. Such terms relate to propositional language and are forms of what he calls 'imperialistic compulsion.'"[39]

Consistent with this line of thought, Frye also considers Dante's process to be, in a sense, "dialectical," an apparently anachronistic assessment, though he does note that it "has also the sense of a continuous movement going into itself, so to speak, at each stage and emerging from it into a new phase" (*GC* 222), a process generally consistent with Hegelian thought. Dante's levels are, as Frye describes them, all focused on how human understanding and action is to be shaped by sacred text. Of most interest in the present context is Frye's assessment of Dante's literal sense, as it provides an instructive counterpoint to Frye's own radical conception of literal meaning. Using the Hebrew Scripture's recounting of the exodus from Egypt as an example, Frye asserts that Dante's "literal" reading is not merely concerned with historical events but overlays a typological perspective on what is said to have occurred. In this reading Moses, freeing the Hebrews from slavery, becomes a type for Jesus whose redemptive act is the antitype, freeing humanity from the brokenness of the fallen world provided, of course, people apply the

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[37] Robert Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, p.11. Denham's insightful analysis of *Aufhebung* and the related concept of "interpenetration" are important contributions to commentary on Frye's work.

[38] Denham notes in his Introduction to *Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks*, that "[a]mong modern discursive thinkers Hegel is his great hero, though he admires the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an Odyssean quest, not as an introduction to Hegel's system (*LN* xxxvi).

[39] Robert Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World*, 33.

realization to their own situations and "thereby reach a condition in which those lives can be transformed into the analogy or imitation of the Christian life" (*GC* 222). This extension of the literal sense, beyond bare facts to something more "real" is, for Frye, representative of how Dante views the operation of language at each of his levels. And while Frye's adoption of the main thrust of polysemous meaning is central to his own views, Dante's perceived specific employment of its principles has limitations which Frye will not accept within his own schemata:

> On the allegorical level the words are subordinated to the historical fact of the work of Christ on earth. On the moral level they are subordinated to the actions we perform existentially; On the anagogic level they are subordinated to the actual life we enjoy after this one in heaven. *On every level words are treated as servomechanisms of reality, thought, activity and existence* (*GC* 223, emphasis added).

In Frye's thought, treating words as "servomechanisms" is an unfortunate use of language that obstructs meaning and creates false equivalencies between language and the objective externalities the servomechanisms purportedly portray. This conception of the relationship of words to reality makes sense in purely descriptive writing, but not where serious literary or sacred writing is employed, wherein a rich multiplicity of meanings may be ascertained (*WP* 18).[40] Frye notes that post-structural critics employ this interpretive technique in their notion of the "'transcendental signified,' the view that what is true or real is something outside the words that the words are pointing to" (*WP* 43). In *The Great Code* Frye asserts that this line of thought has led to confusion regarding the true meaning of John 1:1, which he says, "was solidly rooted in the metaphorical phase of language, where the word was an element of creative power" (*GC* 18).[41]

[40] See also *LN* 23: "The conception of the word as a servomechanism, a signifier of a signified generating it, is one I have opposed from the beginning. The signifier in turn is contradictory: that's why I find so much in the metaphor which *says* it is self-contradictory" (emphasis added).
[41] See also Frye's discussions of the ways *logos* has been translated at *GC* 18-19 and *WP* 42-3.

Frye's Radical Definition of Literal Meaning

For Frye literal writing that is purely descriptive is necessary in applications where specific concrete relationships between the words used, and the objects and events they signify, are a practical necessity. In the realm of serious literary and sacred writing, however, that kind of usage only destroys the possibility of a kerygmatic experience, which depends on a shift in consciousness not possible using that limited method. That shift is accomplished through a broad range of linguistic techniques that, together, create a "literal" meaning inherent to the work itself and only incidentally related to the external, objective world of what is normally considered fact. It is very much a real world, created in the human mind, but as Frye is careful to note, it is "imaginative" — a product of the imagination — but not "imaginary," meaning completely made up or unreal.

Frye approaches his radical definition of "literal" meaning from complementary perspectives. As we have seen, his debt to Dante's concept of polysemous meaning is substantial but does not extend to his specific views of the literal sense, which is still rooted in a historical perspective, albeit with a distinctly typological slant. Frye's own definition of literal meaning begins to be worked out in *Anatomy of Criticism* in a secular context which will also become applicable to sacred writing. It is loosely based on a metaphor from physical science, relating to centrifugal and centripetal force (*AC* 76-82). Here, Frye contends that the literal meaning of serious literary writing is determined by a holistic, self-referential process (the centripetal approach) that prioritizes synergies of meaning within the context of the work, rather than by appeal to outside referents (centrifugal approach). Of course, this is not to say that a writer or their reader would not necessarily have recourse to their knowledge of the objective world outside the work, only that the totality of meaning generated is an imaginative structure, uniquely resulting from the totality of the literary devices of which it is comprised. Indeed, in *The Educated Imagination* Frye addresses the external references in literature, both overt and implicit which, being imaginative themselves, can be significant in creating literal meaning both within a particular piece of writing and as part of a larger corpus. This occurs primarily through literary allusion where one work makes a direct or oblique reference to another, drawing in a consideration of external literary elements which may inform its own meaning. Frye contends that: "Literature tends to be very allusive, and the central things in literature, the Greek and Roman classics, the Bible, Shakespeare and Milton, are echoed over and over again" (*EI* 26). No doubt if Frye were writing today, more than 60 years later, that list would be altered, but the principle would remain, and the Bible would still be included, though arguably less prominently.

Frye notes that allusion is at work on an even larger and more diffuse scale as well: As consumers of literature, "[w]e relate the poems and plays and novels we read and see, not to the men who wrote them, or even indirectly to ourselves; we relate them to each other. Literature is a world that we try to build up and enter at the same time" (*EI* 28), or as expressed more succinctly: "All themes and stories that you encounter in literature belong to one big interlocking family (*EI* 18). This interconnectedness of all literature is directly related to Frye's theory that on some level all literature is both conventional and, by extension, "involuntary". It is conventional, because at least in the broadest sense, "literature can only derive its forms from itself" (*EI* 15) in order to be recognizable as literature. Conventions are most recognizable in popular fiction, such as detective stories or modern romances, where the forms of the genre dictate predictable elements of narrative structure, including the settings, types of conflicts, and their resolutions. Serious fiction, of course, breaks beyond these preliminary limitations through the creative use of literary devices, including allusion, that enrich the potential for polysemous meanings and

bear critical reflection on a level not typically worth pursuing with respect to popular conventional writing. Even so, according to Frye,

> All [literary] writers are conventional, because all writers have the same problem of transferring their language from direct speech to the imagination. For the serious mediocre writer convention makes him sound like a lot of other people; for the popular writer, it gives him a formula he can exploit; for the serious good writer it releases his experiences or emotions from himself and incorporates them into literature where they belong (*EI* 17).

These conventional underpinnings of literature also make the means of expressing it somewhat "involuntary" in that "[t]he writer of literature can only write out what takes shape in his mind," and this shape must, as noted, be a recognizable literary shape, irrespective of the quality of the creative vision it contains. This controlling aspect of convention and involuntariness also applies to Biblical writing since it is written in largely recognizable literary forms. Such conventions as the "mysterious birth of the hero," found in many early mythologies, are recounted in the Bible in the story of Moses (*EI* 14), Isaac and even Jesus; none of which is to deny that these are historical events, only that the writers or editors were cognizant of a traditional manner by which they were best conveyed. In this context, Biblical writing would be seen to have a literal meaning which is also real, but imaginative, and not directly linked to external fact. This observation is closely linked to Frye's oft-repeated claim that literature never directly asserts but always remains "hypothetical" (*AC* 74) and has important implications for the role of both secular and sacred literature which Frye explores in *The Educated Imagination.* The first is that it has the potential to instill tolerance by creating a "power of detachment in the imagination" where "our own beliefs are also only possibilities … and we can also see the possibilities in the beliefs of others" (*EI* 32). This, of course, is why totalitarian governments will always attempt to control popular artistic expression which might challenge the dominant — and sacrosanct — social mythology. The second important implication noted by Frye is that, by itself, literature can never become the basis of religious belief:

> In belief you're continually concerned with questions of truth or reality: you can't believe anything unless you can say "this is so." But literature, we remember, never makes any statements of that kind: what the poet and novelist say is more like "let's assume this situation." So there can never be any religion of poetry or any set of beliefs founded on literature. When we stop believing in a religion as the Roman world stopped believing in Jupiter and Venus, its Gods become literary characters and go back to the world of the imagination. But a belief itself can only be replaced by another belief (*EI* 31).

Insofar as the Bible were to remain purely in the literary realm, then, its literal meaning would remain hypothetical and could not be the basis of religious belief. But Frye begins his analysis in the Introduction to *The Great Code* by noting that its impact reaches beyond the purely literary: "A literary approach to the Bible is not in itself illegitimate: no book could have had so specific a literary influence without possessing literary qualities. But the Bible is just as obviously 'more' than a work of literature, whatever 'more' means" [*GC* 16]. While Frye never addresses this "more," in a systematic way, some preliminary inferences may be drawn. First, for

a Christian or Jewish believer, the text is not merely hypothetical but asserts ways of being that are kerygmatic and fundamental to a spiritually fulfilled life. This, in Frye's view, would be irrespective of whether the belief was grounded in a literal meaning in the populist, fundamentalist sense, or in the imaginative sense just discussed. In either case it would still be a belief in something "real," though Frye's critical preference would certainly be for the imaginative sense, which would be more alive to creative visions and not grounded in dubious historical facts. In summary, the literal language of secular literature and the Bible is radically reflexive. Though not quite to the point of being hermetically sealed against external references, it depends for its higher meanings on the interrelationships of the linguistic features of which it is comprised. Foremost among these features is metaphorical language.

In the third chapter of *The Great Code*, "Metaphor I," Frye asserts the priority given to metaphorical over conceptual language in Biblical texts, and how subsequent, doctrinal formulations that revert to the latter mode of expression ultimately lack spiritual purchase:

> Christ *is* God and man, in the Trinity three persons *are* one. In the Real Presence the body and blood *are* the bread and the wine. When these doctrines are rationalized by conceptions of a spiritual substance and the like, the metaphor is translated into metonymic language and "explained." But there is a strong smell of intellectual mortality about such explanations and sooner or later they fade away and the original metaphor appears, as intransigent as ever (*GC* 55, emphasis textual).

Numerous biblical texts, including many purported sayings of Jesus, exemplify the irreducible power of metaphor. For example, "I am the door"; "I am the vine, ye are the branches"; "I am the bread of life": "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (*GC*: 54-5): These direct statements of identity, in Frye's analysis, are to be taken much more seriously than if they were simple comparisons or analogies, as would be the case with similes. In *The Educated Imagination* he points out the paradox of the metaphor, where when "you're really saying 'this *is* that', you're turning your back on logic and reason completely, because logically two things can never be the same thing and remain two things" (*EI* 11, emphasis textual). The encounter with this form of paradox, specifically in literary and sacred writing, releases a form of imaginative energy, not possible in descriptive writing, and this energy creates a kind of psychic landscape wherein an authentic visionary experience such as a kerygmatic breakthrough can occur.

This process is exemplified in Wallace Stevens' poem, "The Motive for Metaphor," which is included in *The Educated Imagination* and lends its title to the first chapter. Stevens is one of Frye's most important influences on important aspects of his spiritual schemata, especially regarding the poet's concept of "description without place" (referenced at p.16, above). Frye uses poetry in general, and Stevens' poem in particular, to illustrate the primacy of metaphorical expression in the development of the human imagination, which for Frye is the most essential element defining the human condition. Everything we create, in all human realms, is a product of the human imagination arising from a persistent desire to create something better than what we already experience. As Stevens' poem (and Frye) suggests, we can never be satisfied by "The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X,"[42] Stevens' term for any final, decisive, objectively verifiable answer to an existential question. And it is the inherent uncertainty of metaphorical identification that allows the human imagination the space and freedom to explore

[42] Wallace Stevens, "The Motive for Metaphor," l. 20, quoted in *The Educated Imagination*, p. 20.

new possibilities. In this context, Frye makes two foundational claims about human striving and creativity: first, "the limit of the imagination is a completely human world" (*EI* 9); and second, "the imagination won't stop until it's swallowed everything" (*EI* 33). And, though not explicitly asserted here, "everything," for Frye, will clearly come to include the content of the spiritual realm, and means that, linguistically, any authentic kerygmatic encounter with the Divine is achieved largely through metaphorical expression which is a fundamental aspect of Frye's literal language.

Frye's concept of literal language is also deeply influenced by Paul's distinction between the natural man (*soma psychikon*) and the spiritual man (*soma pneumatikon*), set out in I Corinthians (*WP* 120-24; *GC* 19-21). Frye's interpretation holds that Paul's *soma psychikon* or natural man is essentially a human body with a soul which includes the attributes one typically associates with distinct personhood. While this soul-body has a spiritual element, the "spirit of man" (I Corinthians 2:11, KJV), it is equated with the "'natural' or mortal body" (*WP* 120) with which it perishes at death, at which point the soul "would either vanish into non-being or survive without its body in a discarnate state." (*WP* 121).[43] The Spirit attributed by Paul to the *soma pneumatikon*, however, is of a distinctly higher order and is directly associated with the resurrected spiritual body of Christ (I Corinthians 15:44). Those that have received the Spirit of Christ "possess it [the spiritual body] in this life also and it is the element in us that enables us to understand the scripture and other aspects of revelation (2:14)" (*WP* 123). In short, it is a state in which we are open to a fully kerygmatic experience. It is also significant that while this is a powerfully personal experience, involving an imparting of specific spiritual gifts, these are all of the same spirit (12:4). In fact, for Frye, the experience of being in the spiritual body potentially liberates one from the solitude of the soul-body, enabling a participation in a higher, more integrated state of spirituality or consciousness in conjunction with Christ:

> The Jesus of history, according to most Christian views, was a soul-body unit like anyone else; the spiritual body of the risen Christ is everywhere and in everyone, and … it may be a part of us or we may be a part of it. The *soma pneumatikon*, then, suggests a certain fluidity of personality, in which such metaphors as the "one flesh" erotic metaphor, or metaphors of being influenced by another personality or the work of a creative artist begin to take on more reality (*WP* 124).

In his analysis, Frye relates the natural man's relative limitations to a lower form of literal language that is locked in a descriptive frame of reference that is unable to ascend to the higher understanding available to one able to participate in the language of the spirit:

> We are told in the New Testament itself that that the mysteries of faith have to be "spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14). This is in a passage where Paul is contrasting the letter, which, he says "killeth," with the spirit that "giveth life" [II Corinthians 3:6, KJV]. He is not saying that there is no literal [descriptive] basis for Biblical meaning, but that that literal basis cannot be "natural": its authority is not from the external world outside the Bible. The word "spiritually" (*pneumatikos*) means a good many things in The New Testament, but one thing that it must always mean is "metaphorically"

[43] Here and at *GC* 19-20 Frye asserts that the concept of an immortal soul is Platonic and not Biblical.

(*GC*, 56).[44]

In *The Double Vision,* Frye equates the *soma pneumatikon* with the state of the natural man (*soma psychikon*) after a rebirth of the kind Jesus spoke of with Nicodemus. This rebirth in the Spirit is a holistic transformation, which includes a physical body and profound raising of spiritual — and social — consciousness that is apparently not delayed until after death, as is implied by Paul in his discussion of the resurrection body in I Corinthians 15:44. In addition to a personal transformation, Frye sees the proliferation of such rebirths as a potential boon to a society as it moves from dependence on legalistic means to restrict creative activity, to an openness which encourages it to flourish in an environment of love and good will: "The resurrection of the spiritual body is the completion of the kind of life the New Testament is talking about, and to the extent that any society contains spiritual people, to that extent it is a mature rather than a primitive society" (*DV* 14).

Here, then, we see the connection between societal progress and individual spiritual rebirth occurring through the kerygmatic experience. This is a persistent theme for Frye, whose schemata inevitably point to the achievement of human communities grounded in love and creative freedom. As always, for Frye, this process is directly linked to the development — or thwarting — of authentic language. In Frye's schemata this is the literal language of the imagination. It is as "real" as any human language can be, and yet is the vehicle of encounter with a universal spirit beyond space and time.

[44] The broader implications of Frye's analysis of Paul's distinctions between the *soma psychikon* and the *soma pneumatikon* are set out in more depth in my paper, "First Corinthians 15:44 and the Search for a Definitive New Testament Theology on the Nature of the Resurrection Body: is it Physical or Spiritual?" submitted to Dr. Lucian Turcescu, Theology 653, December 18, 2017. An important part of Frye's thinking discussed there depends on his assertion that biblical Hebrew has distinct terms for soul (*nefesh*) and spirit (*ruah*) (*GC* 20), an assertion firmly rejected by noted biblical scholar Robert Alter, who states that: "In point of fact, there is no word for soul in Biblical Hebrew, and the body-soul distinction is alien to the biblical worldview" ("Northrop Frye Between Archetype and Typology," *Semeia* 89 (2002), 9-21, p.18).

From Viconian "Phases" to Dialectical "Modes": *Kerygma* as a Fifth Mode of Language on the *Other Side* of the Poetic

In his Introduction to Frye's second biblical book (*WP*), Alvin A. Lee succinctly notes:

> Frye in the 1980s went deeply, as far as words could take him, into apprehensions of the reality of the spiritual world. In Part 1 he takes the conception of *kerygma* outlined at the end of Chapter 1 of *The Great Code* (and working powerfully throughout that book), and places it in a context of five modes of language: descriptive, conceptual, rhetorical, imaginative, and kerygmatic (*WP* xix).

The Viconian phases of language set out in the first book, while not abandoned, are revisited and substantially reworked beginning with the first chapter of *Words with Power*, "Sequence and Mode". This revision provides a cohesive framework from which a more fulsome account of *kerygma* within Frye's *theoria* can emerge. In this new scheme, explicit references to Vico are left behind in favour of the influence of Dante and especially Hegel, as introduced above. Dante's general concept of polysemous meaning is retained as it continues to support Frye's assertion that all serious writing will support several meanings. In this revised scheme, however, the modes

> are closer to Hegel than to Dante. That is, they are not so much hierarchical as progressing from the less to the more inclusive. But this is misleading too if it implies that each mode is a self-enclosed entity, which it never can be. Each mode is partial and imperfect. And that is the reason both for the existence of the others and for their co-existence within the same work" (*WP* 18).

Here we see the continuation of a process seen throughout Frye's work: the creation of a framework which is revised and repositioned amongst others in the schemata, with a recurrent and increasing emphasis on the potentially Hegelian interconnectedness of the concepts which, again, Frye will never abandon in the face of an either-or dilemma (above, p. 22, *GC* 223).

The four revised modes, then, bear marked similarities to the Viconian phases, but are conceived and interact differently.[45] Each mode has a primary focus or phase but the sequence, as Frye notes,

> is not historical — in fact it is practically the reverse of the historical. The mode that is easiest to begin with [descriptive] was the last historically to become fully mature. … On the whole, continuous descriptive techniques in writing are later than the Bible, because they depend on certain social and technological developments that took a long time to become fully functional (*WP* 18-19).

[45] Frye's Introduction notes that "the sequence of verbal modes in the opening chapters covers much the same set of phenomena as the Viconian sequence in *The Great Code* but may be simpler to follow in reading. Perhaps, of course, repetitiveness is merely the result — the flip side, so to speak — of getting it right the first time" (*WP* 4).

While each mode has a discernible motive, it contains an unstated assumption or "excluded initiative" that, in Frye's dialectic, will become the linguistic imperative of the subsequent mode (*WP* 21).[46] Here, Frye is influenced by Whitehead's observation that "[e]very philosophy is tinged with the coloring of some secret imaginative background which never emerges explicitly into its train of reasoning.[47] As in the Viconian scheme, the goal of the first descriptive or perceptual mode is to factually mirror something existing in the world that is external to the speaker/writer. As noted, in modern times it has become the language used to set out basic scientific or historical facts, and tends to avoid figurative usages that might be interpreted as obscuring the putative truth of the statements being made. The assumed but overlooked initiative here is the necessity of a grammatical structure in the descriptive expression which will necessarily impact the perception of the external object or event described. This concern with the way words are ordered then becomes the primary focus of the second, conceptual mode which, while concerned with the way language operates in the construction of meaning, disregards how the subjective concerns of the perceiver have influenced the argumentation that arises. The third, rhetorical or ideological, mode is clear about the specific purpose of the speaker's persuasive bent but, as Alvin Lee notes "obscures the hidden myth driving the ideological case; it ignores the metaphors that propaganda and advertising and preaching prefer to leave unexamined" (*WP* xix-xx*)*. These first three modes are what have been popularly regarded, since the Enlightenment, as serious modes of expression, concerned with factual presentation and rational thought. However, for Frye, it is the fourth and fifth modes, the imaginative and kerygmatic, which are of the most fundamental importance since they hold the potentially regenerative power of language.

The fourth, imaginative or poetic mode, is the vehicle of creative (literary) writing which, as we have seen, presents what are essentially hypothetical situations. Because of what is presumed to be its fictional bias, "[t]he language of imagination is distrusted in the first three modes but, because of its capacities for expanding human perception and vision beyond those modes, and even beyond itself, it is the gateway to the spiritual world" (*WP* xx). And as has been noted the imagination is unlimited and insatiable.

Curiously, Frye does not immediately speak to the concept of *kerygma* in this discussion of the modes but, rather, provides numerous and detailed examples of the first four modes. Indeed, *kerygma* is not mentioned until the fourth chapter. Again, Alvin Lee's introduction is helpful here, making a more direct link between the imaginative mode and *kerygma*: "The imaginative or metaphorical mode of language (central in literature) brings to the fore the hypothetical and fictional nature of what is being expressed, *but fails to consider that what is being imagined might actually be realized*" (*WP* xx, emphasis added). The role of the fifth kerygmatic mode, then, will be to obviate the assumption that what is expressed in literary or imaginative terms must remain in the realm of the merely possible. The obvious inference is that this process is ultimately what distinguishes the Bible as "more" than literature though, once again, Frye does not explicitly say so here, perhaps because *kerygma* emanates from a different plane of consciousness and cannot be directly connected to the dialectical framework of the first four modes. This apparent disconnection is finally addressed by Frye three chapters later as he

[46] Alvin Lee's "Introduction" to *Words with Power* provides a succinct summary of these modes and their operation at xix-xx.
[47] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in* [sic] *the Modern World* (1926), Chapter 1 (Frye's unverified citation, *GC* 287).

expands on his earlier rejection of Bultmann's views on *kerygma* and myth in the first chapter of *The Great Code* (quoted p. 28). It is not, however, definitively resolved:

> This word *kerygma* is associated mainly with the theologian Rudolf Bultmann, who contrasts it with myth, and regards the mythical elements in the Bible as something to be removed or transmuted into something else before the *kerygma* can stand out. As the entire Bible, from the first chapter of Genesis to the twenty-second chapter of Revelation is written in the language of myth and metaphor, with occasional divergences into other modes, this would be difficult to do. If it were possible, we should be back to our old situation: *kerygma* would be simply a version of ordinary rhetoric, with the theologian adding a skeleton of his own dialectic (or pseudo-dialectic), the literary element being regarded as left in the Bible by inadvertence or simply to make it more fun to read. I think it is important to keep the word *kerygma,* but it has to mean not ordinary rhetoric but a mode of language that takes account of the mythical and literary qualities which cannot be separated from the Biblical texture. In short, a mode of language on the *other side* of the poetic (*WP* 102, emphasis textual).

Where, then, is "the *other side* of the poetic" from which *kerygma* emanates, and what are the "mythical and literary qualities which cannot be separated from the Biblical texture" of which it is comprised? We begin by recalling Frye's assertion that the proper critical perspective of the Bible is that its metaphorical and mythical structures comprise a unified whole, since that is how it has always been culturally received, despite the extensive revisions, redactions and contentious questions of authorship identified by modern scholarship (*WP* 102-5). In the context of that unified view, certain characteristics of linguistic expression emerge which are unique to the Bible and prerequisites of biblical *kerygma.* Foremost of these is the biblical concept of "'Word' [which for Frye] includes all possible words, as symbolized by the Alpha and Omega of Revelation 22:13 but is something other than the totality of words" (*WP* 109*)*. As John 1:1 famously declares, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," clearly indicating an identification of Christ with the Father and his role as creator. Frye would assert that this is a metaphorical and not a merely descriptive identification and is all the more powerful for that reality since the most powerful truths of the Bible are written in metaphorical language. But this metaphorical identification of Jesus and God does not negate the Bible's presentation of Christ as an active person of history, however doubtful the factual veracity of any specific statements about or attributed to him might be. This portrayal of Jesus is an important factor in viewing the Bible as "more" than mere literary fiction, because Jesus' reality, however conceived, is unarguably far more than merely hypothetical. In *The Great Code* Frye posits another identification between Jesus and the Father which also has profound implications for the operation of *kerygma*:

> The Christian Bible is a written book that points to a speaking presence in history, the presence identified as Christ in the New Testament. The phrase 'word of God' applies both to the Bible and that presence. As long as we accept the referential meaning of the Bible as the primary one, and read the words only for their revelation of

> something beyond themselves, applying the same phrase to such different things is only a dubious syllepsis. But we saw that the Bible deliberately subordinates its referential or centrifugal meaning to its primary, syntactical, centripetal meaning. It is our only real contact with the so-called "Jesus of history," and from this point of view it makes good sense to call the Bible and the person of Christ by the same name. It makes even more sense to identify them metaphorically. This is a conception of identity that goes far beyond "juxtaposition," because there are no longer two things, but one thing in two aspects (*GC* 76-77).

Taken together, these metaphorical identifications assert the essential unity of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Bible. But in Frye's unique conception of Hegelian dialectic, they retain their individual identities but operate as one dynamic continuum that can convey *kerygma* from God to the spiritually engaged. And while the doctrinal version of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this specific framework, which otherwise has close parallels to the traditional Trinitarian mystery, it is always implicit. Here, for instance, Frye might have added reference to a passage from the disciples' reaction to Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse (John 6: 60-71): In distinguishing between the flesh and the spirit, Jesus states: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life" (John 6:63, KJV, emphasis textual). When he asks his disciples if they too will leave with the many who reacted negatively to Jesus' controversial discourse, "Simon Peter answered him, Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art Christ, the son of the living God." (John 6:69). It is somewhat curious that Frye doesn't refer directly to this passage, given Jesus' insistence that his "words" are "spirit." This, of course, is spoken pre-resurrection but Peter would have certainly been one of the *soma pneumatikon* in Paul's definition as signalled by Christ himself in Matthew 16:17. Here, Jesus commissions Peter to lead the Church in terminology that can be seen as another example of the distinction between the spiritually awakened Paul's natural man and the spiritually awakened *soma pneumatikon*, set out by Paul decades before the writing of the Gospel of John: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

Frye's prioritization of the Spirit is also reflected in his expressed compatibility with the thought of the medieval mystic, Joachim of Floris, explored by Robert Denham in *Northrop Frye and Others: Twelve Writers Who Helped Shape His Thinking* (*NFO* 85-101). As Denham notes, there are close to forty references to Joachim in Frye's published work and notebooks (*NFO* 85).[48] This affinity is probably rooted in both thinkers' reformist tendencies to favour reliance on a direct encounter with the Holy Spirit, unmediated by an institutional hierarchy which they saw as necessarily circumscribing that experience. Frye notes that, "as in all repressive cultures, most of the penetrating thinkers of the Middle Ages were dissidents accused or at least suspected of heresy. They included Siger of Brabant, Scotus Erigena, Peter Abelard, John Wyclif, Roger Bacon, Nicholas of Autrecourt, Meister Eckhart, William of Occam and Joachim of Fiore" (*DV* 66).[49] Frye is especially interested in Joachim's three ages of the world, corresponding to his conception of the Trinity. This schema portrays the age of the Father as one of obedience to the

[48] The full list of index entries is at the *Index to the Collected Works of Northrop Frye,* Volume 30 of the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye.* O'Grady, Jean, compiled. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 291.

[49] Frye approvingly adds here that Dante placed some of these in his Paradiso, while one of his own works, *De Monarchia* was placed on the Index *Librorum Prohibitorum.*

Law, rooted in the Old Testament, while the age of the Son is that of the New Testament dominated by the clergy and the sacraments prescribed by the institutional church, both of which for Frye, as inspired by Blake would be spiritually restrictive. The third age of the Spirit which Joachim thought would begin around 1260 would be liberating. As summarized by Denham, Joachim's

> "age of the spirit would usher in the period of what Revelation calls the 'everlasting gospel.' The age of the Spirit was an age of autonomy, in which the absolute freedom contained in the gospel message would prevail. The age of the Spirit was the monastic age, so that the need for the Church and other constraining institutions would effectively disappear. All would be freed from the letter of the Gospel, and universal love, freedom and justice would reign (*NFO* 86).

The phrase "everlasting gospel" is taken from the Book of Revelation, 14:6, an apocalyptic vision of great interest for both Frye and Joachim. Here, Frye's interpretation of this concept, like so many others, is based on Blake's revolutionary take on traditional Christianity. Denham notes that while in the traditional reading, the phrase relates to the "imminent judgment" of God, which is to be feared, in Blake's view it is about forgiveness, undertaken by Christ to liberate all humanity once and for all time from the punishment of the law (*NFO* 91). This is related to Blake's — and ultimately Frye's — position, noted in the first chapter of *Fearful Symmetry* that "All Religions are One" whereby "the material world provides a universal language of images and … each man's imagination speaks that language with his own accent. Religions are grammars of that language" (*FS* 28). Three hundred pages later, he clarifies that "Blake does not mean by one religion the acceptance of a uniform set of doctrines by all men: he means the attainment of civilized liberty and the common vision of the divinity and unity of Man which is life in Jesus. By one language he does not mean English: he means, quoting the Bible … that all the Lord's people will become prophets; all will speak the language of the imagination" (*FS* 340). This vision is closely related to Frye's hoped-for realization of more permanent "mature" societies, that outgrow their reliance on ideologies, both religious and secular, and are based on mutual love and creative freedom (*DV* 7-14). And in his Late Notebooks, Frye approvingly notes his longstanding agreement with Joachim that the present and the future both hold the potential to realize this vision which is beyond doctrinal limitations: "The Joachim of Flores notion, that there's a coming of age of *purely spiritual Christianity*, an everlasting gospel, has always been central to my own thinking. I don't look for it in the future of time, but ideally it's always there" (*LN* 202, emphasis added). This suggests the possibility that Joachim's age of "purely spiritual Christianity" has some bearing on Frye's concept of the Participating Apocalypse, discussed below, and that his Ages of the Son and the Father also are reflected in the phases leading up to that culmination, though any suggestion of direct influence, while intriguing, is little more than conjectural.

Finally, the reference to freedom from the "letter of the Gospel" recalls Frye's comparison of Paul's "letter that killeth" to the "spirit that giveth life" (above, p. 27) and in a notebook entry Frye wonders "[a]t what point did Xy [Christianity] throw away Paul's spiritual-natural antithesis and pick up this dismal shit about a soul-body combination that separates at death, leaving us with a discarnate soul until God gives the order for the resurrection of the body?" (LN 714). In Frye's view this interpretation by the institutional Western Church essentially makes the Spirit an adjunct to the Father and the Son rather than celebrating its role as

the most direct and powerful vehicle of spiritual fulfillment. This is a sentiment shared to a discernible extent by Joachim of Flores which, though not expressed in as explicit terms as in Blake, was clear enough to garner disfavor from ecclesial authority.

In Joachim, then, Frye sees a kindred spirit in his quest for spiritual liberation. And, as Denham notes their parallel interests extend further: to their predilections for schematic thought, symbols, and diagrams (*NFO* 97); their indebtedness to the medieval four senses of Scripture (*NFO* 92); and to typological analysis of scripture (*NFO* 90). However, their most enduring connection is their focus on the apocalyptic vision which for Frye is the gateway to the final apotheosis of spiritual experience.

Frye's Typology: Phases of Revelation Culminating in the Participating Apocalypse

Arguably every aspect of Frye's expansive *theoria* is coloured by a typological perspective which defines its overall shape and provides an organizational structure for its content. This includes Frye's own framework of the Phases of Revelation which begins with the Creation story of Genesis and concludes with the visions of Revelation: the Panoramic and Participating Apocalypses. This process applies both to the Christian community in general as well to one's individual spiritual pilgrimage, the conclusion of which, if attained, is the Participating Apocalypse, the ultimate kerygmatic experience achievable in the biblical context. His views are set out in the middle two chapters of *The Great Code:* Chapter Four "Typology I," which ends Part I, "The Order of Words" and Chapter Five, "Typology II, "The Phases of Revelation" begins Part II, "The Order of Types." The organizational structure and titles are, once again, significant and indicate the open-ended mirroring process seen throughout Frye's work.

Interestingly, in these Chapters Frye does not explicitly contradict his insistence that the Bible be read synchronically but his theory of how the Bible creates meaning typologically suggests a methodology at least partially dependent on essentially historical processes which have been reflected in secular historiography as well. Biblically, the operative premise is that the two testaments indeed mirror one another, with antitypes in Christian scriptures fulfilling or completing the types of the Hebrew scriptures, with the latter containing its own self-contained typology as well. Much of the focus here is on the interpretive texts of Paul but of course there are many proof texts in the Gospels as well, many attributed to Jesus himself. Taken all together, these explicit, as well as many implicit, references make it hard to deny an overarching typological design of the New Testament. It is to be noted, however, that Frye is at pains to distinguish this interpretation as purely critical, with no personal theological bias:

> [T]ypology is a neglected subject, even in theology, and is neglected elsewhere because it is assumed to be bound up with a doctrinaire adherence to Christianity. I am concerned here with typology as a mode of thought and as a figure of speech. I say 'and,' because a mode of thought does not exist until it has developed its own particular way of arranging words. Typology is a form of rhetoric, and can be studied critically like any other form of rhetoric (*GC* 80).

Frye's avowed doctrinaire neutrality here is certainly arguable, as Joe Velaidum asserts in "Typology and Theology in Northrop Frye's Biblical Hermeneutic."[50] However, though Frye certainly does have a discernible theological position it is arguably not dogmatically Christian in any traditional sense. Significantly, Frye distinguishes typology from causality, noting that for the latter, as understood through the three previously outlined phases of language (metaphoric, metonymic and descriptive), causes and effects "are all based on two units assumed to exist simultaneously," while "typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is is a mode of thought, what it both assumes and ultimately leads to, is a

[50] Velaidum, Joe. "Typology and Theology in Northrop Frye's Biblical Hermeneutic," *Literature and Theology* 17 No 2 (June 2003): 156-69. Robert Alter also challenges Frye's use of typology in "Northrop Frye Between Archetype and Typology," *Semeia* 89 (2002), 9-2.

theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history" (*GC* 80-81). Like causality, then, typology is a form of rhetorical thinking, but is not based as much on the time-bound, scientific criteria of observation and logic but looks to the future, with "faith, hope and vision" (*GC* 82).

In addition, Frye sees biblical typology's influence extending into society's "confidence in historical process" in a more general sense (*GC* 81), informing not only eschatological thinking, but also supporting ascendant secondary mythologies advanced by both secular and religious hierarchies. This is evident, for example, in the "canonical" texts of Marxism, where Lenin's Bolshevik revolution is the antitype that fulfills the type presented in the writings of Marx and Engels (*GC* 80). The Church, meanwhile, in response to the centuries-delayed second coming,

> developed a progressive and forward-moving structure of doctrine, one that carries the typology of the Bible on in history and adapts it to what we have called second phase, or metonymic, language. This structure of doctrine became increasingly the compulsory means of understanding the Bible; and so, as Cardinal Newman remarked in the nineteenth century, the function of the Bible, for the Church, came to be not to teach doctrine, but to prove or illustrate it … [so that] the doctrines of Christian theology form the antitypes of which the stories and maxims in the Bible, including those of the New Testament, are the types (*GC* 85).

Frye follows this controversial statement by elaborating on how western political and religious hierarchies, largely through dominant use of second phase language, effectively exercised their central temporal power at the expense of spiritual freedom. Fortunately, as Frye asserts in *The Great Code*, a return to the authentic concerns of first phase language, essentially through poetry, is always available as a necessary corrective for linguistic phases that have become overly restrictive (*GC* 23*)*.

Chapter Five, "Typology II, Phases of Revelation" (105-38), then, is an examination of how the typological mode of thought is manifest in the process by which the biblical revelation progresses from the creation story of Genesis to the apocalyptic visions of Revelation. Interestingly, Frye introduces this section in an almost apologetic tone, favourably contrasting the Eastern concept of enlightenment, attainable in the absence of Western theistic structures through the destruction of the individual ego, with the concept of Christian salvation, noting that "[i]f attained, enlightenment brings about the same kind of obedience to the moral code (dharma) that 'salvation' does in the West, but without the legalism that Christianity is regarded as having abolished only in theory" (105). This leads Frye to broaden his examination to include what aspects of biblical texts might be less conceptual or, perhaps, doctrinal, and more metaphorical, in an attempt to answer, "part of our central question, 'What in the Bible particularly attracts poets and other creative artists of the Western world?'" (106)

Frye then outlines his conception of the dialectical progression of seven revelatory phases. In a notebook entry made during the writing of *The Great* Code he sets out his goal for this section: "I want to establish the point that every phase is the type of the phase in front of it and the antitype of the phase behind it. *That way, creation passes ultimately into the reader's creation in the eighth phase, which in turn becomes a type of new creation"* (*NR* 364, emphasis added). Interestingly, while this eighth phase is not specifically outlined in *The Great Code*, it is clearly related to other iterations of culminating spiritual experience in Frye's schemata, namely

the second, participating, apocalypse in phase seven and the overarching concept of interpenetration, discussed in more depth below. In the actual text of Chapter Five, Frye does add a qualification to the typological approach taken there, noting: "Each phase is not an improvement on its predecessor but a wider perspective on it" (*GC* 106), another reiteration of Frye's recurrent preference for dialectical inclusiveness over either/or categorical choices.

Creation

In his analysis of the first phase, Creation (*GC* 106-114), Frye recounts prominent elements of the Genesis story, outlining the dominant symbolism and drawing comparisons with and connections to other extant creation mythologies in what might be considered something of an anthropological analysis, any aspect of which might be fertile ground for creative artists. For present purposes three of Frye's conclusions about the biblical Creation stories are of particular interest. The first is that the early Church's cosmological interpretation of the Genesis story which impacted much doctrinal and hierarchical thinking was undercut by 18th century advances in science (*GC* 113). This, of course, had been asserted by Blake and argued by Bultmann though, as noted for the latter, in support of what Frye considered to be misguided ends. Frye's second conclusion is that, despite many of its potentially unsatisfying elements, "clearly there is something essential about the place of creation in the total biblical vision, but our ways of comprehending it seem to be grossly inadequate. When we turn to human creative power, we see that there is a quality in it better called re-creation, a transforming of the chaos within our ordinary experience of nature" (GC 112). This both aligns with Blake's creative vision and answers Bultmann's assertion that the power of biblical mythology has been obviated by modern knowledge. The problem, then, is not in the myths themselves, which have become fundamental aspects of human understanding, but with flawed interpretation based on faulty conceptions of language. A third conclusion, connected to the second, concerns how Creation's typological positioning, stands somewhat apart from the phases intervening between it and "Apocalypse". While it is the opening episode for the entire narrative structure of the Bible "[t]he essential meaning of the creation story, for us, seems to be as a type of which the antitype is the new heaven and earth promised in Revelation 21:1" (*GC* 114). This is where all biblical symbolism is re-created in an apocalyptic vision that at the same time both fulfils and surpasses the typological promise of the intervening phases.

Revolution

The second phase of revelation, "Revolution" (*GC* 114-118) is initiated by God's sixth "contract" or "testament" with Moses, following those with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Frye suggests that this is the real beginning of the story of Israel, and had the Bible begun here, thorny issues such as "the dreary chess problem of 'theodicy,' of how to derive a bad world from a good God without making God responsible in any way for its badness" (*GC* 114) could have been avoided. The revolutionary aspect of this phase is highlighted by three elements which are present in each of the major faiths derived from Abraham: first, a particular revelation in a specific context of adversity which must be addressed; second, the establishing of canonical texts which allows differentiation between true religions and heretical challenges; third, the adoption of "a dialectical habit of mind that divides the world into those with us and those against us" (*GC* 114). Taken together, these elements engender an anticipation of a "*culbute generale*" where those with the right beliefs will ultimately triumph over the false beliefs which are seen as

opposing them (*GC* 115).[51] Interestingly, Frye associates this impulse to revolutionary religious belief and action with biblical imagery relating to the ear and hearing, which is seen as more rhetorically powerful than that related to sight: "The revolutionary context of this is clear enough. The word listened to and acted upon is the starting point of a course of action: the visible object brings one to a halt in front of it" (*GC* 117). Frye argues that biblical denigration of visual imagery, such as the forbidding of graven images by the second commandment (Exodus 20:4) which led to the iconoclasm in Eastern Churches, was born of "a revolutionary impatience with a passive attitude toward nature and the gods assumed to be dominating it" (*GC* 118). This argument, while persuasive, might have been more fully set out, as it does support Frye's overarching prioritization of the dynamic power of verbal expression as the main driver of all aspects of human consciousness in general, and particularly with respect to spirituality. It also anticipates the distinction between the two aspects of Frye's seventh phase of revelation, the panoramic and the participating apocalypse. While both are fundamental to the ultimate kerygmatic experience the former, as the name suggests, is an all-encompassing, but essentially static vision of the complete arc of biblical narrative and accompanying symbolism, while the latter is a dynamic and fully participatory experience with the fullest expression of spiritual power, ideally triggered by the biblical text, as one completes the reading of Revelation (*GC* 137).

Law

The third phase, "Law" (*GC* 118-121), naturally follows immediately after Revolution, being a typological consolidation of the societal priorities arising from the reaction to the crisis that precipitated it. The resulting law thus becomes an iteration of the tendency of revolutionary societies to set out strict rules differentiating themselves from their oppressors and establishing guidelines to preserve the purity of vision of the new nation. Frye draws a loose parallel between the American "reverence for its Constitution, an inspired document to be amended and reinterpreted, but never discarded, … [and] the Old Testament sense of Israel as a people created by its law" (*GC* 118). Judaic law's emphases on purity of one kind or another, however, impacts each of the succeeding phases, becoming part of the reason for the recurrent reduction of the faithful to a "saving remnant, a curiously pervasive theme in the Bible from the story of Gideon's army in Judges 7 to the exhortations to the seven churches in Asia minor in Revelation" (*GC* 119).

Wisdom

Frye's fourth phase, "Wisdom" (*GC* 121-125), sees a shift towards the internalization of the general law into the individual lives of those who can correctly interpret and apply it in their evolving circumstances. Biblically, this wisdom is collected in several places, most notably in Book of Proverbs, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and in Ben Sirach's Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha. Wisdom in these contexts is, for Frye, characterized by two broad principles. The first is that in a specific challenging circumstance, the wise man is the one who follows the law in the established way, while the fool's supposedly novel approach fails as the result of his adherence to an old fallacy. This principle favors the experience of elders and the strict and

[51] Here, Frye notes how the potentially explosive conflict in Japan between the native Shinto religion and newly introduced Buddhism was averted when it was suggested that the miscellany of Shinto spirits could all be seen as "emanations of the Buddha, a compromise which was not possible for Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.

rigorous education of the young in the traditionally accepted ways. While this first principle is focused on a correct application of the acquired wisdom from the past in present circumstances, the second concerns a view to the future, which must be approached with "prudence" (*GC* 121, referencing Proverbs 8:12). The teachings in this context are primarily addressed to those in humble circumstances and are typically expressed in proverbial form. Frye, however, notes the similarity of that genre to the fable, well known outside the Biblical context, and represented in the Gospels, the parables of Jesus and, in a greatly expanded form, the Book of Job (*GC* 122).[52] He also references similar proverbial literature from various non-biblical sources, including Assyrian and Egyptian texts, as well as Polonius' fatherly advice to Laertes in Hamlet (*GC* 122, referencing *Hamlet* I, iii, 55-87).

Of greatest interest for present purposes is Frye's discussion of the Book of Ecclesiastes as the central repository of biblical wisdom. Here, his analytical focus is on the translation of *hebel* which he notes is rendered in the Authorized Version (AV) as "vanity." Frye's assertion is that *hebel* includes "a metaphorical kernel of fog, mist or vapor, a metaphor that recurs in the New Testament (James 4:14). It thus requires a derived sense of 'emptiness,' the root meaning of the Vulgate's *vanitas.* To put Koheleth's central intuition into the form of its essential paradox: all things are full of emptiness" (*GC* 123). Frye's characterization of Koheleth is particularly telling: "He is not a weary pessimist tired of life: he is a vigorous realist determined to smash his way through every locked door of repression in his mind" (*GC* 123). A thorough reading of Frye's thought suggests that he might also, in fact, be describing an idealized version of himself. His reference here to the Buddhist conception of "*shunyata*" or "void" (*GC* 123) echoes a deep, early interest in the work of D.T. Suzuki and other seminal Buddhist works.[53] In the present context, it also anticipates his observation regarding the seventh phase that the participating apocalypse is an experience that has parallels with the Tibetan Book of the Dead, where the deceased is led through a process that provokes a confrontation with — and potential release from — the self-conceived illusions that have imprisoned their spirit (*GC* 137). This interest in overcoming the false constructs of the self is a recurrent motif in Frye, sometimes in reaction to his own perceived inability to rest his mind from the obsession with words and concepts, and experience the apophatic peace promised in anonymous fourteenth century *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which he refers to as "[t]he mystical … movement … toward the wordless apprehension of the hidden divinity that's beyond all categorizing" (*LN* 532*;* see also *LN* 161). Frye, of course, while intrigued, never fully commits to a contemplative or mystical approach to spiritual enlightenment, but continually returns to his obsession with its relation to linguistic expression.

Frye's insights into the wisdom of Koheleth concludes with the implications of his translation of *'olam* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). As with *hebel*, Frye's interpretation deviates from and adds nuance to the AV which renders the verse: "He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" (emphasis textual). Frye notes that *'olam* "usually means something like 'eternity,' but in this context has rather the sense of mystery or obscurity. … The metaphor of fog or mist present in 'vanity' suggests that life is something to find a way through,

[52] Cf. *GC* 198, where Frye notes that his extended discussion of Job in Chapter Seven "somewhat expanded our earlier remark that the Book of Job, though classified as wisdom literature, needs the prophetic perspective to understand it" which he asserts at the end of his analysis of the fifth phase of Prophecy (*GC* 129).

[53] Frye's extensive interest in Eastern religious thought is outlined by Robert Denham in his introduction to *Northrop Frye's Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts* (*LN* xlv-xi).

and that the way of wisdom is the way out" (*GC* 124). Frye stresses Koheleth's prioritization of the value of work, as way of navigating through the fog of uncertainty and creating meaning, perhaps in the manner of Vico's *verum factum* (though Vico is not explicitly mentioned here). For Koheleth, Frye notes, this work is not merely a distraction from the vanity or confusion of worldly existence but allows one to "live joyfully" (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

Prophecy

The fifth phase, "Prophecy" (*GC* 125-129), consolidates the societal energy arising from the three preceding phases, and redirects it into the future, with a tighter focus:

> Wisdom, with its sense of continuity, repetition, precedent and prudence, is the highest form of the ordinary functioning level of society. The revolution is far in the past; it is part of tradition now, and without the fifth stage of prophecy the culture reflected in the Old Testament would have nothing unique about it. For prophecy is the individualizing of the revolutionary impulse, as wisdom is the individualizing of the law, and is geared to the future as wisdom is to the past (*GC* 125).

Prophets, then, like wise individuals, find themselves confronting challenging situations but with different motives and orientations. While the wise reflect on traditional understanding to move forward with sound judgment, biblical prophets see the current, dominant way forward as mistaken, and seek a revolutionary return to the true path. Frye notes that biblically the prophetic tradition begins with "ecstatic groups" one of which Samuel foretells Saul he will encounter, at which point "the spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them and shall be turned into another man" (*GC* 126, quoting Samuel 10:6). This ecstatic connection eventually succeeds, of course, in Saul's anointing of David, but, as Frye notes, there has always been a difficulty with verifying the truth of prophetic visions, especially when they conflict with established authority, yet are advanced, as was often the case, by "well-broken-in functionaries either of the court or of the temple" (*GC* 126). Thus, while prophets are seen as essential, as indicated by Moses' desire that "all the LORD'S people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29, emphasis textual), they are also reviled and persecuted for their views, as noted in the Gospels, notably by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:12).

Frye recognizes that the age of prophecy has been regarded as finished in both Rabbinical Judaism and Christianity since the establishment of the canon. Biblical prophecy, however, still retains a prominent place in Frye's schemata, firstly in relation to that framework's generally open-ended dialectical approach:

> Prophecy in the Bible is a comprehensive view of the human situation, surveying it from creation to final deliverance, and it is a view which marks the extent of what in other contexts we could call the creative imagination. … It postulates an original state of relative happiness, and looks forward to the eventual restoration of this state, to, at least, a 'saving remnant.' The wise man's present moment is the moment in which past and present are balanced, the uncertainties of the future being minimized to the observance of the law that comes down from the past. The prophet's present moment is an alienated prodigal son, a moment that has broken away from its own identity in the past

but may return to that identity in the future (*GC* 128-9).

This "comprehensive view," then, cuts across and informs all the phases, reaching back to Creation, and looking ahead in anticipation of Frye's theory of the Panoramic Apocalypse, the first of the two stages of the seventh phase, discussed in more depth below.

For Frye, prophecy also identifies the source of the power of kerygmatic language, a source to which inauthentic human language may return for rejuvenation. Frye makes several significant references in this regard to Zephaniah 3:9: "For then I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent." In Chapter 6 of *The Great Code*, this "pure" speech is briefly contrasted with the confused language of the Tower of Babel (*GC* 158), which it will replace when Israel is finally restored. Other references are very strategically placed. At the conclusion of *The Great Code* the contrast arises again when Frye addresses religious structures of faith (*GC* 229), noting that "professed faith," often becomes defined by rigid and exclusive dogma. Ultimately, "[t]here comes a point at which a structure of faith seems to become part of the Tower of Babel, one of a number of competing and mutually unintelligible assertions with a vague factual basis" (*GC* 230). Again, Zephaniah's pure speech (in addition to the gift of tongues in Acts 2:4), is posited by Frye as representing the restorative power enabling a return to authentic spiritual language in the new age which, for Frye is always potentially upon us.

Not surprisingly, Frye's most direct statement on the nature and power of pure speech occurs at the conclusion of *The Double Vision*, Frye's last, posthumously published work. Here it is noted as "one of the benefits of the coming of the spirit" (*DV* 83), the occasion of humanity's spiritual apotheosis. It transcends all merely human phases of language purging it of incomplete or exclusionary meaning:

> Such purity can hardly be the abstract purity of logic or descriptive accuracy, much less the isolation of one existing language from others. It is rather the purity of simple speech, the parable or aphorism that begins to speak only after we have heard it and feel we have exhausted its explicit meaning. … *Such purity of speech is not simply a creative element in the mind, but a power that re-creates the mind, or perhaps has actually created the mind in the first place, as though it were an autonomous force deriving from an authentic creation; as though there really were a Logos uniting mind and nature that really does mean 'Word.'* (*DV* 83, emphasis added).[54]

The prophetic voice, then, does not speak in complete narrative structures, syllogistic formulae or ornate figurative language. It does, however, speak to the promise of open-ended, creative possibilities that can't be contained by systematic language. Curiously, Frye does not explicitly reference *kerygma* here, but the description of "an autonomous force deriving from an authentic creation" capable of uniting the Logos and all of creation suggests exactly that: it originates from the Divine source, finds expression in the human imagination, engendering the necessary conditions for the reunification of creation on a spiritual plane beyond the strictures of language, time and space.

[54] See also *LN* 284, where Frye notes that in the metaphorical interpretation of pure speech, "[t]he separation of word and thing would disappear."

Gospel

Frye's analysis of the sixth phase, Gospel, (129-135) is essentially a dialectical reformulation of some of the main principles of previous phases, highlighting the role of Jesus in that progression, and setting the stage for the final phase, Apocalypse or Revelation. Prophetic motivation, it was noted, was rooted in profound dissatisfaction with the spiritual state of Israel and looked backward towards either the perfection of Eden or the arrival in the Promised Land, and/or forward to the full restoration of Israel. The imagery associated with these visions reflects a level "above" the prophet's current situation, while Jesus' teaching asserting the presence of the Kingdom of God *being* among us here and now, necessitates metaphors of ascension and descent, bringing the past, present and future into common focus (*GC* 129).[55]

Frye notes that in Jesus' teaching, the Kingdom is also presented as something of an unsolved mystery, misunderstood even by the disciples to whom Jesus speaks directly rather than in parables (*GC* 130). The mystery, which arguably remains today, is compounded by confusion over the translation of *metanoia*, the primary entry requirement for the Kingdom. Rather than the traditionally accepted translation as a need to "repent" for one's sins, Frye asserts that "[w]hat the word primarily means … is a change of outlook or spiritual metamorphosis, an enlarged vision of the dimensions of human life" (*GC* 130). This interpretation has profound implications within Frye's schemata, especially concerning one's relationship to the Law both in Old Testament times and today. Those who favour "repent," Frye suggests, are not ready for the Kingdom, since they understand entrance into it "merely as doctrine," rather than the need for a radical new way of life (*GC* 129). Implicit in this perspective is the sense that those focused on the doctrinal interpretation remain bound to the Law, rather than freed from it in the Spirit, as asserted by Paul.[56] This dichotomy has profound implications for one's orientation to their faith:

> The dialectic of *metanoia* and sin splits the world into the kingdom of genuine identity, presented as Jesus' "home," and a hell, a conception found in the Old Testament only in the form of death or the grave. … As a form of vision, *metanoia* reverses our usual conceptions of time and space. … In the "kingdom" the eternal and infinite are not time and space made endless (they *are* endless already) but are the now and here made real, an actual present and an actual presence. Time vanishes in Jesus' 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58); space vanishes when we are told … that the kingdom is *entos hymon* (Luke 17:21), which may mean among you or in you, but in either case means here, not there (*GC* 130).

If one does not enter the spiritual kingdom, they remain bound by the Law and subject to "hell," whatever that artificial creation of unredeemed human language entails. In the Spirit, however, the full extent of human potentiality is achievable, including the ultimate kerygmatic experience, towards which these phases dialectically progress.

The "new creature" in the Spirit (referenced in II Corinthians 5:17) is also seen as a typological progression from the first phase of Creation, as is the rebirth of nature foretold in

[55] From the Old Testament, Isaiah 7 (the prophecy concerning Emmanuel), and Ezekiel 37 (the vision of dry bones) which were interpreted in early Christianity as types of the Incarnation and Resurrection respectively; and from the New Testament, the *kenosis* of Philippians 2:7, as well as the ubiquitous equation with resurrection ("rising") to a return to the spiritual realm.

[56] See, for example, Romans 8:1-4.

Romans 8:21, which Frye sees as the final, redemptive "re-creation made through the union of God and man" (*GC* 131). The revolutionary impulse of the second phase is also held to be reprised in the Gospel phase through the individual power granted to the Christian liberated by the Spirit. Finally, Jesus' connection to the prophetic phase is noted in how his challenges to hypocritical aspects of religious authority led to his death. Frye's suggestion here is that Jesus' importance should not be seen as having overcome the Law by living without sin; rather, his "real significance is that of being the one figure in history whom no organized human society could possibly put up with. The society that rejected him represented all societies; those responsible for his death were not the Romans or the Jews or whoever happened to be around at the time, but the whole of society down to ourselves and doubtless far beyond" (*GC* 132-3).

Apocalypse

The seventh and final phase, Apocalypse (135-38**),** is the culmination of biblical typology and sits at the very threshold of the ultimate kerygmatic breakthrough. While clearly the most significant phase regarding the potential of spiritual apotheosis, Frye gives it one of the shortest treatments in the chapter leaving the reader, as he often does, to establish a more fulsome context from his published work as a whole, his notebooks, and the detailed critical commentaries. As presented in *The Great Code*, Apocalypse is comprised of two related but very distinct events, the panoramic and the participating apocalypse, both of which arise from an encounter with the book of Revelation which Frye describes as "a mosaic of allusions to the Old Testament: that is, it is a progression of antitypes" (*GC* 135). It is not, however, a prediction of imminent events, and it is certainly not meant as a realistic visual portrayal of what John sees in his vision; rather, it is "the inner meaning or, more accurately, the inner form of everything that is happening now" (*GC* 136). Here, then, we see another example of Frye's dialectical progression at work. As with the phases and modes of language, the phases of revelation reflect a kind of chronological progression, belied by the suggestion that the apocalyptic breakthrough to a pure spiritual encounter can occur at any time. Frye observes that the suggestion that it will come like a thief in the night is a rare link between Revelation (16:15) and the rest of the New Testament (cf. I Thessalonians 5:2). This is, in Frye's view, a reference to something more powerful and nuanced than the traditional understanding of the Second Coming: "What is symbolized as the destruction of the order of nature is *the destruction of the way of seeing that order that keeps man confined to the world of time and history as we know them.* This destruction of nature is what the Scripture is intended to achieve" (*GC* 136, emphasis added).

The first or panoramic apocalypse is proposed as a marvellous, but essentially static vision of the entire sweep of salvation history. It is viewed objectively, rather than fully in the Spirit, so those experiencing it are still limited by the strictures of time and space. This vision begins with creation and ends with a "final 'judgment,' where the world disappears into its two unending constituents, a heaven and a hell, into one of which man automatically goes, depending on the relative strength of the cases of the prosecution and defense. Even in heaven, the legal vision tells us, he remains eternally a creature, praising his creator unendingly" (*GC* 136).

Far more significant in relation to the ultimate kerygmatic breakthrough is the participating apocalypse, which would ideally immediately follow the panoramic. It is the culminating antitype of all biblical literature, a process of active, cooperative participation of the human and the divine in a spiritual re-creation, where all things are finally made new after the barriers of time and space, and between subject and object have been eliminated. While Frye doesn't specify a precise trigger for the transition from panoramic to participating apocalypse, he does draw an intriguing parallel with the process stipulated in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*

referenced at p. 39, above, where a priest reads that text directly into the ear of the deceased helping them realize that their final visions of earthly life are all illusory self-creations which must be overcome before their spirit is liberated. For Frye, this overcoming of the self, and its relation to the objective world is a prerequisite to spiritual fulfilment, as it is for many mystical seekers.[57] In Frye's words, "The apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared" (*GC* 138). In this enlightened state, one experiences all things being "made new" (Revelation (21:5), no longer feels separation from a previously "transcendent" God, and is beyond the reach of the "legal vision" in which they were previously imprisoned. Here, Frye this experience allows in the heart, which is superior even to the Bible itself, because for Milton this 'heart' belongs not to the subjective reader but to the Holy Spirit" (*GC*, 138). In *The Double Vision* Frye approves Milton's assertion that freedom from the law in the Spirit has implications for all human action, and specifically to biblical interpretation: "[T]he Bible should be read by the 'rule of charity.' That is, the Bible is the charter of human freedom, and any approach to it that rationalizes the enslaving of man has something wrong with it" (*DV* 77). In Frye's view, this would include any "literal" reading that was purported to arbitrarily restrict or punish humanity, contrary to the rule of love.[58] As noted, the Apocalypse phase is given short treatment in *The Great Code*, and that is especially true for its dynamic participatory aspect. However, in his preparatory notes for the second Bible book (*WP*), Frye provides more context for its prominence in his schemata, noting,

> the panoramic apocalypse, the thematic stasis, the myth as dianoia or picture, represents the end of experience as knowledge. … To move on to the seventh phase of participating apocalypse, one has to move back to existential metaphor, and let the preceding narrative structure one's life. To do this is to repeat the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh. When the Word's mythos is complete it discarnates, & we attach ourselves to the spirit that works by metaphor (*LN* 91).

Earlier in the same notebook, he summarizes the process more succinctly: "The response to Apocalypse is the interpenetrating vision" (*LN* 41).

[57] Frye notes, with approval, mystics who were seen as marginal to the established Church and approached spiritual truth directly through what Frye calls "ecstatic metaphor." These include Meister Eckhart, John van Ruysbroeck and Jakob Böhm (*WP* 89; see also p.7 above).

[58] Frye's example here is the insistence of some clergymen, in the early days of chloroform use, that it be denied to women in labour based on the admonition in Genesis 3:16, "In pain shall you bring forth children."

Interpenetration

Though not yet explicitly linked to Apocalypse in *The Great Code*, Frye subtly introduces the concept of "interpenetration," there in Chapter Six, "Metaphor II, after which it will arguably become the culminating vision at the apex of Frye's spiritual architecture. He begins by reaching back to William Blake's visionary quest "To see a world in a grain of sand" (*GC* 167)[59] as exemplifying the process. Frye's understanding here is complemented by Buddhist Philosopher D.T. Suzuki's view of interpenetration, as "'an infinite mutual fusion or penetration of all things, each with its individuality yet with something universal in it.' … [Suzuki] goes on to speak of the 'transparent and luminous' quality of this kind of vision, of its annihilating of space and time as we know them" (*GC* 168).[60] Moreover, Frye asserts that the true power of metaphor should be seen as being "genuinely infinite" or "decentralized," and not limited by the "finiteness" of the human mind which cannot see beyond "unity and integration" (GC 168).

When he returns briefly to the topic of interpenetration in *Words with Power*, it is with reference again to the expansive spiritual capacity of the *soma pneumatikon*. Here Frye closely associates the conceptions of shared spirituality and love, identifying love as "[t]he capacity to merge with another person's being without violating it" (*WP* 124). This is true *agape,* not what Frye terms a "frenetic rutting in rubber" (*DV* 8*)* which is incapable of the spiritual dimension of love available to the *soma pneumatikon*. In a fully mature society where individual freedom predominates and true love is unencumbered true interpenetration could be achieved through what Frye refers to as "a certain fluidity of personality" (*WP* 124). Frye appeals to a familiar poet to illustrate: "John Donne uses a beautiful figure in this connection based on the metaphor of an individual life as a book. The spiritual world, he says, is a library 'where all books lie open to one another'" (*WP* 124).

Hegel's *Aufhebung*, is also once again fundamental to his concept of interpenetration. While Denham notes Frye's limited use of the term in his notebooks and the last two major works,[61] he correctly observes that "the dialectical transition represented by the word, even if the word itself is absent, is omnipresent in Frye's thoughts,[62] indicating a nuanced application of subtle aspects of the concept. He sets out his summary of Frye's position in an annotation to a notebook entry by Frye:

> Interpenetration is a complex and multi-faceted term in NF's work. He most often, however, uses it in a religious context in an effort to capture the paradox of the one and the many, the identity of the human and the divine, the nature of spiritual intercourse and the like. NF takes the notion of *Aufhebung* from Hegel, for whom the word is a triple pun (lifting up, preserving, cancelling) in the description of the mechanics of his dialectic. Once a certain philosophical position (thesis) has found its antithesis, the new synthesis that results lifts up the old position to a new level while at the same time preserving it as a part of the new

[59] William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* David V. Erdman, ed., Garden City, Anchor Books, 1982, 490, l.1.
[60] Frye quoting D.T. Suzuki from *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 3rd Series (1953), 77 ff., as per *GC* 243n.
[61] *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 47.
[62] *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 47-8.

synthesis (*NR* 665, n102).

Though not substantively explored until Frye's concluding works on the Bible, the emergence of interpenetration as foundational to his *theoria* can be traced to his student days and an epiphanic reading of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* which resonated with him up to his last, posthumously published work, *The Double Vision:* "I can still remember the exhilaration I felt when I came to the passage: 'In a certain sense, everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus, every spatio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world.' This was my initiation into what Christianity means by spiritual vision." (*DV* 40-41).[63] Robert Denham's careful summary of the development of Frye's understanding of interpenetration is again helpful here.[64] As noted (above, p. 22), Denham considers Frye to be a dialectical thinker, but points out that he prioritizes unity over philosophical distinctions though never, ultimately, at the expense of the holistic sanctity of specific systems of thought. Denham quotes Frye's notebooks from the 1960s: "I have always distrusted what I call Reuben the Reconciler in thought: the syncretism that 'reconciles' Plato and Aristotle or St. Thomas & Marx. *I think every great structure of thought or imagination is a universe in itself, identical with and interpenetrating every other, but not harmonizable with any other* (emphasis added)."[65]

Regarding Frye's stated debt to Whitehead, Denham surveys Frye's numerous notebook entries for otherwise unpublished clues as to the extent of Whitehead's specific influence on interpenetration. While the results, under the subtitle "The Philosophical and Scientific Contexts," are inconclusive, they do indicate a web of other complementary influences that are of at least incidental interest,[66] introduced by the statement "Frye sees interpenetration as synonymous with the identity of the one and the many, of particularity and totality." [67] Denham also points out that the Whitehead quotation statement so prized by Frye occurs in the context of his explanation of the Romantic movement's response to the exaggerated materialism of the Enlightenment, a response shared in general terms by Frye and, of course, William Blake. The technical terminology employed in Whitehead's account is exceptionally dense and not of specific use to Frye or his would-be commentators but in a general sense does support affinities between his work and that of disparate thinkers known to Frye who have similar interests in the idea of "the one and the many." These include Plotinus' *The Enneads*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, perhaps, most intriguingly the work quantum physicist David Bohm. Indeed, it is not surprising that Frye was especially taken with quantum physics' perception of the interchangeability of energy and matter, seeing it as being prerequisite to the ultimate state of consciousness, where the restrictions of time and space vanish, and the spirit moves freely. Indeed, Frye refers to Bohm's concept of "implicate order"[68] in the penultimate paragraph of *The Double Vision*, his last published work, which can be read as the concluding statement to his entire *theoria*:

Our physical bodies are part of a world usually described as material,

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[63] Frye quoting Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Simon and Shuster, New York:1967, p.91.
[64] Robert Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World*, 33-60.
[65] *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, p. 33 quoting from *The"Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 1964-1972*. Frye would doubtless have considered his own *theoria* as an example of such a structure of thought.
[66] *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 39-45.
[67] *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 39.
[68] David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980), ch. 7, as cited by Frye.

> but if matter is simply energy cooled down to the point at which our bodies can live with it, perhaps spirit can enter a world of higher energies where the separate things spread around objective heres and theres are no longer things to keep bumping into. In such a spiritual nature, a nature of "implicate order" as it has been called, or interpenetrating energies, and no longer the nature of congealed objects, we should be gods or numinous presences ourselves. If the spirit of man and the spirit of God inhabit the same world, that fact is more important than the theological relation between them (*DV* 84).

As Robert Denham notes, "interpenetration is the verbal formula Frye most often calls upon to define his vision of the new creation and the participating apocalypse. The idea of interpenetration … is used in several different contexts, but the most frequent is a religious one. … Frye associates interpenetration with anagogy, apocalypse, spiritual intercourse, the vision of plenitude, the everlasting gospel and the incarnation" (*LN* xl). But, as we have seen, by the end of his exploration, he takes the concept apparently far beyond the scope of traditional religion, into the realm of physical science, even as it approaches the metaphysical. Even here, however his spiritual orientation endures. "Angels," he says, "according to St. Thomas Aquinas, belong in a pure presence and don't have to move in space, their real or universal form being the *Holy Spirit, who, being everywhere at once,*[69] *is the pure principle of interpenetration"* (*LN* 562, emphasis added).

[69] *Summa Theologica*, pt.1, question 52, arts. 2 and 3 (as cited by Frye). It is noteworthy that Frye usually omits the adjective "Holy," when referring to the Spirit, presumably to distance his views from doctrinal associations connected with the Trinity (*LN* 24). The exception here, not surprisingly, arises out of a reference to Thomas Aquinas. It also occurs in Frye's references to the work of Milton, who like Frye, sees the Spirit as a liberating force (above, p. 40).

Non-Sacred Kerygmatic Writing

This apparent final embrace of quantum physics notwithstanding, Frye's pursuit of the nature of interpenetration and *kerygma* maintained a steadfast focus on the proclamatory language of the Christian Bible. That said, his deep knowledge of all literature, coupled with his insatiable intellectual interest in apparently disparate fields, consistently led him to examine the possibility of *kerygma*'s influence in non-sacred writing. This is implicit in Frye's recognition in *The Double Vision*, again recalling Zephaniah 3:9, that "[n]ot all pure speech is in the Bible" (*DV* 83). In that context he is referring to T.S. Eliot's and Stéphane Mallarmé's suggestion that it is the vital, social function of poetry to continually purify the language of the ascendant society or "tribe" that has become less potent in aligning that society's goals with its authentic motivations.

This societal role, more relevant to secondary mythologies arising from secondary concerns, is somewhat removed from the use of mythical and poetic language to express primary concerns which profoundly impact individual human consciousness. In that regard, Frye writes approvingly about Mallarmé's use of language, as described by Paul Valéry, who "says that in Mallarmé the language becomes an instrument of spirituality, which he explains as 'the direct transmutation of desires and emotions into presences and powers that become 'realities' in themselves (*WP* 126).'"[70] This is a clear description of *kerygma* as indicated by the following analysis by Frye, directly referring to the modes of language, and the ability of the kerygmatic to unite the spirit and the body, in a new reality, as in the *soma pneumatikon*:

> It is not hard to understand that spiritual may be used to mean the highest intensity of consciousness. But Valéry and Mallarmé are saying much more than that, and implying still more. They are, in fact, suggesting that the initiative excluded hitherto from the imaginative and the poetic, the principle that opens the way to the kerygmatic is the reality that is created in the production and response to literature. Such a reality would be neither objective nor subjective, but essentially both at once, and would of course, leave the old opposition of idealism and materialism far behind (*WP* 126).

Frye refers to this new reality as "an intermediate world, where a Word not our own, though also our own, proclaims and a Spirit not our own, though also our own responds" (*WP* 117). In this world, notions of God, Word, Spirit and Father, previously projections of the subjective self, merge into dynamic continuity with the divine in a co-creative experience. In his Introduction to the Late Notebooks, Robert Denham laments that Frye never published an essay on Mallarmé, and crystalizes Frye's views on the importance of the French symbolist in a short compilation of notebook entries: "He is a poet, writes Frye, … who sometimes talks 'as though literature was a "substitute" for religion,' who sees the pure poem as a symbol of 'something transcendent,' who 'tries to sink himself in myth & metaphor so completely that the kerygmatic will speak through,' and who believes 'there really is some kind of resurrection by faith in myth'" (*LN* xxxiv).

In these preparatory notebooks to *Words with Power* Frye typically takes a much more tentative approach to non-sacred *kerygma*, putting the positive affirmations just referenced into emphatic relief. There, he muses about a "kerygmatic anthology" of secular writing, with a

[70] From *Collected Works*, vol. 8, tr. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler, 294 ff (as cited by Frye).

sardonic qualification: It 'would include [Blakes's] "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," some fables of Dostoevsky and Kafka, the opening of Buber's *I and Thou*, some Rimbaud & Hölderlin. … This is a purely subjective list of no value. I made it because it shows that no kerygmatic canon will ever be drawn up: it would be impossible to find a committee to agree on the selections" (*LN* 366). Elsewhere in the notes he speaks of a "lower *kerygma,"* which falls short of the "higher" version, which is "a two-way street, the interpenetrating of Word & Spirit" (*LN* 209). Lower *kerygma* is also seen as "proclamation derived from or allegedly derived from dialectic. … the stage of law, full of prohibitions & penalties, & increasingly given to censorship in the arts — Plato is almost insane about this in the Republic. Bultmann's *kerygma* excluding myth is in the same tradition, as in fact is all theology" (*LN* 265). In *Words with Power,* Frye also considers the possibility of secular *kerygma* in the form of some political writing, suggesting it might meet the kerygmatic criterion of arising out of a societal recognition, akin to Jesus' teachings being understood by his followers as an outgrowth of the "scriptures." The reception of The Communist Manifesto in some Marxist countries is said to come close but lacks the "full support of a mythology (*WP* 116)." Interestingly, writers such as Shakespeare and Dante, despite the universal recognition of their literary power are not seen to be kerygmatic since they don't put forward a rhetorically driven, "model-myth" to live by (*WP* 117).

With the possible exception of Mallarmé, and the writers noted in Frye's putative kerygmatic anthology, the secular writer closest to actually meeting Frye's definition of kerygmatic writing is the religious philosopher, Martin Buber. Remarkably, like Mallarmé, Buber is discussed only briefly in the Bible-focused books: three times in *Words with Power* (117,132,149), and not at all in either *The Great Code* or *The Double Vision*. He is, however, referenced over thirty times in the *Index* to Frye's work, mostly in relation to *I and Thou*[71] which had a clear and lasting impact on Frye's *theoria*. In these entries, it is Buber's conception of the relationship between I, Thou and It that can be seen to inform Frye's search for a mechanism by which the obviation of the separation between subject and object can be achieved, a fundamental outcome of the kerygmatic process. The opening to *I and Thou* is where Buber begins to define his two fundamental "words": "I-You" (Kauffman's translated term) and "I-It."[72] These concepts comprise the context and possibility of all authentic relations within specific spheres, each with their own distinct verbal challenges:

> Three are the spheres in which the world of relation arises.
>
> The first: life with nature. Here the relation vibrates in the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language.
>
> The second: life with men. Here the relation is manifest and enters language. We can give and receive the You.
>
> The third: life with spiritual beings. Here the relation is wrapped up in a cloud but reveals itself, it lacks but creates language. We hear no You and yet feel addressed; we answer — creating, thinking, acting with our being we speak the basic word, unable to say You with our mouth.
>
> But how can we incorporate into the world of the basic word what lies outside language?

[71] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1970.
[72] Buber, 53.

> In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze towards the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it; in every
> You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its Manner (formatting textual).[73]

Buber returns to the three spheres near the end of *I and Thou*, repeating verbatim the passage just quoted, but this time adding significant terminology providing a gloss to the nature of each, and raising interesting questions regarding possible influences on Frye's theories of language. Immediately following the previous passage, which concludes with a focus on addressing the "eternal You," Buber adds:

> All spheres are included in it
> while it is included in none.
> Through all of them shine the one presence.
> But we can take each out of the presence.
> Out of life with nature we can take the 'physical' world, that of consistency; out of life with men, the 'psychical' world, that of affectability, out of life with spiritual beings, the 'noetic' world, that of validity. Now they have been deprived of their transparency and thus of sense; each has become usable and murky, even if we endow it with shining names: cosmos, eros, logos (formatting textual).[74]

In *The Educated Imagination* (*EI*), a series of CBC lectures delivered twenty years before Frye's adaptation of Vico's phases of language in *The Great Code*, Frye also posits three distinct realms of human interaction with specific levels of language developed for each. As with Vico's phases, and the "modes" replacing them in *Words with Power*, they will eventually come to operate simultaneously, but with distinctive goals and results. It is noteworthy, firstly, that these levels seem to correlate more closely with Buber's spheres than with his own, later, phases and modes; and secondly, that Frye's consistent notebook references to Buber towards the end of his career indicate a continuing urge to align his own *theoria* with Buber's that is arguably never fully worked out in metaphorical language as powerful as Buber's.

Frye's three-stage process in *The Educated Imagination* begins with a shipwreck metaphor for humanity's dawning of consciousness in a hostile and uncommunicative natural world seemingly set off against it (*EI* 2). The initial language developed to encounter this environment "is the language of consciousness or awareness. It's largely a language of nouns and adjectives" (*EI* 3) emphasizing the separation of the subjective human from the objective world beyond them. This is a basic realm, where, in Buber's "cosmos," the relationship with the external "vibrates in the dark and remains below language" where no authentic I-Thou relationships can yet occur. As Frye's nascent society develops, people begin to see their world less as purely objective and hostile, and desire to develop it in recognizably human terms, through interpersonal engagement, akin to Buber's "eros": "The language you use on this level is the language of practical sense, a language of verbs or words of action and movement" (*EI* 5). However, as Frye notes, inherent in this realm of practical sense is a consistent desire for

[73] Buber, 56-7.
[74] Buber, 150.

improvement in all areas, especially "a desire to bring a social human form into existence" (*EI* 5). It is in this aspect of Frye's schemata where the third level of language, the imagination, gains prominence and is operative in all social human endeavours: science, literature and the arts, politics, and religion, always in search of the possible. Interestingly, while religion is addressed here, it is done in the context of the development of early mythologies and the linguistic structures expressing them (EI 12-22), with scant references to authentic spiritual vision, which are left for the later Bible-related books. There are two near exceptions. The first is Frye's assertion that the "Story of the loss and regaining of identity is, I think, the framework of all literature" (*EI* 21) which, though it is not specifically mentioned, would clearly include the arc of biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation which, we have seen, has powerful kerygmatic significance. The second exception occurs at the conclusion to the first chapter of *The Educated Imagination*, mentioned above in relation to Frye's implicit affinities to Barth, but bears repeating in this new context, where it echoes Buber's quest for spiritual unity in the You as the fullest expression of "*logos.*" Echoing I Corinthians 13, Frye states: "The motive for metaphor … is a desire to associate, and finally to identify, the human mind with what goes on outside it, because the only genuine joy you can have is in those rare moments when you feel that although we may know in part, as Paul says, we are also a part of what we know" (*EI* 11).

For Buber, it is the second sphere "life with men" that is "distinguished" as it is the most relational with respect to human interaction with language:

> Only here does the word, formed in language, encounter its reply. Only here does the basic word go back and forth in the same shape; that of the address and that of the reply are alive in the same tongue; I and You do not only stand in a relationship but also in firm honesty. … Here that which confronts us has developed the full actuality of the You. …
>
> This is the main portal into whose inclusive opening the two side portals lead. …
>
> The relation to a human being is the proper metaphor for the relation to God — as genuine address is here accorded a genuine answer. But in God's answer all, the All, reveals itself as language (formatting textual).[75]

The suggestion here, as throughout Frye's work, is that the highest state of human consciousness and most intimate encounter with God is achievable though that most quintessential human medium: language. While the extent to which Frye's theory of the origin and operation of kerygmatic language is influenced by Buber's philosophy has yet to be fully explored, the evident parallels and Frye's approving references suggest intriguing possibilities. The foregoing passages, including references to the third sphere's generative role in creating divine language out of silence, suggest complementary ways of understanding Frye's *theoria* regarding how God works through human language and creativity and can bring one to the final spiritual apotheosis in the participating apocalypse.

Here, we also begin to see more clearly that in Frye's schemata, *kerygma*'s place on "the *other side* of the poetic" relates less to a particular location or religious orientation, and more to a dynamic and interactive process between subjective consciousnesses, both human and divine, unfettered by the misconceptions and barriers imposed by inauthentic language. And, as we have seen, this is a process which is mirrored, perhaps even directly operative, in linguistic

[75] Buber, 151.

expressions beyond the strict limits of what might be considered “sacred.” It is also a process which is contained within an even larger schematic framework which, for Frye, is an interpenetrating vision eclipsing space, time and, in the end, any meaningful differentiation between man and God.

Conclusion

Northrop Frye's concept of *kerygma* is clearly a central pillar of his spiritual architecture, and the primary focus in his search for a mechanism that triggers the ultimate apotheosis of human consciousness. It is also clear that, however it is defined or operates, it is a direct function of linguistic expression. Frye's *theoria*, then, sets out to construct a context or, rather, a series of interconnected contexts within which *kerygma* can be situated as a mode of human language in direct communion with the divine.

Frye is a schematic, as opposed to a systematic thinker who sees himself as a pure critic comfortable in any intellectual field — philosophical, literary, religious, theological, social, even scientific — that may inform his own work. He is always looking to expand his frames of reference, rather than to "close the circle." In doing so, his processes and terminology are informed by thinkers from disparate fields, though sometimes in tangential ways that may be too diffuse to support satisfying conclusions. Frye's approach is also unapologetically synchronic and unconcerned with verifiable historical facts, except insofar as they provide a general context for his linguistic theories including, for example, those relating to biblical typology and phases of language. This freedom provides him with a broad canvas on which to work out his ideas but can be of understandable concern to theologians as well as religious and biblical scholars whose methodologies require stricter adherence to factual "truth."

While Frye's methodology is expansive and his influences diverse, there can be no doubt that his intellectual and spiritual lodestar is the English poet, William Blake. Frye's groundbreaking critical work on Blake (*Fearful Symmetry*, 1947) not only established his own literary critical reputation, it also provided the foundation for all his theories on language, religion, spirituality, and the co-creative power of the human imagination and the divine will. Regarding the role of language, Frye echoes Blake's deep distrust of Enlightenment thought as exemplified by John Locke whose great error was, for them, the assertion that humans are essentially perceiving subjects separate from the objective world and a remote God which could only be apprehended indirectly through sterile conceptual language. Frye's response to this is, in large measure, an attempt to identify a process within which verbal expression could achieve a more authentic encounter, perhaps even an identification, between subject and object. After three decades of refining his literary critical theories, this response began in earnest with *The Great Code* (1982), the first of his final three books all focused on biblical language where, for Frye, kerygmatic language would figure most prominently.

In Vico's phases of language, Frye found what would become his prototype: a progression of modes of expression that became, as social structures evolved, more conceptual and descriptive and less existential than the first linguistic responses to basic survival concerns during the dawning of consciousness. Frye's adaptation of Vico's three phases emphasized the power of the poetic and metaphorical aspects of the early process and the increasingly rhetorical or persuasive function in the evolving social context. While, for Frye, each of these elements are necessary to the transformative power of biblical language, they are not sufficient, leading him to adopt the familiar term *kerygma*, or proclamation, as a fourth phase or mode that is the most significant spiritual conduit between the human and the divine. It would not be an unfair exaggeration to say that the remaining focus of the three Bible books was an attempt to work out the details of this insight in the context of his own schemata, and to an incidental but still significant degree, suggest potential implications for the field of theology.

Frye develops his foundational adaptation of Viconian phases through a series of complementary schematic structures informed by evolving interpretive processes, inspired by a

range of influences. Later in *The Great* Code, for example, Dante's interpretation of the traditional four senses of Scripture, first considered by Frye in The *Anatomy of Criticism*, becomes the grounding for his theory regarding the potential for multiple meanings in all serious writing. This idea is in turn augmented by Frye's adaption of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* which insists on the potential interconnectivity of apparently competing meanings or ideas into larger, interpenetrating perspectives, a recurrent *motif* in all of Frye's later works.

Dante's interpretation of the literal meaning within the four senses also becomes a touchstone for Frye's own radical reinterpretation of literal meaning as it applies to all literary and biblical writing. But while Dante's literal meaning remained grounded in then-accepted historical fact (such as the Exodus), literal meaning for Frye is the reality created within the work itself in a completely self-referential or centripetal process, with minimal dependence on external, or centrifugal facts. This world, created by the confluence of literary elements of the text, becomes a substantial reality in the human imagination where, in conjunction with the divine presence it has a spiritual potency not possible in merely descriptive or conceptual expression.

The seven phases of revelation comprise another fundamental structure which combines Frye's dialectical process with his typological analysis of the narrative arc of the Bible, beginning with Creation in Genesis and concluding with the apocalypse in Revelation. This framework, though based on a chronological timetable from the first creation to the new creation at the end of the world, is essentially the model for an authentic spiritual journey from humanity's first encounter with the divine to the possibility of a final apotheosis of consciousness where time and space and all barriers between subject and object disappear into the new reality of an interpenetrating vision.

Kerygma, it seems, is always powerfully working at the margins of these structures and interpretive processes, but never quite comes into clear view. One of Frye's most significant metaphors for hidden keys to his *theoria* is Edgar Allan Poe's "Purloined Letter," a "verbal message" which everyone desperately seeks but cannot find, even though it lies in plain view. In a broad context, it is the key that unlocks the barriers between exclusionary categories that limit a full and mutual apprehension of the power of human language:

> For literary critics my "purloined letter" is the Bible, a book normally excluded from discussions of literature, yet the only book, to my mind, that pulls the major problems of criticism into a single focus. For Biblical scholars the "purloined letter" is the language of myth and metaphor, the essential language in which the Bible is written, and yet a language excluded as far as possible from historical and doctrinal approaches to it (*WP* 11).

In the preparatory notes to *Words with Power*, Frye is even more direct about the identity of the purloined letter, wryly poking fun at some then current commentary on Poe: "Some say it's a clitoris and others that it's a phallus. *I think it's the kerygma of God, the verbal message everybody wants to kidnap but can't get hold of"* (*LN* 219, emphasis added).

But the actual content *of kerygma* and the imaginative mechanism by which it operates remain just beyond reach. Frye comes closest to pinpointing its essence in his reworking of the three Viconian phases from the beginning of *The Great Code* into a series of five dialectical modes in *Words with Power*. Here, as was noted, it is posited as a fifth and final mode, "on the other side of the poetic." Based on the dialectical structure set up here, *kerygma's* role is to negate the assumption that the Bible, though expressed in ostensibly literary language, is not

merely presenting hypothetical situations to be abstractly considered but is proclaiming a spiritual reality which is to be internalized and lived out by those "with ears to hear." Still, wherever "the other side of the poetic" resides, it would seem to be beyond human language as we understand it. But as we have seen, Frye does assert that the Word includes all human language in a metaphorical identity with the Bible as the word of God, and with Christ, who spoke all of creation into existence and was with God the Father from the beginning.[76] Certainly *kerygma*, or proclamation, would be an active aspect of this unity as well, working from a place beyond the reach of human language, but in a recognizable human form with which it ultimately becomes integrated.

Interestingly, while Frye's concept of Spirit seems, paradoxically, to stand somewhat apart from the all-encompassing Word, "[I]t's the interaction of the Word and Spirit that's important" (*LN* 32). The nature of this relationship is suggested in numerous notebook references couching their interaction in different but related metaphors: as being in general "dialogue" with each other (*LN* 51,116, 421, 427, 437);[77] or being in "covenant" (*LN* 382). Some of the imagery emphasizes a more dynamic relationship: such as operating in corresponding movements of "ascent" and "descent" (*LN* 51, 213), or most explicitly, as parallel modes of engagement with kerygmatic overtones: "The cycle of the Word is a series of epiphanies — creation, law, prophecy and apocalypse — and the cycle of the Spirit is a series of responses — exodus, wisdom, gospel and participating apocalypse" (*LN* 462, cf. *LN* 447).

In each of these metaphors, none of which are definitively developed, the implication is that the realm of the Spirit is the realm of the final apotheosis of consciousness, where "all things are made new." This is particularly evident in the metaphor of cycles just noted, when the epiphany of the apocalypse encounters the response of the participating apocalypse which, as we have seen is the culmination of the phases of revelation. The participating apocalypse, in turn, we have seen, is the gateway to the interpenetrating vision, and "the Holy Spirit, who, being everywhere at once, is the pure principle of interpenetration" (above, p. 47).

This purity of the Spirit, thus conceived, simultaneously transcends and contains all operative aspects of Frye's spiritual architecture. It is the realm where all barriers and divisions disappear, and the limitations of space and time no longer obtain. *Kerygma*, then, touted as it is throughout Frye's late work, is somehow subsumed in this all-encompassing and indescribable realm, but retains an essential role as a vehicle of human and divine communion: "The words creation and apocalypse indicate the points at which a human construct begins to mesh with something that's constructed but divine or infinite in origin. The answering voice from God to the human construct … is what I mean by *kerygma*" (*LN* 615).

Kerygma, though traditionally understood as the proclamation of divine revelation, is seemingly also possible for Frye in non-sacred language as exemplified in the work of Martin Buber and the French Symbolists. In this context, verbal expression is seen to achieve the kerygmatic wherever it is purified and working beyond preconceived intellectual notions in a search for perfect communion between subject and object. This, as we have seen, occurs in the "intermediate reality" that is created where the production and response to literature meet. It is unlikely that Frye's views here have been sufficiently explored in mainstream literary critical discussions given Frye's unique perspectives on the nature and role of *kerygma* and its traditional categorization as a religious or theological concern.

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[76] In another example from the notebooks, Frye suggests that "in the N.T. [New Testament] the Word is a whole in which we are parts, and individual man is a whole of which the Word is part" (*LN* 539).
[77] Cf. *LN* 278

More fertile critical ground is to be found in Frye's fragmentary but provocative forays into theological areas: Frye's reconciliation of his "primary concerns" as progenitors of language with Paul Tillich's "ultimate concern;" his adoption of Blake's *analogia visionis* as a third way in the debate between the traditional *analgia entis* of the Thomists and the Barthian *analogia fidei*; and, of course, his assertion that myth is the actual vehicle of *kerygma* as well as of all sacred and serious literary expression — and that to exclude it would deprive *kerygma* and all human language of all authentic meaning. These topics as well as Frye's approval of Blake's assertion that "Man in his creative acts and perceptions is God, and God is Man" (above, p.7) are doorways into potentially exciting new understandings of how the human imagination and the divine are connected through the medium of human language.

Glossary

***Analogia entis*.** A concept based on the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and brought to prominence by Erich Przywara in the 20th century. It is a way of speaking of God by analogy, legitimized by humanity's relationship to God as finite creatures to an infinite Creator.

***Analogia fidei*.** Protestant principle espoused by Karl Barth, in large measure in reaction to *analogia entis*. Barth's view is that our understanding of God can only occur through God's self-revelation and cannot be derived from creation.

***Aufhebung*.** Hegel's dialectical process by which intellectual constructs can be transformed through encounters with other constructs. The resulting synthesis results in a higher level of understanding which both negates and preserves elements of the originating constructs. *Aufhebung* pervades Frye's thinking and is foundational to his theory of interpenetration.

***Kerygma*.** Traditionally considered to be the proclamation of the Gospel message as preached by the Apostles and recorded in the New Testament. In Frye's schemata it is the linguistic mechanism by which life-changing spiritual experiences can occur, primarily, though not exclusively, in response to sacred language.

Primary concerns. For Frye, the fundamental requirements for human life: food, intimacy, property and physical freedom. The response to these concerns gives rise to the archetypal patterns from which all forms of verbal expression are derived.

Theoria. In reference to Frye's work on biblical language, a comprehensive, interdisciplinary body of speculative thought.

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