CHAPTER THREE

SINGLE-LEVEL SPEECH ACTS:
THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST’S BLOOD
IN ROM 3:25 AND HEB 9:12

3.1. INTRODUCTION

What advantages can biblical scholars gain from Searle’s philosophies of language and mind? In light of Searle’s ‘biological naturalism,’ is it a conflict of interest to use his philosophies to study the speech acts of four New Testament writers at the level of intentionality? In response to my inquiry of whether the mental phenomena of intentionality, the network, and the background can be applied to the biblical writers, Searle says, “If no, then something is wrong with the categories. If the categories are good, then they apply.” Searle clarifies his position: “I do not wish to imply that I am endorsing the accounts of the biblical writers. The point is simply that the categories are intended to be perfectly general and should apply across any kind of discourse.”

For Searle, consciousness is a biological function like digestion or photosynthesis. He concludes that neither a worldview of God nor the immortality of the soul or the afterlife have measurable validity in the real world. Can one affirm Searle’s stance while using his philosophies to study the biblical writers and their speech acts? Searle’s methodology applies to all language regardless of his views of God, though some biblical scholars may find it problematic using a declared atheist’s theories. In asking Searle about reconciling his biological naturalism with the fact that most people have some form of religious or theological experience or thought at some point in life, Searle replies, “From individual

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1 Searle, in discussion with the author, Berkeley, California, June 28, 2005.
2 Searle, e-mail message to author, September 13, 2006.
3 In Mind, Language and Society, Searle has a section called “Beyond Atheism” in which he explains that he (and others) have moved beyond atheism due to a lack of evidence for God in the real world (33–37).
4 Williams-Tinajero, e-mail message to Searle, September 23, 2006.
experience, nothing much follows.” If something did follow for the NT writers, however, and they wrote about it from their own individual perspectives concerning Jesus Christ, then this raises the issue of subjectivity.

Most biblical scholars favor objective methods. Searle makes a similar claim regarding the prevalence of objective analyses and the prevailing worry about consciousness in philosophy. “The deepest reason for the fear of consciousness is that consciousness has the essentially terrifying feature of subjectivity.” Consciousness is subjective because it is unobservable, says Searle; yet, it exists and must be accounted for at the ontological level rather than at the epistemological level.

What sort of study takes into account the consciousness and intentionality of the NT writers? Before the Christ event, Paul and the author of Hebrews each had a set of attitudes, beliefs, and stances about the God of Israel. For example, both writers operated out of a monotheistic mindset. Each of them, however, experienced a reshaping of mind—a shift in intentionality. They performed their speech acts out of their own shifts. Their intentional states reflected a new understanding of God in Jesus Christ. In some of their ‘single-level’ speech acts, for example, Paul and the author of Hebrews used the blood-of-Christ language to reinforce the new belief system in God for the early church communities.

A distinction is made between single-level and ‘multi-level’ speech acts for the five selected NT texts. Paul, for example, performed one illocutionary act in asserting that (p) in Rom 3:25. The author of Hebrews also performed a single illocutionary act in asserting that (p) in Heb 9:12. In the next chapter, the multi-level speech acts about Christ’s blood in John 6:52–59, Rev 1:5b–6, and Rev 7:13–14 will be examined. John 6:52–59 makes for an interesting case study because of the multiple speakers (e.g., John, the Judeans, and Jesus). These speakers also performed multiple speech acts (e.g., John’s assertives in addition to his reports of the Judeans’ question and Jesus’ speech acts; Jesus’ direct assertives, indirect directives, and indirect commissives). In Rev 1:5b–6, John performed a multi-level speech act in asserting and expressing that (p). In Rev 7:13–

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5 Searle, e-mail message to author, September 25, 2006.
6 Searle, Rediscovery, 55.
7 Searle has a section titled “Subjectivity” in Rediscovery, 93–100.
8 The (p) symbolizes any propositional content. The propositional content of Rom 3:25, for example, is “God put forward [Jesus Christ] as a cover through faith by his blood as proof of his righteousness on account of the passing over of formerly committed sins.”
9 See n. 23 in this third chapter for an explanation of my use of ‘Judeans’ and ‘non-Judeans’ in place of ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles.’