Angst in the household:
A deconstructive reading of the parable of the Supervising Serv­
vant (Lk 12:41-48)

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ABSTRACT
Interpretation has to take into consideration three poles: author, text and interpreter. In the field of literary studies deconstruction has provoked much interest and concern. The scope of this paper is to illustrate this activity of de­construction unfolding by means of a reading of the para­ble of the Supervising Servant. This illustration from the Scriptures shows what happens to every text which is read again. It is reinterpreted anew according to new contexts. It is an example of the dissemination of the Word, whereby the Word becomes flesh.

1 PRETEXT
A pre-text (Latin pre- [before] + textus [the text] = [before the text]) is an important presentation introducing the text prior to an investigation of the text itself. At the same time it gives the reason behind, the purpose for, the investigation itself. The pre-text of the pretext is in fact the pretext for the pre-text, namely, the purpose of the introduction to the text, and it is also the introduction of the reason for this entire presentation.

What in fact, then, is the pretext, the reason for this presentation?

Language is a game - we the players. We play the game and the game plays us. But what kind of game is this? It is a game of hide-and-seek. Who, then, is it? Rather what is it, es, id? (Taylor 1982a:114).

This consideration aims at illustrating the deconstructive activity by means of one particular example chosen from the Scriptures. The purpose is not so much to endorse this activity, as to illustrate its modus operandi. A pretext (before the text) is necessary to illustrate certain aspects which characterise the deconstructive activity.

Deconstruction is above all a writing activity. In the great debate concerning the relationship between speech and writing, it is to the activity of writing that priority is given. In the approach adopted towards writing the purpose is not to discover "the last word" (Barthes 1977:170), but to show how writing is constantly open to being rewritten. One can never reach the point where one can say that one has written the final word and has come to a final under­standing.

"I must explain things clearly to you", I said. "Up to the last moment, I'm going to be tempted to add one word to what has been said. But why would one word be the last? The last word is no longer a word, and yet it is not the
beginning of anything else. I ask you to remember this, so you'll understand what you're seeing: the last word cannot be a word, nor the absence of words, nor anything else but a word" (Blanchot 1985:52-53).

Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation. "To make one's own" what was previously foreign "remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics" (Ricoeur 1976: 91). This shows the twofold axis of all interpretation: one axis rests on the other, on the text itself, while the second rests upon the reader her/himself. One has here the twofold play of operating with the strange and the familiar, with the other and the self, with the different and the identical. Seen in this light interpretation aims at understanding what is strange and attempts to overcome that estrangement (Taylor 1982a:68).

2 THE TEXT IS PLURAL

The text is plural. This does not mean just that it has several meanings, but rather that it achieves plurality of meaning, an irreducible plurality. The Text is not the coexistence of meanings but passage, traversal (Metaphora); thus it answers not to an interpretation, liberal though it may be, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The Text’s plurality does not depend on the ambiguity of its contents but rather on what could be called the stereographic plurality of the signifiers that weave it... (Taylor 1982a:126).

Christianity is defined as “a religion of the book” (Taylor 1984:76). Not only is the book central to Christianity, but the very centre of the book is seen to be the Logos, the Word. All the parts of the book are related to each other as parts to a living whole. Every book bears the imprint of the one who wrote it, its author. The same is true of the Bible, it bears the imprint of its author, God. However, with God as its author, the Bible attains a position which places it above every other book.

For this reason, God is the author to whom all authors finally defer, and His Book is the Book to which all books ultimately refer (Taylor 1984:81).

2.1 The approach of Schleiermacher

The relationship of author to book is well exemplified in the writings of Schleiermacher. He brings to expression a thought that has been and is representative of most interpreters over the course of the centuries. For him interpretation is in essence reproduction, by which the interpreter’s aim is to reproduce the original intention of the author embodied in the text. The aim is "the reproduction of an original production" (Schleiermacher 1978:263).

The role of the author in determining his text is decisive for the interpreter. The interpreter’s task is to get behind the text to the mind of the author. Once this has been achieved, the key to unlocking the interpretation of the text has been found. To a large extent this approach has dominated the historical-critical method of interpretation of biblical studies. This is seen either in regard to the attempt to decipher the mind of the gospel authors (as is evidenced in redaction criticism), or in regard to those who wish to get
behind the gospel to the mind of the historical Jesus (as in form criticism). In reaction to this approach (whereby the author of a text is seen to reign supreme) a number of approaches have emerged in more recent times. One can speak of a structuralist and a hermeneutic approach.

2.2 A structuralist approach
The structuralists gave the death knell to the control which the author exercised upon the text. Instead, the emphasis was placed solely upon the text. To it ultimate authority was given. The aim was to take the text as it was and to allow it to speak for itself. From the text itself would emerge the various structures, codes and symbols which the interpreter strove to unravel and discover. Barthes shows how, in the process, the position of the author became unimportant.

As an institution the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared; disposed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing (Barthes 1975:27).

It is here in the realm of the author that structuralism differs from previous methods of interpretation. Instead of approaching the text with a view to unlocking and discovering the mind of the author, the structuralist interpreter strives for a discovery of the overall system which gives meaning to the text. This overall system is seen through the emerging structures and codes discovered within the text (Taylor 1982a:69).

Structuralism has replaced the absolute author with an absolute text. The text dominates the whole process of interpretation. It is treated almost as a sacred object from which one is to discover everything through an analysis of its structures, codes and systems.

My point is only that the present-day commentary on the crisis of interpretation involves critics (are we the secular scribal priests?) in a struggle for the authoritative texts, and that in the process we play out the ancient agon of dependency and freedom: making messages we attribute to the gods, then seeking through interpretation to liberate ourselves from the text's domination, only to see that interpretation become the new master. As long as we interpret (and how could we stop?), we will create sacred texts. And it is our sacred texts - in whatever guise - that compel us to interpret (Detweiler 1985:228).

2.3 A hermeneutic approach
A different stream of interpretation has emerged from the influence of the philosophy of Heidegger. Again, it is a reaction against the tyranny of the author. At the same time the efforts made in certain circles to establish the original historical circumstances of texts have been fruitless. As Gadamer (1975:148-149) says:
The reconstruction of the original circumstance, like all restoration is a pointless undertaking in view of the historicity of our being. Having discarded the absolute rule of the author, the absolute rule of the text is also rejected. Instead, the aim of this hermeneutic interpreter is that of bringing together the horizon of the text with the horizon of the interpreter. This is the fusion of the two horizons which is the aim of all hermeneutic interpretation.

To understand it (= text) does not mean primarily to reason one’s way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said (Gadamer 1975:353). In this method of interpretation the fusion of horizons sees a development away from the past horizon of the text and the present horizon of the interpreter to a new horizon in which the application of the text is made in the life of the interpreter.

2.4 An assessment

Each of these different approaches towards interpretation has its own value as well as its shortcomings. Schleiermacher is representative of those who regard the text chiefly from a past dimension: their aim is to reconstruct the past, in particular the author, his world and intention. The structuralists, in focusing upon the text, aim at discovering the present structures which exist within the text. Finally, the hermeneutic interpreters, such as Gadamer, focus upon a new horizon which opens up the future. Taylor defends this interpretation of Gadamer in this way:

This classification of Gadamer might seem questionable. The constant emphasis on tradition appears to be at odds with the suggestion that Gadamer’s hermeneutics is concerned chiefly with the future. The profound influence which Heidegger exercises on Gadamer, however, leads to a view of historicity in which the future assumes priority. Tradition, therefore, is significant more for the future it projects than for the past it recollects (Taylor 1982a:82 n 12).

These three approaches to interpretation have shown that any interpretation must take into consideration three poles: the author, the text and the interpreter. In different ways each of the above approaches to interpretation emphasises one aspect of these poles: Schleiermacher gives emphasis to the author, structuralism emphasises the text, while Gadamer and the hermeneutic stream emphasise the relation between text and interpreter. Surely the answer lies not in endorsing one approach to the exclusion of the others, but in harmonising all approaches within a wider, all-encompassing framework? Deconstruction attempts to do this; it will be the focus of this paper to see whether it has been successful.

2.5 The deconstructive approach

The text is a tissue of quotations... (Barthes 1979b:146).
...woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural language (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cuts across it through and through in a vast stereophony (Barthes 1979b:160).

It is against the background outlined above that the deconstructive activity has emerged, placing the emphasis chiefly upon the role of the interpreter, at the same time adopting a very special attitude towards the other poles of author and text.

The deconstructive activity sees the text as totally liberated from the control which an author exercises over it. The text is now totally independent of the author.

It is not that the author may not "come back" in the text - in his text - but he then does so as a "guest" (Barthes 1977:161).

Once written, the text assumes a life of its own and it is no longer under the hegemony of the author, who can subsequently treat the text only as an interpreter.

The text is not to be seen as a well-rounded unit. Instead, it appears much like a cloth with frayed edges which are seen to overlap and make connections with other texts. Every text must be seen to have a connection with every other text. Every text brings with it an intertextuality with other texts. "Every text is the intertext of another text" (Barthes 1979b:77).

Because every text is seen as an intertext for every other text, the search for a single meaning in a text is a useless endeavour. The text is plural in that it bears a relation to all other texts, and it is plural in that it is open to a plurality of meaning. This does not mean that it has many meanings at one and the same time, but that it is open to being read in numerous diverse ways. Consequently, the search in a deconstructive reading of the text is never for one, final, meaning. The search is not for the Archimedes point of a text which, once discovered, renders the meaning. Instead, one is searching for traces of a meaning which appear and disappear in the reading of the text. Every reading of the text will produce a new interpretation. One can say that each reading of a text becomes a new text which, in a way, displaces the old text. The activity of interpretation in this perspective is seen to be a creative act whereby the interpreter attempts to appropriate what is in fact unfamiliar and strange. The text is treated as a victim (Taylor 1982b:65) by the interpreter who feels free to utilise it at will, and make its otherness his/her own.

Finally, the deconstructive activity wishes to see how meaning is deferred from one text to another, how it is disseminated.

Dissemination refers to the action of dispersing, diffusing, broadcasting or promulgating. When translated into the present context, these verbal affiliations suggest that the dissemination of the word can be understood as its spreading, scattering, diffusion, or publication (Taylor 1984:119).

Every text is incomplete in that meaning is not present, but is deferred.

Above all, deconstruction is not presented as a method. It opposes the construction of yet another system. Instead, it presents itself as an activity,
and it is in this vein that one wishes to approach the parable of the Supervising Servant (Lk 12:42-46). Although deconstruction is not a method, one can observe certain aspects that illustrate Derrida's approach. In an excellent article Leavey (1982:43) illustrates the essentials of Derrida's approach to deconstruction:

In four protocols, this essay approximates how Jacques Derrida's deconstruction works. Each protocol approaches from a different direction the strategies Derrida uses in deconstruction: 1) In a certain way and strategy define part of Derrida's close readings of Western tradition. 2) According to Paul de Man, Derrida is an Archi-e Debunker. 3) Reversal and many forms of reinscription constitute the twofold "process" of deconstruction. 4) Double imagination defines the narrative structure of deconstruction's double science (Leavey 1982:43).

One is not applying a ready-made formula or method to this parable. Rather, one wishes to read the parable according to the approach adopted by the deconstruction writers, keeping within one's horizon the axioms outlined above. Before, however, this is done, the widely accepted approach of the historical-critical method will be presented in order to show more forcibly how the deconstructive approach differs from it.


3.1 A previous approach to the parable of the Supervising Servant and its resultant interpretation

This parable of the Supervising Servant occurs in both Luke 12:42-46 and Matthew 24:45-51. Accordingly, this is viewed as belonging to the Q source (Havener 1987:139) which has been variously appropriated into the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Luke, particularly, has inserted it more carefully into his context, presenting the parable as a response by Jesus to a question by Peter. At the same time, the parable is further enlarged to incorporate further sayings of Jesus (Lk 12:47-48) which tend to place a special emphasis on the meaning of the parable.

Over the course of the Christian centuries the parables have been read and interpreted in various ways, depending upon the interests as well as the exegetical concepts and tools the interpreters brought with them. During the course of this century the historical-critical method has dominated the approach to interpretation and has made its influence felt, especially in this area of parable interpretation. The aim was above all to search for the parable as it appeared in the ministry of the historical Jesus. Consequently, the approach aimed at chiselling out the original parable from the bedrock of the Gospels in which it had been encased. Once the parable had been discovered in this way, its true meaning emerged. This is the meaning that is to be adhered to and endorsed today. Consequently, a distinction is drawn between the parable as it occurred in the original teaching of Jesus and the way it
developed or was re-read in the context of the early church, and then finally further re-read into the respective Gospels.

Connick (1974:209) shows well this development of re-reading this parable of the Supervising Servant (Lk 12:42-46). It is worth quoting him at length, for he illustrates well the approach adopted to the reading of the parables.

The early church saw a parousia parable in the Supervising Servant. This is clear from its context. The master is the Son of man returning to judge the world (Mt 24:44; Lk 12:40). The servant stands for the church members or its leaders (Luke). They are admonished not to betray their trust because the parousia is delayed. Luke, who equates the servant with the apostles, limits the application of the parable to them. They have been placed in a position of authority. They know the master's will better than the others. A more rigorous reckoning will be required of them if they permit the postponement of the parousia to prompt them to abuse their office (Lk 12:47-48).

When the gospel context of the Supervising Servant is disregarded and its later allegorical features are removed, we are left with the picture of a large household living under tension. The master is away. He may return at any time. Preparedness is the point of the parable. Its subject is the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom is near. Jesus probably delivered the parable as a warning to the religious leaders (the scribes or the high-priestly group) (Connick 1974:209).

3.2 A deconstruction assessment of this approach

On the one level the deconstructive thinkers would view the development or transmission of the parable thus presented and outlined by Connick as a logical progression and development. This is what takes place in the normal course of events. A text is always open, and always tends to be re-read in different contexts, in different situations. All texts are previous texts that have been rewritten (Taylor 1984:16). Consequently, both Matthew and Luke are seen to have rewritten the text of the parable as it occurred in the Q source. They rewrote it with the use of other texts, inserting it into other contexts. Similarly, in its turn, Q is to be seen as having re-read the text of the parable which occurred in the ministry of Jesus.

On the other hand, there is one major area where the deconstruction approach and the historical-critical method part company. This is indeed the heart of the matter, and the point where no reconciliation is possible. It is in the search for meaning that the paths are diametrically opposed. The main task and aim of the historical-critical method is the uncovering of meaning, the search for the meaning which is judged to be inherent in the text. By means of their various strategies and tools, the historical-critical scholars aim at uncovering the one meaning, the Archimedes point, where the entire text unfolds and the meaning becomes evident. For Derrida and the post-structu-
ralists this approach to text and writing is one that they cannot endorse. For Derrida

languages are "systems of difference", rather than revelations of or references to some "transcendental signified", some entity, meaning, or Absolute that means something all by itself beyond the play of differential systems....The meaning of an object is always contingent, never "proper" to it or "present" in it. "Presence" in any form is never the truth of a sign: by which Derrida means something more than the fact that a footprint is not a footprint until the foot is out of it (Schneidau 1982:11).

Instead of searching for the meaning inherent in a text, the post-structuralists wish to illustrate how meaning is in fact deferred. Traces appear, only to disappear, and re-appear once more. The deconstructionists illustrate how meaning and the traces of meaning are deferred and passed on as each text is rewritten and replaced by another text.

3.3 A deconstructive reading of the parable of the Supervising Servant

3.3.1 A textual analysis of the passage

To facilitate a deconstructive reading of this text, a textual analysis of the passage would be appropriate.

(T)extual is used with reference to the contemporary theory of the text, this hexing understood as production of significance, and not as philological object, custodian of the Letter (Barthes 1979b:126).

The aim in this present section is not to examine the actual origins of the text (historical criticism). Attention is no longer focused on the issue which has so preoccupied previous scholars - that of distinguishing between the contribution of Jesus and that of the early church. Such a distinction (with a view to rejecting the later development and interpretations of the early church) is fruitless. On the other level the focus is not upon an analysis of the structures of the writing (namely, structural analysis). Instead, the aim is to see how the text actually disseminates, explodes, and spreads itself (Barthes 1979b:126-127).

As with the previous parables (Lk 12:35-40) (Hartin 1987:50) this text (Lk 12:41-48) also lends itself to a sequential analysis (Barthes 1979b:127). Two distinct sequences make their appearance in the text: (a) Be prepared (Lk 12:41-46) (b) The punishment (Lk 12:47-48).

1 Be prepared (Lk 12:41-46). The text commences with a question by Peter. The Lord ignores the question: it is irrelevant. A parable of contrast is introduced where the responsibility given to the servant by the master is contrasted with the irresponsible way in which the servant carries out his responsibilities. Instead of caring for the needs of those entrusted to his care by the master, the servant is careful of his own needs. He fulfils his cares and concerns for himself alone. His carefulness in satisfying his own needs results in
the master surprising him and discovering that his carefulness did not extend to what had been entrusted to him, namely the care of the needs of the others and a fulfilment of their needs. The faithful servant becomes the unfaithful servant.

Faithful servant cares for fellow servants.
Unfaithful servant cares more for himself and less for his fellow servants.

2 The punishment (Lk 12:47-48). The contrast between the way the servant cared for himself and carried out his cares for others disappears into the background. Now the text is read in conjunction with another text depicting sayings relating to two types of servants who do wrong: the one who does wrong knowingly and the one who does wrong unknowingly.

The servant who knows the master's will and does wrong will be punished
The servant who does not know and does wrong will be punished less

The contrast here is drawn between doing wrong knowingly and unknowingly. The result is inevitable punishment. Faced with this inevitability, the feeling of angst again returns. The Lord demands much from those to whom he has given much. The question with which the pericope commenced, namely "Who, then, is the faithful and wise steward?" is ultimately answered in the final saying: "Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required".

Throughout this passage the thread of angst/anxiety, waxes and wanes, backwards and forwards. The coming of the master is presented as inevitable and certain. When the master is delayed, this coming sinks into the recesses of the mind of the servant, to be ultimately ignored and practically forgotten. The trace of the arrival of the master appears again in the punishment that is given to those who do not carry out his will. The trace of angst emerges again; this becomes more evident in examining the binary oppositions evident through the text.

3 Binary oppositions. These are clearly evident in these two passages:

TENSION

master vs servant
faithful vs unfaithful
responsibility vs irresponsibility
expectation vs delay
knowledge vs ignorance
gift vs demand
reward vs punishment

ANGST

These binary oppositions are far more urgent and tension-laden than in the previous two parables in Luke 12:35-40 (Hartin 1987:52). The tension lies between what is positive and fulfilling on the one hand, and what is negative and destructive on the other hand. The dynamics of the narrative culminate...
in the punishment given to those who do not do the master’s will. Consequently, the feeling of anxiety/angst appears and disappears throughout the passage, only to reappear in a formidable way at the conclusion of the narrative.

3.3.2 Deferment of meaning

These two passages (12:41-48) read together illustrate how meaning is still being deferred. The coming of the master is something which is hinted at throughout the narrative. The coming is certain, then it is delayed and even forgotten. Finally, the coming inspires absolute fear for the punishment that it is to bring. In this context the angst of the household becomes more intense.


Writing is tracing, interweaving which is fabrication. The fabric of the text, however, always has loose ends. Ever unfinished, the text is a permanent metamorphosis which transforms reader into author and author into reader (Taylor 1982a:1126). Reading the two sections of this chapter (Lk 12:35-40 and 12:41-48) together as intertexts illustrates more forcefully this aspect of the deferment of meaning. The opposition of presence and absence has been constantly in evidence. I have already presented a deconstructive reading of Luke 12:35-40 (Hartin 1987:42-56). The approach and result of this reading will be presumed here. In the first passage (Lk 12:35-40) the expectation of an arrival is a trace that appears and reappears throughout. This waiting culminates in the expectation of the coming of the Son of man, a hope that engenders certain feelings in the fulfiment of promises made. In awaiting the coming of the Son of man the feeling of angst (arising particularly from not knowing when he will come) becomes more pressing.

The feeling of angst appears and reappears like a trace through the following pericope (Lk 12:41-48), whereby the feeling of angst becomes far more urgent and oppressive. The binary oppositions of this pericope have heightened the tension. The angst is indicated at the beginning in the delay of the return of the master who, in the light of the intertext, is seen as the Son of man. His coming is ignored and the angst tends to be once more absent in a life of unbridled passion. With the arrival of the master, the Son of man, the angst returns with the knowledge that punishment is to follow. It is the focus that that passage brings to bear on punishment that heightens the angst that is engendered in the household.

These passages clearly speak with "an apocalyptic tone" (Derrida 1982b:63). Apokalupto,

I disclose, I uncover, I unveil, I reveal a thing that can be part of the body, the head or the eyes, a secret part... the thing to be dissembled, a thing that
does not show itself or say itself, that perhaps signifies itself but cannot or must not first be handed over in its self-evidence (Derrida 1982b:64).

The deconstructionists and Derrida would be willing to speak about and analyse the apocalyptic tone or genre, but not to endorse or to practise it. The apocalyptic tone is seen to be indeterminable (Derrida 1982b:89). No one is able to exhaust its strategies and metaphors. The metaphors remain as a vast array, ever capable of being turned in upon themselves in an indeterminable reversal.

If one were to adopt the apocalyptic tone of these passages one would note that the end in view would be "to attract, to get, to come or arrive at itself, to seduce in order to lead to itself" (Derrida 1982b:84). The end is soon, the parousia is imminent. The parousia is absent. The present is absent. We begin with the absence, we wait for the absence to become presence. When Jesus speaks the Word to his followers, being present to them, he was absent. As the future Son of man whom his followers awaited with anxiety and angst, he was absent.

The end is soon, the end is imminent. The end is the beginning. We are going to die, and that death will bring life. That end brings punishment. The presence of Jesus is the absence of the Son of man. The presence of the Son of man brings the punishment of the believer. The disciples see Jesus' presence in his absence and feel the presence of their punishment in its absence. The punishment is going to come. The punishment was and is and is to come. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is and who was, and who is to come" (Rv 1:8). The coming is never totally present. The coming shall always come. In waiting for the coming Son of man, who is about to come, who is in the course of coming, the angst of the disciple and the believer grows more and more intense. The absence of the Son of man renders the disciples full of angst as they await, with eagerness for reward and with fear of punishment, the coming of the absent Son of man.

To be free for death and free in death; a sacred "No" when the time for "Yes" has passed: therein lies his understanding of death and life (Nietzsche 1957:72).

The time for "Yes" is the time that Jesus has shown his believers to affirm in doing good and caring for the needs of others. The time for affirming others in their needs. "The sacred No" is the time for death, the time when punishment is given by the Son of man to those who in their lives used "the time for Yes" as a "time for No". In the affirmation of others lies the promised reward of Jesus' affirmation of the believer. In the negation of the other lies self-negation. By affirming oneself, one negates oneself. In negating oneself, one affirms oneself. "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead" (Rv 2:1-3). The way to life is through death. To come to life one has to "stay awake", be vigilant, for the coming of the absent Son of man will be unexpected. It will come "like a thief in the night". A thief robs and takes away what is precious to oneself. The Son of man is a thief who robs
one of one's self-affirmation. Faced with this impending rupture of one's self-affirmation, the angst grows ever more forceful. Yet, the thief leaves one's most precious possession, life itself. The Son of man rewards those who have affirmed others, while punishing those who have affirmed only themselves.

Life demands a radical Yes-affirmation of others. This Yes is a No to oneself, and a Yes to others. This Yes is a No to what is also No. On the part of the coming Son of man lies the expectation of the most radical No-denial and Yes-affirmation. It affirms the radical No that has been uttered against others, while uttering a radical Yes to coincide with the Yes that has been addressed to the others.

The angst of the Christian household lies in the waiting for the presence of the absence, for the coming of the parousia. In the presence of the absence will occur the affirmation of the presence of the believer or the negation of the absence. The negation of the angst will occur in the affirmation of the presence, while the affirmation and realisation of the angst will occur with the negation of the presence. The end will be the beginning. The end of the angst will be the beginning of the reward given by the presence of the absent Son of man.

We must begin with absence, with silence, with the confession of the absence of word(s). And we must dwell with this silence until we can hear, hear how absence presents. Then we shall see, see that the word is absent when present, and present when absent (Taylor 1982a:124).

4 THE DISSEMINATION OF THE WORD
The aim of this investigation has been to illustrate graphically what the deconstructive activity has said with regard to texts. It has shown how each text has been re-read in the process of interpretation, and that this new text in fact replaces the previous text. It has shown how meaning has constantly been deferred, from that of the eschatological expectation of the coming of the kingdom, to that of the exhortation to acceptance of the Word.

A deconstructive reading of these texts can today offer a new reading of these texts. By focusing upon the Word one can see how the trace of the dissemination of the Word takes place. It is essential for the Word to disseminate itself if it is to bear fruit, if it is to be accepted, understood and adhered to. The Word needs to scatter, to diffuse itself, to expand and take root elsewhere.

The problem, the problem at least posed to me, is exactly to manage not to reduce the text to a signified whatever it may be (historical, economic, folkloristic, or kerygmatic) but to hold its significance fully open (Barthes 1979b:141).

The Word that is addressed cannot be placed in a circumscribed area, place, or even orbit. It cannot rest within a fixed boundary or structure. It always diffuses itself beyond its confines. Dissemination of the Word is not some-
thing that can be fixed as regards the origin or as regards its end. It is a process which is in continuation, without beginning, without end. Dissemination, as Derrida observes (1981b:45)

*can be led back neither to a present of simple origin...nor to an eschatological presence. It marks an irreducible generative multiplicity.*

The Word, in diffusing itself, is indeed emptying itself, it is going through a kenotic experience. Just as the Almighty Father in begetting the Logos sends him forth, the Logos is disseminated among mankind. In this dissemination of the Logos the Word is becoming flesh. The Word empties himself of his transcendent qualities as God in order to become a host and victim in the world of man. In this emptying of himself, the Logos undergoes a kenotic experience.

This is an experience that is continuing. The Word is becoming flesh. It disseminates itself continually proclaiming the eschatological expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. At the same time it issues forth a challenge to all the hearers of the Word to accept it, understand it, hold fast to it, and consume it. In the dissemination of the Word the hearer is called upon to struggle with the task of making inward what is outside himself.

*The interpreter lives by eating; he sinks his teeth into the text in order to inwardize the outward. Further reflection uncovers a sacrificial dimension of all eating. From this perspective interpretation appears to be an act of dismemberment in which the text is sacrificed. The para-doxa of transgression is that the transgressor needs what he sacrifices, is nourished by what he attempts to devour* (Taylor 1982b:65).

5 POSTSCRIPT

It was stated at the beginning of this investigation that "Christianity is a religion of the book" (Taylor 1984:76). As such, Christianity is a religion which places at its centre the Logos, the Word. Its task is to see this Word becoming flesh, becoming incarnate. In the reading of the texts of this book, the Word becomes flesh in new contexts, with new intertexts. It is a constant process of the dissemination of the Word, in which the Word empties itself in order to take on a new life. It is a dynamic, ever-continuing process.

The reader becomes a participant in this dissemination of the Word, not a passive observer or hearer, but actively involved in the whole process. The process of the Word becoming flesh did not end with the crucifixion of Jesus, nor with the canonisation of the Scriptures. It is a process which continues through to today and then on into the future. The reader is a part of the very process of disseminating the Word.

*The reader of this text is transformed into a reader who by her very reading and practice becomes a living interpretant of Jesus' parabolic tradition, the prophetic tradition preceding him, and Yahweh's own word. As such she enters as a part of the tradition as participant in revelation's continuing expression. However, she cannot interpret exactly as either Jesus or Matthew*
Becoming a scribe/hearer of the Kingdom of Heaven necessarily means finding one's own way of saying it and being it through dialogue with predecessors, and that portends interpretation, a way characterised by conflict, reversal, undermining, challenging, contesting, and the like (Phillips 1985:136).

To read the text is to disseminate the Word. The reader becomes part of the process of God's revealing action. The Word is becoming flesh through the deconstructing reading of the text. The tradition of the text as it is handed on through its re-interpretation in always new contexts and together with new intertexts continues to render the Word incarnate.

However, to my mind, the deconstructive activity presents a number of very serious shortcomings which cannot go unchallenged. The purpose of this paper was to illustrate how the deconstructive activity would proceed with regard to the reading of a passage of Scripture. The aim was to illustrate the procedure and the resultant reading that would emerge from it. Elsewhere (Hartin 1987:53-54) I have discussed some of the shortcomings of the deconstructive activity. Although the aim is not specifically that of challenging the activity, I feel it is necessary to specify a number of problematic areas which should form the basis of further discussion and investigation.

1 Relativism. To my mind one of the greatest difficulties is that this activity tends to degenerate into total relativism. It is above all in the statement that the new text replaces the previous text that the danger of relativism clearly emerges. In the re-reading of the Scriptures the "original" text is not replaced by the new re-reading. Instead, the new reading is there, showing how the meaning of the "original" text has been deferred, handed on in new contexts, with new inter-texts. The original text must remain as a challenge for all future re-readings of the text. In this sense the "original" text of the Scriptures retains its authority, from which its meaning is to be disseminated in every new re-reading of the text.

2 The disappearance of the author. Previously it was stated that in the light of the vicissitudes through which the science of interpretation has passed, due attention needs to be given to three aspects: the author, the text and the interpreter. Deconstruction has given free reign to the interpreter in his/her use of the text. The author is removed exclusively from the text. Utterances are seen to have a life of their own. Once uttered, one no longer has control over them. There is a certain measure of truth in this. The problem falls within the whole realm of the relationship of author/reader. However, to totally exclude the role and realm of author is, to my mind, opting for a one-sided approach to interpretation. Such an exclusion results in subjectivism and relativism. Again, such an approach has serious repercussions for the authority of the Scriptures where the ultimate Author, God, is also involved.
3 The communication of meaning. Deconstruction views its task not as the search for meaning in a text, but rather as an attempt to show how meaning is deferred from one text to another. To abandon the possibilities of attaining meaning has serious consequences for all forms of communication. To oppose the notion of one meaning being evident in the text (as deconstruction does) can have serious repercussions. When I make a statement: "My house is on fire", the intention is to communicate a meaning to a hearer. To disregard the meaning, and see it as deferred will result in nothing less than the loss of my house. Words have an efficacy of their own and it is up to neither the author, nor the reader alone, to give them any meaning that they wish. A good illustration of this is given in Burms (1986:34-35):

Wie uit zenuwachtige verstrooidheid en zonder enige slechte bedoeling bij een begrafenis "Gefeliciteerd" zou zeggen in plaats van "Innige deelneming", zou daarmee een blunder begaan die men hem moeilijk zou vergeven, ook al staat vast dat hij wel degelijk de "juiste bedoeling" had. Blijkbaar hebben de woorden hier hun eigen efficiëntie, enigszins onafhankelijk van wat er mee wordt bedoeld.

Despite these shortcomings, the activity of deconstruction offers one major lesson to which attention must be given. A deconstructive reading can help one to look anew at what has become so familiar. Rather than dismiss deconstruction as a novelty which will hopefully soon disappear as all novelties do, attention should be given to it - even if for no other reason than that it helps one to look at one's own tradition and ways of thinking with new eyes. It helps one to look with new vision at the old; it brings new insights into landmarks and landscapes that have perhaps become too familiar.

Our thought is always entwined, to some degree, with a discredited and supposedly abandoned metaphysical fundamentalism. We notice it no more than we do the atmospheric pressure: we need Derrida to help us feel and see it (Schneidau 1982:24).

WORKS CONSULTED


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