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ABSTRACT
This study is a venture in empirical research. Starting with some theoretical considerations on reader-oriented studies, this paper reports on the findings of the reading of Luke 12:35-48 by first-year students in Biblical studies. The purpose was to obtain a better understanding of the reading process itself and in this way to contribute to an evaluation and possible revision of existing theoretical frameworks of reception. The findings of this study suggest that there is a correlation between the potential (Wirkung) of the text and its actualisation (Rezeption) by concrete readers. This is a facet of the autonomy of texts which should be explored in further empirical studies.

1 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 Reader-oriented studies can be divided into two broad categories, namely theoretical and empirical reader research (cf Schmidt 1980; Verschuren 1986; Segers 1980). This distinction goes back to the difference between Wirkung and Rezeption as understood by Jauss (1975) - a distinction which is not unproblematic, but which basically understands Wirkung as referring to the aspects determined by the text and Rezeption to those determined by the reader. This distinction is linked to the idea that the text only offers a potential reading, which a real reader has to actualise. The further implication is that no automatic correlation can be assumed between the potential offered by the text and its actualisation by a concrete reader - an assumption which the findings of this study seem to challenge.

1.2 A study of actual reception is, of course, only possible where a record of some kind is available of the reading or readings which have taken place. Records of all kinds present themselves, both from the past and the present. This has lead to a further distinction between historical and contemporary empirical research (cf Van Gorp, Ghesquiere & Segers 1981). Examples of the former are studies in which the reception of a specific book or text during a fixed period (say, the eighteenth century) is investigated. A more comprehensive study of this kind is the well-known attempt of Jauss to write a history of literature in terms of a history of reception (cf Jauss 1975). Contemporary reception research based on actual responses to texts has enjoyed great popularity in some circles (cf Holub, 1984:134-46; Steinberg 1983;
Empirical work of this kind has gone hand in hand with extensive theoretical reflection (cf. Groeben 1977; Schmidt 1982).

1.3 Empirical reader-oriented research in Biblical studies is only in its very beginnings, despite the fact that these texts themselves are very "reader-" or rather "audience-conscious". Their dialogic nature becomes apparent on many levels. It is therefore not surprising that, long before the rise of reception theory in literary studies, the reader has featured in various hermeneutic frameworks developed for the interpretation of Biblical texts. For example, the creative role of the early communities in the shaping of the Jesus tradition was recognised from the outset by the History of Religions school. The Sitz im Leben, the famous concept developed by form criticism, presupposes a reconstruction of the audience and of the situation of reception (cf. Kümmel 1958:419-423). Existential hermeneutics took as its point of departure the need of the modern reader who wants to make sense of an ancient text and whose understanding of self plays an important part in this process. In the New Hermeneutic, the concept of a Sprachereignis or a "language event" is indicative of the involvement of the reader in the process of understanding (cf. Ebeling 1971:197: Die Sprache versammelt Redenden und Hörenden am selben Ort).

1.4 Although the reader has never been completely out of the picture, the latest surge in reader-oriented work in Biblical exegesis has been stimulated by developments from outside the discipline. The rise of reception theory in general literary studies and the proliferation of reader-response analyses have not only highlighted a neglected area in Biblical hermeneutics, but have also demonstrated the possibilities of this approach. Semeia 31 (1985), under the title "Reader response approaches to Biblical and secular texts", was one of the first attempts to explore these possibilities. By offering a theoretical orientation and examples of reader-response criticism applied to both Biblical and non-Biblical material, the volume provided a valuable introduction to the potential and limitations of this approach. At the same time, seminars and study groups of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas began to pay serious attention to various aspects of reception.

1.5 Despite this renewed interest in the reader, it is a curious fact that what has been done up to now in the field of Biblical studies was almost exclusively concerned with theoretical aspects of reader research. Empirical reader research of Biblical material is virtually non-existent, although many opportunities present themselves. The present paper reports on a tentative attempt to venture into this field and to test the usefulness of an empirical approach.
1.6 Where would one look for evidence of actual readings of Biblical material? As far as historical empirical research is concerned, one possibility would be different translations of the Bible or of sections of text, as each of these represent a specific reading. Commentaries are also a record of actual readings. In this case we are dealing with a more specialised kind of reader, depending on the level at which the text is read (see below). Matthew's reading of Mark is the record of a specific reception (cf Fowler 1986). The use of textual traditions and citations from the Bible, the use of the Old Testament in the New, can be studied from a reception point of view. The formation of the canon may be interpreted as a record of reception. Writing a history of theology or of dogma in terms of a history of reception would indeed be an interesting counterpart to Jauss' undertaking. At the same time, it must be conceded that the material on which historical empirical research is to be based is often incomplete or not readily available.

1.7 In contrast, contemporary readers of the Bible, who offer examples of a wide variety of readings -"Western" and "non-Western", "Black" and "White", academic and liturgical, visual (film and television) and non-visual - are much more accessible.

1.8 Once we decide to concentrate on real readers, a further set of problems present themselves. One of the most important is the level on which the instructions of the text are actualised. The variation in the level of actualisation can be due either to limitations in competence or lack of familiarity with codes on the part of the reader, or to a conscious choice to read the text from a specific perspective or for a specific purpose.

1.9 For example, Fowler (1983) has developed Steiner's distinction between the "reader" and the "critic" and applied it to the text of Mark. The reader accepts the text at face value, is intent on a positive realisation of the text and in this sense becomes a "servant" of the text. The critic reads reflectively, keeps his distance and thus becomes a "judge and master" of the text (cf Fowler 1983:32-38 for a full discussion of this contrast). Dormeyer (1987a:120) has shown that further distinctions are possible by describing the reading attitudes of naive, understanding and critical readers. For the naive reader, reading is a direct experience aimed at affirming his or her reading attitude. For the understanding reader, reading is a reflective activity which is open to a change in reading attitude. For the critic, reading is an analytical activity which takes place on a meta-level and which aims at an objective attitude towards the text.

1.10 The fact that texts can be (and are) actualised on various levels is due not only to differences in reading attitudes - it can also be caused by factors over which the reader has little control. We are not, and never will become,
the readers for whom the letters of Paul were originally intended. For this reason Petersen (1984) makes the important distinction between authorial and non-authorial readers. Failure to observe this difference lies behind much of the misreading of Biblical texts. But, despite each text's particularity, it also contains certain universal features which makes it possible for a later (unintended) reader to read it - the so-called Grundbestand an Universalität (Dormeyer 1987b).

1.11 When undertaking an empirical study, it is important to keep the level of realisation in mind. In the case of the present project, using first-year students as respondents, it could be expected that we were dealing with either naive or understanding readers.

1.12 When one looks at the empirical work that has already been done in other fields, it is surprising to find that an attempt is very seldom made to explain the reading process as such. In most cases, studies are aimed at obtaining information about reader conduct, that is, about issues like the attitudes of readers, the influence of television on reading, the reasons for the popularity of specific books, expected trends in book sales and so forth; cf Steinberg 1983 and Kussler 1979 for examples).

The present study, although very limited in scope, has a different purpose.

2 PURPOSE OF THIS EMPIRICAL STUDY
This study hopes to achieve results which can lead to a better understanding of the reading process itself and in this way contribute to an evaluation and possible revision of existing theoretical frameworks of reception.

At the same time it must be stressed that criteria according to which the different readings are classified, for their part depend on a prior reading of the passage in Luke. This reading is not free from subjective elements and certainly cannot claim to be universally valid. Needless to say, empirical research is part of science and therefore "probing" for answers because man's knowledge is "imperfect" (cf Campbell & Stanley 1963:35). In addition to this we would like to emphasise that this project was more than just a straightforward experiment - it was a venture in the dark. We had no help from similar research done on the reading of Biblical texts at our disposal. It was only the example of empirical research in general which provided some light while we were groping in the dark. If this project ultimately serves only to pave the way for empirical research on the reading of Biblical texts in the future, it will have been worth our while.

However, with the expert advice we received on the design and implementation of this empirical study, we are nonetheless confident that we have taken a small step forward. Furthermore, the fact that a team of analysts were able to agree on the basic categories and the main themes of the passage gives us the confidence that at least we used a workable classification. If
one adds to this the cross-checking of results within the experimental and control groups, as well as the retest on both groups, the recurrent patterns in the reader responses can surely claim some degree of validity.

3 MODUS OPERANDI FOR THE EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE READING OF LUKE 12:35-48

As stated above, the primary goal of this project was only to see whether one can distinguish some patterns and processes in the reading of Biblical texts by "the man in the street". To provide us with an experimental and control group, we decided to use the first-year Biblical studies students at the Universities of Port Elizabeth (UPE) and Stellenbosch (US). Obviously this narrowed down our definition of the "man in the street". Nevertheless, it provided us with a group of 209 respondents of 16 denominations, various cultures, a wide age span and different levels of Bible knowledge. To make the project more interesting, it was decided to test the respondents at two stages during the academic year. The first test was made at the very beginning of the academic year with the first test, Test 1 (consisting of biographical detail, a multiple-choice questionnaire to evaluate their Bible knowledge and a comprehension test on Luke 12:35-48). Approximately five weeks later, following a course in Biblical hermeneutics, the respondents were tested with a second test (a replica of the comprehension test of the passage in Luke). The testing procedures at the different universities were monitored to ensure uniformity in execution.

Sections A and B of Test 1 (the biographical detail and the multiple-choice test) did not provide any problems in the classification of responses. Most of the questions in A had limited and straightforward options (e.g., male or female) while others (e.g., the different denominations) were easy to classify by giving them consecutive numbers. The multiple-choice questionnaire (section B) had its limited options and was used for evaluating the students' general knowledge of the Bible.

One of the biggest challenges in this empirical research was to classify the responses in section C. This was because the comprehension test offered no pre-set answers, but allowed for the free formulation of answers (i.e., "open-ended questions" - cf. Babbie 1983:132-133). The identification of categories (i.e., "coding") was done in the following way. A profile drawn from a sample of thirty respondents provided a temporary grid which was given to two independent analysts (one at UPE and one at US). They tested this grid with another sample of thirty respondents each. In the light of their identification of the deficiencies of the initial grid and their independent recommendations a final grid of categories was drawn up. After giving it a trial run, it was used to classify the responses. Response forms were used for classifying the answers of the respondents. Provision was made to create new categories if necessary. Each analyst independently classified the responses of both the experimental and control groups on separate response forms. The responses to
the two tests were also classified separately. These response forms were eventually exchanged and each analyst had to identify any differences with the classification of his counterpart. This led to the last phase where the project leaders together with the analysts decided on principles for dealing with the differences. Eventually one analyst had to finalise all the responses for the last time. These results were then prepared for data-processing at the computer centre of the University of Port Elizabeth.

It is necessary to make a few remarks on the use of statistical findings before we proceed to discuss the results of our research. In the first place we are well aware of the misuse of statistics and consciously tried to avoid the pitfalls. No decisive conclusions regarding the significance of responses which did not comply with Cohron's rule (cf Dixon 1981:157 and Fallik & Brown 1983:426-427) were drawn. Therefore we made some suggestions for future research in cases where the probability value for the significance of results was close to 80%. Even in the cases where the probability value exceeded the requirement of 95%, we opted to interpret the results in terms of "tendencies". This cautious approach is due to the large number of uncontrolled variables and observations that should be reckoned with in human sciences research (cf Babbie 1983:4-25). We preferred to interpret our results in terms of broader categories and trends (cf Babbie 1983:406-428). In addition to this the observation of Campbell & Stanley (1963:3) is also relevant:

The experiments we do today, if successful, will need replication and cross-validation at other times under other conditions before they can become an established part of science, before they can be theoretically interpreted with confidence.

Having said this, we are confident that the experimental design of our empirical research on the reading of Luke 12:35-48 is well founded and complies with Campbell & Stanley's requirements (1963:13-22) for "true experimental designs" (cf Babbie 1983:186-207). The formula for our experimental design is the following:

\[ S(UPE): 01 \quad x_a \quad 02 \]

\[ S(US): 01 \quad x_b \quad 02 \]

"S" symbolises the selected experimental (UPE) and control (US) groups. The figure O1 is the pretest whereas O2 is the posttest. Xa an Xb represent the experimental variable or event, the effects of which are to be measured. This kind of experimental design avoids most of the internal sources of invalidity such as history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, regression, selection, mortality and the interaction of selection and maturation. In our opinion there was only one serious flaw in our design, namely the uncontrol-
led differences within the experimental variable \((X_a\text{ and } X_b = \text{ an undefined one-month course in hermeneutics})\). We shall return to this issue again in section 4.

Keeping these remarks in mind we are now in a position to discuss the findings of our empirical study.

4 FINDINGS ON THE READING OF LUKE 12:35-48: SOME SIGNIFICANT PATTERNS

To provide us with a frame of reference and some insight into the independent variables in terms of which the reader responses should be evaluated, we shall start by having a look at the biographical profile and Bible knowledge of the respondents.

4.1 The biographical profile and Bible knowledge of the experimental and control groups: sections A & B of Test 1

The different profiles of the respondents of the experimental and control groups are given in Table 1 (Appendix). In the light of this profile a few remarks should be made.

4.1.1 It is clear that the US group is more homogeneous, in terms of home language and experience of group Bible study in particular, but to a lesser extent also with regard to age, qualifications and denomination. Therefore in some respects the US group was not an adequate control group for our research - especially with regard to the variables of language, denomination and qualifications.

4.1.2 Interestingly enough, the differences in age, sex, language and denomination did not have a clear-cut (indisputable) influence on the performance of the respondents. It was only in as far as the older (UPE) or younger (US), male (US) or female (UPE), Afrikaans-speaking (UPE and US), Dutch Reformed (UPE and US) and the better qualified (UPE) respondents were more involved in group Bible study that they performed better in the multiple-choice questionnaire. This outcome illustrates how easily statistical data can be misinterpreted. Campbell and Stanley (1963:42) emphasise that one should especially be aware of this danger when comparing group means. Fortunately the BMDP program is designed to cross-relate variables in order to determine their overall and interrelated significance for a particular profile of a multivariate analysis.

4.1.3 In the cross-relating of the independent variables, it was confirmed that the variable of experience in group Bible study was decisive for the performance of the respondents in both groups.

In the multiple-choice section there was a 13 % difference in performance between the UPE group (i.e. an average of 4,7/10) and the US group (i.e. an
average of 6/10). In the UPE group the variables of qualifications and experience in group Bible study statistically had a decisive influence on the results. Although the results of the US group revealed that experience in group Bible study, language and denomination were statistically decisive variables, one should remember that the samples of the last two variables (i.e., language and denomination) were too small to justify a conclusion. The sample of respondents with different qualifications in the UPE group was big enough to justify the significance of this variable in the performance of the respondents. Although UPE had the greater number of better qualified respondents they still scored 13% lower than the US group. Therefore the number of respondents who had experience in group Bible study is the only common denominator explaining the 13% difference between the UPE and US groups.

4.1.1 One would expect these tendencies to have a direct influence on the performance of the respondents with regard to the reading of Luke 12:35-48. It is reasonable to assume that the respondents who have a better knowledge of the Bible will perform "better" in the comprehension test on Luke 12. Our study reveals that experience in group Bible study and qualifications are the only two statistically significant independent variables which had a direct influence on the respondents' Bible knowledge. Although one could argue that this result is to be expected - that it is even imperative if Bible teachers and lecturers expect to stay in a "business" which is seriously being rationalised in South Africa at present - it does contribute to our epistemological theories with regard to the relationship between experience and knowledge.

The tendencies identified with regard to some other variables are mere pointers and could serve as suggestions for possible fields of future research (cf. 4.3).

4.2 The performance of the respondents in the reading of Luke 12:35-48: Results of section C of Tests 1 and 2

4.2.1 Questions 1 and 4:

| Describe in your own words what this passage is all about |

Question 4:

| If you had to get a message for 1987 from this passage, how would you formulate it? |

4.2.1.1 Profile 1 (Table 2):
There are a number of ways in which the responses to Questions 1 and 4 can be grouped. One option is to use the following categories as a grid:

A: DESCRIPTIVE (OBJECTIVE)
B: EXISTENTIAL (SUBJECTIVE)
C: DESCRIPTIVE & ESCHATOLOGICAL
D: EXISTENTIAL & ESCHATOLOGICAL

These categories forced themselves on the analysts right from the start. Therefore they inevitably formed the basis of the final grid for the classification of the responses. The profile of this classification is found in Table 2 (Appendix). The following conclusions can be drawn.

(a) From this profile it is clear that the pragmatics of the text involved the readers, irrespective of whether the questions required a description (cf T1Q1 & T2Q1) or an actualisation (cf T1Q4 & T2Q4) of the passage. This could be explained either by the fact that the respondents were conditioned to accept a Bible passage as existentially authoritative for their lives, or by the fact that the text invited them to become involved. The fact is that the pragmatics of this passage were existentially operative. This phenomenon should be reckoned with in our reader-response theories with regard to the Bible.

(b) Together with Table 3 it is clear that the majority (approximately 90 %) of respondents combined at least three themes and facets of the text in their reading of Luke 12:35-48. This reveals that the respondents were able to acknowledge the multifacetedness of the passage. This profile surely has implications for our text theories on multiple meaning and interpretation. We shall return to this issue at a later stage.

4.2.1.2 Profile 2 (Table 3):
Another option for the grouping of the responses is in terms of the following categories:

C-1: STEWARDSHIP & PREPAREDNESS
C-2: SOLA LEGE +
C-3: SOLA GRATIA +
C-4: PARABLE / SYMBOLISM +
C-5: PIETISTIC
C-6: JUDGMENT +
The profile in Table 3 (Appendix) warrants the following remarks.

1 A clear pattern can be discerned from Table 3 in which the distribution of the three main categories (i.e., C-1, C-4 and C-6) are given. There is a major shift towards C-1 between Question 1 and Question 4. Test 2 confirms this interesting pattern. It is significant that there are no major differences between Tests 1 and 2 as far as the distribution of responses is concerned.

Contrary to our expectation the major shifts were within the respective tests. The question is how this should be explained. It is more than probable that Questions 2 & 3 have something to do with this change. Therefore our empirical research turned out to have the following design where "M" is the material the respondents were exposed to (i.e., the passage in Luke), O1 & O2 are the observations in Questions 1 and 4, and X is the re-reading of the text to answer Questions 2 and 3 (cf Campbell & Stanley 1963:46-52):

\[
\begin{align*}
S(\text{UPE}): & \quad M(\text{Lk}) \quad O1(Q1) \quad X(Q2\&3) \quad O2(Q4) \\
S(\text{US}): & \quad M(\text{Lk}) \quad O1(Q1) \quad X(Q2\&3) \quad O2(Q4)
\end{align*}
\]

This design provided us with a cross-check of four self-sufficient tests. Therefore the shift from C-6 to C-1 is confirmed four times and begs for an explanation. At least three possibilities should be reckoned with:

Explanation 1: The first possibility has to do with the fact that Question 4 deliberately asks the respondents to actualise the passage. It is probable that in actualising the passage the respondents avoided the theme of judgment for psychological reasons (e.g., due to subconscious fear or anxiety). If one analyses Table 2 this explanation does not seem likely because the majority of respondents (spontaneously) interpreted the passage existentially in Question 1. If they did not shy away from the theme of judgment in Question 1, there is no reason why they should have done it in Question 4.

Explanation 2: It is possible that Questions 2 & 3 are responsible for the shift from category C-6 to C-1. A closer look at these questions leads one to think that this is not likely with regard to Question 2. Questions 2.1 - 2.6 are straightforward questions which include a question on judgment. Therefore there is no reason why the respondents should omit the theme of judgment in Question 4. Question 3, however, seems to explain this shift from C-6 to C-1. This makes a third interpretation possible.

Explanation 3: It seems likely that the text thrust is responsible for this change. After wrestling with the text the students produced a more homoge-
neous reading of Luke 12:35-48. This seems to be the likely option as it explains a number of things.

First and foremost it is in line with the results of Question 3. Question 3 requires the respondents to identify the most important verse in the passage. In both groups and both tests an average of 55% of the respondents chose verse 40 which reads:

*And you, too, must be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him*

The distribution of the respondents who chose verse 40 is more or less equally spread over the different independent variables. If one adds to this profile the fact that the percentage shift (i.e., an average of 100% shift) from C-6 to C-1 likewise occurred regardless of the independent biographical variables, one is compelled to conclude that the independent variable (X) of the reading of the text is most likely responsible for this phenomenon. A closer look at the semantics of verse 40 (above) explains this. The emphasis is clearly on the first part of the verse whereas the second half is an embedded motivation. This argument also applies to the macrosemantics of Luke 12:35-48. The themes of "punishment" and the master’s "coming" both serve as motivations (i.e., semantically secondary) for the call to "stewardship and preparedness".

2. It is, however, possible to explain this shift from C-6 to C-1 either as a regression or as a gain. This depends on whether one interprets C-1 as the better or poorer reading of the two. Interestingly enough, almost the same tendencies were found in the answering of Question 1 in both tests and both groups, if compared with the performance in the multiple-choice. If this observation proves to be correct, one would tend to conclude that there is a direct correlation between Bible knowledge and reading competence. If C-1 is interpreted as the better reading then the profile of the multiple-choice results and that of Question 1 would imply that the respondents with experience in group Bible study should maintain their advantage over those who had little or no experience. Strangely enough, this pattern is not found in regard to Question 4. Therefore within the parameters of our test no independent biographical variable explains the shift from C-6 to C-1. In both tests and both groups it was the independent variable (X) of the comprehension test (i.e., the wrestling with the text) that caused this shift (see 4.3).

3. If one examines Table 2 one notes that a minor shift also occurred towards category B (i.e., an existential interpretation). It is important that the eschatological dimension was neglected. Once again it seems as if verse 40 is the key. Verse 40 emphasises the preparedness of the servants and the eschatological aspect is motivational. This would also suggest why the theme of judgment has fallen away. Once again it seems as if the text’s thrust is responsible for this outcome. There is however a clear indication that the
respondents with more experience in group Bible study continued to incorporate the theme of eschatology in answering Question 4. Although this profile did not comply with the strict requirements for statistical significance, the tendency was nevertheless clear for both groups in Test 1 and Test 2. The only exception was the profile of the US respondents in Test 2.

Finally, the fact that there is little difference between Tests 1 and 2 needs to be explained. Contrary to our expectation, the experimental variable (i.e., the one-month course in hermeneutics) did not change the reading responses of the respondents. It is just as well that this was the outcome because, as was mentioned earlier, this was the major flaw in our experimental design (cf. Campbell & Stanley 1963:22). Although a course in hermeneutics was the common denominator, the lecturers and the contents differed, which would have made any conclusions very difficult - that is, if differences between the pretest and posttest has occurred. It seems that matriculants are able to read in an adequate way and both tests confirm that it is through their re-reading of texts and responding to questions that readers are influenced by texts. Empirical research on the influence of hermeneutics on the competence of readers needs a different experimental design (cf. Section 4). Such an experiment can also prove helpful in measuring paradigm shifts among the respondents. Therefore it seems that our experimental design was not able to measure the influence of the one-month course in hermeneutics on the respondents. This is probably due to incorrect instrumentation (i.e., the wrong questions being asked, the limitations the Luke passage posed on our research, the non-applicability of the hermeneutics course to a particular passage, etc.). It is also possible that the incompetence of the lecturers was responsible for this phenomenon. Although not statistically significant, there was an indication of an increase in respondents with little or no experience in group Bible study who chose C-1 in Question 1 of Test 2. It would seem, therefore, as though the hermeneutics course gave the "inexperienced" respondents some competence in reading the Bible. This was confirmed by the respondents' evaluation of the difficulty level of Test 2.

4.2.2 Question 2:

What is meant by:

1. The master (12:36)?
2. The servants (12:37)?
3. The coming back of the master (12:35-38)?
4. The householder (12:39)?
5. The Son of man (12:40)?
Questions 2.1 - 2.6 were to a large extent control questions. The profile of the results of both tests did not provide us with significant changes and differences in the responses of the experimental and control groups. The percentages given below are the averages between the two groups and tests.

*Question 2.1:* The majority of respondents (50%) in both groups and tests identified "the master" as Jesus himself, whereas the remainder of respondents were equally divided between "God" or the unspecified "Lord" as the master.

*Question 2.2:* The servants were either identified as "man" (40%), "Christians" (40%) or "us" (14%) in both groups and tests.

*Question 2.3:* The "coming back of the master" was interpreted as the "second coming" (70%); "coming of Christ" (20%) and judgment (6%). This division was more or less the same in both tests and for both groups.

*Question 2.4:* The identification of the "householder" was more or less equally divided between "Jesus Christ", "Christians", "us", "God" and "man". The US group however had a preference for "man" (in general) as the "householder" in both tests.

*Question 2.5:* An average of 93% of the respondents identified the "Son of man" as "Jesus" in both tests.

*Question 2.6:* The "punishment" was interpreted by the respondents as "hell" (40%); "eternal death" (20%) and "judgment" (28%).

4.2.3 Question 3:

Which verse would you identify as crucial for the understanding of this passage?

The preference for verse 40 as the pivotal point was confirmed by both groups in both tests. An average of 55% of the respondents identified this verse as crucial for the understanding of the passage. Verses 35 (15%) and 48 (8%) were the only other choices which caught the eye.

Interestingly enough, the fixed pattern in the responses between the respondents with more and less experience in group Bible study did not occur again. It seems reasonable that the thrust of the text forced itself on the readers, irrespective of this variable. As a matter of fact a greater percentage of English-speaking respondents chose verse 40 than did the Afrikaans-speaking respondents. This is noteworthy if verse 40 is reckoned as a good choice. Although this observation is not statistically significant, it could imply (paradoxically) that although the English-speaking respondents had a disadvantage as far as Bible knowledge was concerned, their reading competence gave them an advantage over their Afrikaans-speaking counterparts. Due to
the homogeneous US group (as far as home language is concerned this hypothesis needs a cross-check (see 4.3).

4.2.4 Question 5 (Section C):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you experience this comprehension test (Section C)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Easy: 5.2 Difficult;</td>
</tr>
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</table>

An average of 75% of the respondents found it easy whereas 20% found it difficult. It is noteworthy that the UPE group had almost twice as many respondents (27%) as the US group (14%) who found the test difficult. Among the UPE group there was a statistically significant difference between the language, denomination and experience in group Bible study. The Afrikaans-speaking people and churches, as well as the more experienced Bible readers, found the comprehension test easy in contrast to their counterparts. Although not statistically significant (due to samples being too small in the US group) this pattern was confirmed except for the language group.

The most important reasons why the respondents found the test easy are (i) because it is a simple parable, (ii) the text is easy to understand, (iii) the passage is known from experience. The main reasons why respondents found the passage difficult are (i) that they felt they had a lack of Bible knowledge, and (ii) that they were uncertain of their interpretation. Although there was a slight gain (approximately 10%) towards respondents who found the test easy after the one-month hermeneutics course, it is statistically insignificant. It is noteworthy, however, that the reasons above correspond to our main hypothesis that Bible-study experience and the autonomous thrust of the text explain the reader responses to Luke 12:35-48.

4.3 Pointers for future empirical studies on the reading of New Testament texts

As a result of our study we would like to suggest a few topics which could prove to be interesting and rewarding empirical studies. It should be emphasised that the profile of these topics were either statistically insignificant tendencies, or themes which our experimental design was not able to measure properly. Therefore the following questions are mere pointers for possible empirical studies.

1 What is the reason for the spontaneous existential interpretation of the Bible by the majority of respondents - conventions and/or the pragmatics of the text? Is there a tendency for Afrikaans-speaking respondents to interpret Biblical texts more existentially than do the English-speaking respondents?
2 Do older respondents have a handicap in the reading of Biblical texts? Apart from other indications, a greater percentage of the older respondents than the younger, found the comprehension test difficult (cf Question 5). This was confirmed in the profile of both groups although the probability value did not indicate the differences as statistically significant. In addition to this the samples of the older respondents were not adequate.

3 Are women more inclined towards symbolism than men?

4 Is there a preference for the different references to "God" (e.g. God, Lord or Jesus) among the sexes, denominations, age groups and those who have more or less experience in group Bible study? Indications of such trends were found in the different profiles of the respondents. It seems, for example, that the identification of "God" as the "master" was found more among English-speaking respondents as well as respondents who had little or no experience of group Bible study. On the other hand Afrikaans-speaking respondents and those who had more experience in group Bible study were more inclined to identify "Jesus" as the "master".

5 What are the reasons for the different degrees of involvement in group Bible study between the different language groups and churches?

6 Another question to be answered is why were the English-speaking respondents and denominations as well as the respondents with little or no experience in group Bible study more inclined to chose category 6 (judgment)? Although this phenomenon within the UPE group (cf the profile of Question 1 and the confirmation in control Questions 2.3 and 2.6) did manifest itself in the more homogeneous US group (cf Questions 1 and 2.6), further research is required.

7 Is there something to be said for the stereotype of the Reformation which associated sola lege and sola gratia with Catholics and Protestants respectively? Vague glimpses of such tendencies occurred now and then (cf however our warning in suggestion (k) below). Is it irrelevant that the only clear-cut sola lege (i.e. justification through works) interpretation was a Catholic respondent? Is it a coincidence that the Dutch Reformed respondents' first reaction to the text (cf Question 1) was percentage-wise almost twice as much in favour of "responsibility" (à la Calvin?) in contrast to the Catholics' and Anglicans' emphasis on judgment. Likewise, with regard to piety, one could ask whether it is a coincidence that the only clear-cut pietistic interpretation of the passage was by a Methodist?

8 In the light of the previous two paragraphs it could be worthwhile to investigate the power of tradition in our current society. The role of master symbols (which include "church tradition") in the reading of the Bible could make a valuable contribution with regard to our interest in reader response.
A knowledge of the communication processes that occur during the reading of a text will help us to get a clearer understanding of why the differences in responses with regard to the message of Luke 12:35-48 were relativised during the comprehension test?

If verse 40 is to be accepted as a key verse to Luke 12:35-48 one could investigate whether women and English-speaking people are better readers than men and Afrikaans-speaking people. Although there were exceptions, this tendency was found in both the experimental and control groups in both tests and confirmed by Question 5 on the respondents' evaluation of the difficulty level of the passage. It was also noteworthy that a greater percentage of the graduates than the undergraduates chose verse 40.

How does a paradigm switch come about in the reading of texts?

Finally, we should like to give suggestions for experimental designs of future studies in the reading of Biblical texts. In reader-response research one should distinguish between the requirements of experiments with a one-session pretest-posttest design and those with a time-lapse educational-input pretest-posttest design.

The first design measures the effects of both the text and the test itself on the respondents. We have argued that the influence of this variable (X) on the respondents was decisive. Therefore, we believe that this kind of empirical research has a major contribution to make towards existing theoretical frameworks of reception processes:

*Once a strong and clear-cut effect has been noted, the course of science consists of further experiments which refine the X, teasing out those aspects which are most essential to the effect* (Campbell & Stanley 1963:33).

We do believe that the average reader has the potential to become an understanding reader able to discern the thrust, perspective and strategy of texts (cf Rousseau 1988). Although this would require some educational input (cf the next paragraph), scholars should not underestimate the competence of readers. The contribution of future studies on the Wirkung of texts should be to refine the X (i.e the text and the comprehension test) teasing out those aspects of the thrust, perspective and strategy which affect readers.

The second design measures the effects of educational input in the reading competence of the respondents. This kind of research requires careful planning with regard to the instrumentation used, as well as control over the experimental variable that will be introduced. When one is interested in measuring paradigm shifts the challenge is even bigger. The changing of cosmological perspectives is a decisive event which does not take place very easily and therefore limits the scope for such an undertaking. With regard to the reading of Luke 12:35-48 we got the impression that the responses were not easily interpreted in terms of ideological differences (e.g. sola lege and sola gratia). Therefore one should be very cautious not to manipulate the
respondents into ideological choices they would not have made in the normal reading of a Biblical passage.

5 EVIDENCE OF HOPE?
Ultimately, this study identified the effect of reader experience and the text’s thrust as the two basic variables which determined the reading of Luke 12:35-48. If our main hypothesis is on target one could ask whether our concern with hermeneutic problems over the last two decades has not been forced on us by the extremists? Is it possible that Biblical scholars have taken up the role of Don Quixote and stormed windmills of their own making? Did our emphasis on the "real" problem of "valid multiple interpretations" mislead us into thinking that textual interpretation is completely subjective and therefore totally relative?

It would seem as if there is something like a silent majority with regard to textual interpretation. Furthermore, the thrust of the text seems able to hold its own against its interpreters. The findings of this study suggest that there is a correlation between the potential (Wirkung) of the text and its actualisation (Rezeption) by concrete readers. There is clear evidence that the dynamics of the text has a self-corrective potential with regard to its interpretative community, irrespective of their varied backgrounds. This is a facet of the autonomy of texts which should be explored in further empirical studies. In addition to this it seems that the majority of our (matriculated) readers were able to recognise the multifacetedness and the thrust of the text. Finally, it does seem as if readers can be educated to become "understanding" readers.

If one accepts that "communication" is the game people play from birth to death, one can expect that meaningful communication does take place. In the introduction to his book "The practice of social research", Babbie (1983:2-3), a sociologist, confirms this belief with regard to science in general:

In fact, you've been conducting scientific research all your life. From that perspective, the purpose of this book is to assist you in sharpening skills you already have and perhaps to show you some tricks that may have not occurred to you.

Our challenge as Biblical scholars is therefore only to make Bible readers aware of the essential processes which determine a meaningful communication with the Bible as ancient canonised texts, and to lead Bible readers into the arena of the battle between perspectives - that of the Bible and that of modern readers (cf Rousseau 1988). If nothing else, this empirical study is at least some evidence of hope for Biblical scholars who have a concern for Bible readers and the future of their own profession.

* We should like to express our thanks to Dr Leslie Melamed, Director for marketing research of Bell Caaada, and Mr Deon Pretorius of the Sociology Department at UPE (previously attached to the HSRC) who assisted
in the planning of the questionnaire. Their vast experience in empirical
research proved to be exceptionally valuable for this whole project and-
helped us avoid disastrous pitfalls. Mr Danie Venter and Mrs Thea
Gouws of the Computer Science Department at UPE should be thanked
for their contribution in computerising the responses on the BMDP
program. A special word of thanks to our analysts Philip Voigt and
Ignatius Swart for their classification of the responses.

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B C Lategan, 2 Van der Stel Street, Stellenbosch 7600. Republic of South
Africa.

J Rousseau, Department of Biblical Studies, University of Port Elizabeth,
P O Box 1600, Port Elizabeth 6000. Republic of South Africa.
### TABLE 1: BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE AND BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

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### Table 3: Profile 2 of Responses to Questions 1 and 4 in Test 1

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TABLE 3: PROFILE 2 OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 1 AND 4 IN TEST 2

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