Responsible hermeneutics: A systematic theologian's response to the readings and readers of Luke 12:35-48

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Abstract

The different "readings and readers" are evaluated, with a view to responsible hermeneutics, on three levels. First, the question is asked as to whether the different readings took place in a responsible way in terms of their own presuppositions and goals. Some general remarks are made on the possible comparison and integration of these readings are made. Second, the question is asked whether some of these readings are more appropriate, responsible or legitimate readings of literature than others. The point is argued that such an evaluation cannot be timeless and abstract, but will depend on the purpose of the reader. Third, the question is asked how the specific pericope, namely a text from the Christian New Testament, can be responsibly read by New Testament scholars.

1 Introduction

I have been asked "to evaluate the different readings and readers" in order to make some remarks on responsible hermeneutics. I shall do this by asking three different questions. Have the different readings been done responsibly in terms of their own presuppositions and goals? Is it in general possible to choose between reading strategies, and/or to integrate some of them in responsible hermeneutics? How can this particular text, namely a pericope from the Christian New Testament, be read most responsibly by New Testament scholars?

2 Have the Different Methods Been Followed Responsibly?

Each method of reading represents a specific scientific discipline, has already produced results and must fulfil certain criteria. It can never be taken for granted that everything that is presented as, for example, rhetorical analysis, or tradition-historical exegesis, or pragmatic analysis, is necessarily responsible in the sense that it has been done well. Perhaps insufficient notice has been taken of results already available, perhaps the analysis rests on presuppositions that can be criticised, perhaps unwarranted conclusions have been drawn.

Of course, it is not that easy to "control" or "verify" all methods in this way. It speaks for itself that a syntactical reading, or a redaction-historical reading, although subjective, leaves little room for completely different, or
even contradictory, interpretations, such as in sociological, psychological, or deconstructionist readings. In spite of the inherent difficulties, however, one could also ask of the more speculative forms of interpretation whether they have been done responsibly, and whether there were no better, more appropriate and more instructive, possibilities available within the same approach.

2.1 What is the specific aim and nature of each method?
It would be helpful if the very specific aims and claims of each method were spelled out clearly. In order for one to be able to evaluate the procedures and findings of a method, it is imperative to understand exactly what it is trying to demonstrate, and what its claims to validity are. In other words: what is the question that a specific method is trying to answer?

Such clarity could perhaps help to prevent interpreters, consciously or unconsciously, from regarding their particular method - which may form only part of the reading process - as comprising the whole process of interpretation. Interpreters often do not realise that they are, in fact, presupposing answers to questions which other methods are trying to deal with in a more responsible way. And just as often, methods may be suspect, simply because other people fear that such methods claim to be the whole reading process; they may, in fact, provide useful information, if they can be seen as a partial method only, answering specific questions.

It is obvious that we shall be able to speak of "scientific progress" only if the exact aims and claims of a method are clear, and the results obtained can be evaluated accordingly.

1 Schnell, in his fine essay, attempts to do exactly this, in a way that clearly demonstrates an underlying problem. According to him, tradition-historical exegesis sees texts as documents which evolved over a period of time within a particular society, and consequently it focuses on three problem areas: how such a text refers to historical events, how the individual and collective religious experiences embedded in a text are related, and "what authority these texts have in the lives of Christians today". Later on, he describes this third presupposition as follows: "The relationship between the message of the Biblical texts ... and our own religious convictions within society". In his article, he restricts himself to the first two questions, and does not consider the third one, "concerning the relevance and authority of the Biblical texts" at all. Is the reason that the third question can, as a matter of principle, not be a part of tradition-historical reading in a strict sense? Is the methodology, that is, the manner of investigation and the logic of argumentation needed to answer the third question concerning "present-day relevance and authority", not completely different from the methodology needed to investigate the first two problem areas? The point that Schnell is making, I think, is that a tradition-historical reading is, under certain circumstances, incomplete without a further, completely different step, namely thinking about the relevance of the
findings. As a method in a strict sense, it does not comprise a reading strategy, or a complete hermeneutic approach. It must be complemented.

2 The purpose of a psychological reading is, to a certain extent, clear. "Under the rubric of psychological exegesis we include all attempts to interpret texts as expression and occurrence of human experience and behaviour" (Theissen 1987:1). Scheffler adds that one can also study "the behaviour on which the text reports". This, however, can be done in different ways, according to many divergent and even mutually exclusive and contradictory theories. The obvious result is that it is impossible to describe the methodology of psychological reading. Results cannot be verified, or falsified, except perhaps in terms of the specific theory employed. This often leads to extreme eclecticism. In the literature authors frequently do what Scheffler has done, which is to follow different directions and admit that it is almost impossible to combine the results in a single, comprehensive interpretation. The net effect on an uninformed reader can easily be that it sounds very interesting, but that one does not really know what to believe or how to use the information.

3 It is difficult to define the methods employed by some of the contributions. I J du Plessis, for example, seems to make use of a combination of approaches, including form criticism, redaction criticism, structural analysis, a study of rhetorical devices. The result is the kind of eclectic, commentary-like discussion that preachers - such as myself - find extremely helpful, but which makes it difficult to ascertain the exact question(s) on which he has focused.

4 Sebothoma's approach presents the same difficulty, but in his case it reflects a very important methodological issue. The questions are what Black theology really is, and how it sees and uses the Scriptures. Is Black theology an additional method of interpretation, or is it an overall hermeneutic approach, in which all available methods can be (eclectically) employed? Does Black theology start from a specific perspective or experience, in terms of which everything is read? Or does it start with the text, and only afterwards apply the results to the Black situation and experience, if they are indeed applicable? I am not convinced that the logic of Sebothoma's representation reflects the usual logic of Black theology's hermeneutics. Is it typical for Black theology first to ask about the main theme(s) of Luke 12 - and to answer this by traditional methods, then to ask what Black theology is, and only then to ask whether a hermeneutic link between Luke 12 and Black theology is possible? Is it not more typical of Black theology to start with the declaration of its own interests and purposes, and then to read the texts "through new eyes"? What would Sebothoma have done if the text was not from Luke, but something else, in which he could not find "the possibility of a hermeneutic link"? Put differently: how does Sebothoma see the claim of this Black theological reading: is this what Luke says - or is this what Black readers, given their experience, make of Luke? And what about "the epistemological
privilege of the poor"? In this regard, Mosala’s two essays on methodology are important indicators of the fundamental issues at stake (1985; 1987).

5 I must take issue with Van Aarde on the way he defines the purpose of an ideological reading in his excellent paper. I realise that many literary critics at present use "ideology" in the neutral, non-pejorative way he uses it, as a synonym for "point of view", or "the network of themes and ideas" present in a narrative. Van Aarde refers to several well-known critics who use the term in that way; There seems to be a consensus amongst some literary critics: an ideology is simply a point of view, a network of ideas or, in Van Aarde’s words: almost, although not exactly, the same as culture.

Van Aarde acknowledges that "'ideology' is an ideologically contested term". He prefers to employ it in a neutral, non-pejorative way, and not in a negative, critical, way. To my mind, however, the way he uses it raises some problems, because he employs this single term as a description to cover at least four different phenomena, which ought to be distinguished.

First, he says:  
Apart from language ... a literary communication record (communication in the form of a text) presupposes an ideology (a network of themes and ideas) which is communicated and has meaning only in a certain social context. If the speech act takes the form of a narration, the ideological perspective (the evaluating point of view) is communicated by means of a narrative act" (my italics).

That is clear. The ideology is the evaluating viewpoint of the narrator, who communicates that evaluating point of view by means of the speech act. He explains it further:

The ideological perspective ... manipulates the reader in such a way that he/she agrees with the ideological perspective or rejects it. In a narrative discourse a writer thus communicates an ideology to a reader by means of a narrator in the form of a story" (my italics).

In the final part of his paper, Van Aarde correctly discusses this under the heading “the narrator’s ideological point of view in Luke 12”. It is obvious that in this sense there can be only one ideological perspective, only one evaluating point of view in a narrative, namely that of the narrator, who uses language in an attempt to manipulate the readers into accepting this ideology.

Elsewhere, however, he says that there can be more than one ideology present in a narrative. In fact, following Resseguie (1982) he accepts that there are two opposing ideological perspectives in Luke 9-19, namely that of Jesus and that of his opponents. Now, to my mind, it is simply confusing to use "ideology" for this phenomenon as well. In this case it has nothing to do with evaluation, with manipulation, or with the way language is used. It is merely a synonym for "viewpoint" or "perspective", or something similar. "Ideological perspective", for describing the viewpoints and ideas of the
Pharisees and the scribes, becomes almost tautologous, and definitely confusing.

Secondly, I want to return to the first, and proper, use that he makes of the term "ideology", in applying it to the manipulating strategy of the narrator. Although correct, I think that such usage also harbours two different phenomena. They correspond more or less with the further distinction that Van Aarde makes between an idealistic and a more materialistic way of using "ideology". They also correspond more or less with a distinction that Cronin, to whom Van Aarde also appeals, is making when he says:

> While we shall be concerned here with ideology within the discipline of literary studies ... it is useful at this point to introduce a working distinction between aesthetic ideologies, and sociopolitical ideologies within texts. Both varieties of ideology are liable to be at play within the same text. While they certainly interact in complex ways, it is important not to conflate them too readily. Not least because there are frequently disjunctures between these two varieties of ideology within the same text (1987:111).

This means that the narrator may be busy with one kind of ideological manipulation in the text, that is, trying to manipulate the readers into accepting particular ideas, while at the same time the whole text, its generation and its reception, may be part of the broader, sociopolitical power play in society. To illustrate: when Van Aarde, in discussing Luke 12:35-48, concludes: "It is shown that the narrator tells the story from the ideological perspective that knowledge entails responsibility", this clearly moves on the first level, the (aesthetic) level of both the ideas within the text, and the evaluating perspective into which the narrator is trying to manipulate the reader.

A further question, however, would be the (sociopolitical) one, for example: Why did the narrator try to do that? Whose interests were served by that answer? What was the nature of the power struggle within the church, exposed by Peter's question?

Obviously, in trying to answer the first kind of question, one moves within the field of narrative analysis, and one stays within the limits and strategies of the story, the language, the characters and the plot. Then one can agree with Van Aarde:

> Extratextual factors ...have exegetic relevance only in so far they manifest themselves in a specific text. The construction of the social context of a specific text never occurs without the text itself being read.

And then one can work with a non-pejorative use of the term "ideology", because one is simply interested in trying to understand the evaluating point of view, the main themes and ideas that the narrator is propagating through the medium of the story.

If, however, one tries to answer the second kind of question, one moves into the field of social analysis. Then one needs to understand the public ideological discourse that serves as backdrop for the narrative or text, in order to understand the way the narrative serves to strengthen or weaken...
social relationships. It then becomes more common to employ a pejorative use of the term "ideology", because these words, ideas, themes and stories are now seen for what they are: social weapons. Now one needs critical tools to interpret the ideological use of language itself (cf Bocock & Thompson 1985; Gouldner 1976; Larrain 1979; Leatt, Kneifel & Nürnberg 1986; Lenk 1970; Lichtheim 1967; McCarney 1980; Therborne 1980).

Other differences become obvious. While the (aesthetic) ideology in a narrative is something conscious and deliberate ("an evaluating point of view"), the (sociopolitical) ideological functioning of language and a narrative may be unconscious; in fact, it may be extremely important for its very functioning.

Van Aarde has done the first. I would prefer the term "ideology" for the second undertaking - simply because it is more usual, and also easier, to find alternative names for the first undertaking than for the second! The point is, however, that we are dealing with two distinct reading strategies, not contradicting one another, but certainly complementing one another, and answering to completely different questions. If literary critics want to use "ideology" in a non-pejorative sense, describing the dominant perspective or ideas within a particular narrative, the second task must still be fulfilled - and no-one has done that in the papers that we have.

However, a fourth aspect is also important. An "ideological reading" can also be a reading that is itself ideological, that is, a reading that also serves social interests and relations of power. Cronin, in fact, says that the social system of reception, involving printing, publishing, distributing, performing, reading, teaching, examining, and critical commentary ... may also involve both aesthetic, as well as more directly sociopolitical ideologies. Such ideologies, at the reception end, may be considerably in agreement, or even completely at variance with those in the text (Cronin 1987:111-112).

To use the illustration again: the literary critic may actually serve his/her own aesthetic point of view, trying to manipulate the readers of the critical interpretation into making the same evaluation of what is important, or not, by concluding that the narrative says that "knowledge entails responsibility". In fact, either consciously or unconsciously, this critical reading may also serve as a social weapon, legitimising the position of authority, power and importance that the one with "knowledge" occupies in a society. Now, this (aesthetic) reading-ideology may indeed be that of the narrative itself, but if, for example, the narrator actually wanted to turn the scales and criticise the leaders and the important people with "knowledge" and power, and show that they should become servants, like the master in his amazing act of self-surrender, then the reading becomes (sociopolitically) even more ideological, since it is now at variance with the thrust of the text itself.
This aspect, of course, opens new questions of method: are all readings ideological, in the sense that they serve social power, that they are "the use of language (or signification) to sustain relations of domination" (Thompson 1984)? Or are some readings less ideological than others? And do we have adequate methodology to describe the ideological function of particular readings within a specific context? What about the readings that we have at this congress? Is, for example, a Black theological reading, or a materialist reading, more ideological, in this sense, than that of Van Aarde?

In summary, I think we must distinguish several possible connotations that the term "ideology" and "ideological reading" may have. Personally, I should like to use the expression "ideological reading" in a pejorative way, indicating the (sociopolitical) ideological functioning of a reading itself. I would like to use the term "ideological-critical reading" for the attempt to analyse the way a specific text functions ideologically within a specific discourse. For the literary task, performed here by Van Aarde, of trying to unravel the (aesthetic) ideology within a narrative itself, and the evaluating point of view to which the narrator wants to manipulate the readers, I suggest we find a new term. And for the different perspectives present within a narrative itself, that is the different sets of ideas and beliefs, we drop the overburdened concept of "ideology" altogether.

2.2 To what extent can the different methods be "controlled"?
Some of these methods are generally known to be more "subjective" and less "controllable" than others. Of special importance is the way in which these papers unmask the illusion that some methods are indeed "objective" and "controllable".

Van Rensburg offers perhaps the most telling demonstration. In the "premises" of his syntactical reading, he argues convincingly that this approach can only hope to suggest a possible, syntactically viable, reading of a text. Such a reading, he says, is "not a pure syntactical process", because "considerations from other readings of the text are of major importance". Syntax is therefore "only in a relative sense an 'objective criterion'". To be sure, it is not even possible to delimitate the different syntactic components and to determine the possible relations between these components, without a semantic interpretation, on a micro and a macro level. Different viable readings of the same text therefore exist. Even his conclusion on the demarcation of the pericope affirms this: "This decision will have to be made on account of arguments other than those based on a syntactical reading".

In the tradition-historical reading, Schnell underlines the same point in several ways. In the first part of his argument, he says that the only way to understand metaphors is to "construct a picture of the extra-textual object to which they refer". And, he adds,

*This extra-textual object can best be understood when it is related to the sociological (religious, political and economical) context within which these words were spoken or within which these texts were used.*
He then aptly demonstrates that tradition (or form) critics are mistaken in their common assumption "that the metaphor itself revealed its referent and that the reader needed no creativity to interpret the parables". No, he argues, the reader needs to be creative in order to "supply (the object of referent) by way of reconstruction or hypothesis". In fact, that is precisely what all the form critics have done, each according to their own, subjective presuppositions, with the inevitable result that they have understood the same parables in diverse ways, depending on their respective constructions or hypotheses. In the second part of his argument, he then deliberately and consciously makes his own construct. And once again, it is extremely subjective. He openly acknowledges his "main theoretical presuppositions", namely those of Talcott Parsons' analyses, and then he defines the kingdom of God "as a society in which people act in a spirit of forgiveness and love". Then this definition, albeit an obvious over-simplification on a highly controversial issue, becomes the grid, the construct, by means of which he reads the pericope. He continues: "We have to take a look at these ideas against the background of first-century Palestine", and concludes:

A need was felt for religious symbols and practical norms which could integrate society on a more acceptable basis. Jesus most probably wanted to resolve the problem by calling the masses to enter or create a new well integrated society....

And then he interprets the text "creatively" and "allegorically" "within this context", on the basis of "our understanding of Jesus' teaching about the coming kingdom". He reiterates: "having reconstructed the extra-textual object, I choose ... therefore what the parables mean", but adds: "I would, however, like to believe that my tradition-historical reading comes close to what Jesus of Nazareth intended to say". Now I, for one, would doubt that. It certainly comes close to Parsons' functionalist views on an integrated and stable society, but it will be difficult to demonstrate that this pragmatic, functionalist role of Jesus and his message and work fits the presentations of the Gospels. But perhaps this is precisely what Schnell wants to show: that nothing can be demonstrated by way of the tradition-historical approach, because ultimately it rests on constructs, chosen by the specific interpreter for reasons alien to the text.

The main reason for this "failure in terms of objectivity" in tradition-historical readings is, I think, that we know too little of the "sociological (religious, political, and economical) context within which these texts were used", of the Sitz im Leben of a particular text. And the religion-historical school could, in spite of all the efforts and claims, not solve this problem, but remained within the confines of its own hypotheses and constructions. Kee reminds us of this in his scathing comments on Bousset, Bultmann and the history-of-religions method in general, in his own search for a responsible sociohistorical method: they operated with "[a] full range of no longer valid
assumptions"; they dealt with "sweeping categories"; arrived at "generalizations"; "seriously underestimated" the changes and adaptations in history; focused on "an antecedently arrived-at reductionist essence"; decided beforehand "on grounds external to the evidence and prior to the assessment"; in short, they demonstrated "pervasive methodological fallacies", so that he discusses them under the rubric "anachronistic reconstruction of the sociohistorical context" (Kee 1983:34-41). What is necessary, argues Kee, for a historian to enter the life-world of an ancient writer or of his/her community, and to analyse not only what is said but what is left unspoken, is "deliberate consideration of method and strategy". The irony, of course, is that Kee himself is criticised for exactly the same reason. Critics have repeatedly said that his findings also remain hypothetical and do not really prove anything. Perhaps we should acknowledge that it is in principle impossible to describe the social context of a particular text to such a degree that our construction provides "objective" criteria with which to read the text. Try, for example, to describe the social context of our congress and of the papers. The moment that one attempts something like that, it becomes obvious how difficult, and extremely subjective and incomplete any description is, even in present-day contexts, of which we are part. When dealing with contexts of centuries ago, with the paucity of information available, it is clear that one can only arrive at gross generalisations and conjectures. Of course, the value of these sociohistorical studies must not be underestimated. Any information is better than none, but one will have to remain critical.

Psychological readings, of course, are notorious for being subjective. In his excellent analysis, Scheffler also deals with this objection. The problem is, of course, aggravated by the fact that different psychological theories compete with one another and often exclude one another. If trained psychologists cannot convince one another, how can an exegete's choice for a specific approach be anything but arbitrary and subjective?

This problem is aggravated by the fact that these theories introduce the realm of the "unconscious", including the concept of "real intentions", as for example, in Scheffler's work. He says:

Psychological exegesis (especially the psychoanalytical school) assumes that a text is more complex than meets the eye. Behind a manifest text there are often suppressed conflicts and an intricate dynamic... a text is not a congruent representation of an author's thoughts, but a censured representation... A psychological reading is interested in what is censured and repressed. It searches for the real intention of the author and is interested in either conscious or unconscious motifs which may again facilitate the understanding of the manifest text.

He demonstrates the impact of this, for example, in his behaviouristic view on the pericope, when he argues that

any behaviour (even altruistic as in our pericope) is best motivated by employing a person's selfish desires' and that "unconsciously the author was aware of that and he employed [them]".
Now, informed speculation of this nature may be far better than the naive speculation on the real intention of authors, often employed by uninformed readers, but it still remains subjective, based on the premises of the particular theory, and hardly controllable in any way.

It is obvious why the "wandering viewpoint" reading of Botha is, according to himself, so subjective and without any possibility of verification. This is in fact applicable to all readings. Some may be closer to the text and/or author's "intentions", and some very obviously far removed from that, but finally every reading is subjective, influenced by the role of the particular reader.

J G du Plessis also underlines the subjective nature of his "implicature-theory", within the limits of speech-act theories in general. He quotes Leech in saying:

All implicatures are probabilistic. We cannot ultimately be certain of what a speaker means by an utterance ... Interpreting an utterance is ultimately a matter of guesswork, or (to use a more dignified term) hypothesis formation.

To be sure, he tries to rationalise the process, to arrive at "an informal rational problem-solving strategy" and to "help eliminate uncontrolled guesswork", but in the end, some element of guesswork certainly remains. This, of course, raises the problem of the logic of persuasion involved in this method. Why do I, for example, find Du Plessis's argument quite convincing? I do not think that the theory, including all the principles and maxims, has convinced me, because I am not capable of judging the theory. Can it perhaps be that I had the same naive intuition when reading the text? And can it be, just perhaps, that Du Plessis also used his intuition, and only used the impressive theoretical arguments afterwards, to legitimise his intuitive conclusions? Or did he really start de novo, applying all the principles and maxims to the text, and did he only then conclude what the implicature was?

2.3 What is the relationship between the different methods?

Many of these methods do not exclude one another, but in fact presuppose one another, or at least leave open the possibility that there may be other methods. It is, however, useful to examine in greater detail how this important aspect is dealt with in the respective papers.

Scheffler investigates the relationship between psychological exegesis and other approaches in great detail. He emphasises its dependence on other approaches and the complementary nature of methods. He especially shows the importance of sociological and historical-critical studies for psychological exegesis. He is even of the opinion that, in return, psychoanalytical theory can contribute to our knowledge of the historical situation of the authors and the readers.

Of special importance is the fact that he already assumes the results of literary analysis and criticism, in order to proceed with the psychological
exegesis. Once again, it demonstrates that no one method alone is a complete hermeneutic approach, or a complete reading strategy, but that knowledge obtained by different approaches is needed as well.

In fact, almost all the contributions, either explicitly (Van Rensburg, Scheffler, Van Staden, Hartin, Botha, Van Aarde), or implicitly (I J du Plessis, J G du Plessis, Schnell, Sebothoma) underscore the fact that all these methods need additional information, and therefore complementary methods, as well. If they do not admit that openly, they simply presuppose the knowledge that they need.

It is not quite clear how Van Aarde sees the relationship between historical and literary studies. He emphasises the importance of both and, in a sense, the purpose of his paper is to comment on their mutual relationship. The way he sees "ideology", however, as "the evaluating viewpoint of the text itself", has the result that he focuses mainly on the "imagined" social context, as it can be derived and constructed from the narrative itself. Of course, in practice, that is impossible. The reader necessarily takes some knowledge of the historical situation for granted in constructing this "imagined" social context. This leads Van Aarde to the somewhat ambivalent description of the method employed:

*In the process of communication there are consequently intratextual and extratextual components. The social context concerns the extratextual component. The construction thereof depends on a knowledge of other texts, of social and cultural codes, and of the sociocultural context of both the extratextual author and the extratextual reader. Extratextual factors however have exegetic relevance only in so far they manifest themselves in a specific text. The construction of the social context of a specific text never occurs without the text itself being read."

But then he adds:

*However, the exegete need not be theoretically obliged to undertake the construction of the social context only after analysis of the specific text. One can also construct a context... and then read the specific text in that particular context.*

It is not clear how these two possibilities are related. In fact, it is not clear which procedure is the one that he follows in his paper. What is the relation between his narrative reading in paragraph 5, and his construction of the imagined social context in paragraph 6? The information in his construction most certainly do not come from the narrative, but from other sources. He relies, for example, heavily on Schmithals and Conzelmann. The question is: how does one know that this construction is legitimate? In an earlier and longer Afrikaans version of his paper, he answered this question:

*Narratiewe eksegese as 'n kommunikatiewe onderneming kan dus nie die historiese vraagstelling tersyde stel nie. Die "geskiedenis" van Jesus en die "geskiedenis" van die Nuwe-Testamentiese kerk is vir die interpretasie van Lukas-Handelinge as "historiese" vertellinge onontbeerlik. Dit is egter...*
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belangrik dat die vraag na die "geskiedenis" van Jesus en die apostels, en die na die Nuwe-Testamentiese kerk nie op sigself 'n metodologiese stap in die analise van die vertelakt is nie... Kennis daarvan [is] deel van die eksegeetse kompetensie waarmee hy die vertelling begin interpreteer, net soos hy vooraf kennis dra van die evolusionêre wordingsgeskiedenis van die evangelies in die algemeen.

Surely this knowledge "as competence", both of the social history and of the redaction-history, does not come by itself, but is the result of other methods. Does Van Aarde therefore say that narrative exegesis, which sees the text as communication or a speech act, can only take place after sociohistorical and redaction-historical work have both been done? If not, where will the interpreter find the necessary competence? And if indeed, will the results of the narrative exegesis finally depend on the historical constructions used?

Very instructive, in this regard, is Iser's idea of the reader's repertoire, well described by Botha. If the act of reading is essentially a sense-making activity, as Iser says, then each reading will depend on the repertoire of knowledge, allusions, information, memories, expectations, and so on, available to the reader. Knowledge of the historical background of the text, of the cultural norms embedded in the text, of other texts to which it may allude, and much more, then all come into play, which simply means that the information acquired by all the possible methods of interpretation will influence the reading process. Concerning some of the knowledge needed, Botha says the following: "We now have to learn that code, so that we can function with that implied reader". Now, reading without that knowledge, of course, does not make the reading less of a reading than one with the knowledge. It only makes it different, less informed, and less congruent with the way the implied reader was meant to read.

J G du Plessis' contribution raises this issue in two ways. In the first place, he reads the pericope within the larger framework of the travel narrative and of the Gospel, and makes good use of the insights of narrative analysis and other literary devices. Secondly, however, the ahistorical nature of his analysis is a little perplexing. Can Leech's principles and maxims, derived from the social logic of conversation known to him, really be applied, without further ado, to conversations from a distant age, culture and society? For example, must a command necessarily compete, in a timeless, abstract, and acultural manner with the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity? Is it not possible to construct specific speech acts, for example within a class-structured society, with "slaves" and "masters", or with an authoritative religious figure like Jesus and his disciples, in which commands do not necessarily compete with social goals, but in fact fit in well with the way social interaction was taking place? In other words, in order to find the implicatures involved in a distant text like this, by means of a strategy of controlled guesswork, is it not necessary for us to know for example, how their conversations
worked, what they found clear, economical and expressive, what they found benevolent or not, or what they found polite or competitive with the social goal? In short, in analysing speech acts, we certainly need historical information about the rhetoric of the specific culture and society, so as not to analyse their conversations as if they were our own.

Hartin suggests the importance of diverse approaches in several ways. Explicitly, it is the gist of his own argument, and an important aspect of his criticism of deconstructive reading. Even more instructive is the way that he implicitly uses or presupposes other methods in his deconstructive reading itself. He starts with a textual analysis. Is that typical? He emphasises that his interest is neither historical-critical, nor like that of structural analysis, but "Instead, the aim is to see how the text actually disseminates, explodes, and spreads itself". But how does one do that? He starts with "a sequential analysis", but in doing so he simply takes for granted that he has the answers to several questions. On the question of Peter, he comments: "The Lord ignores the question: it is irrelevant". How does he know that? In fact, J G du Plessis, and other authors, seem to have reasons to believe the very opposite.

Faced with the inevitability (of the punishment), Hartin continues, the feeling of Angst again returns.... Throughout this passage the thread of Angst/anxiety surges and fades backwards and forwards.... The trace of Angst emerges again; this becomes more evident by examining the binary oppositions evident in the text.... The feeling of anxiety/Angst appears and disappears throughout the passage, only to reappear in a formidable way at the conclusion of the narrative.... The coming inspires absolute fear.... The feeling of Angst becomes far more urgent and oppressive....

Frankly, I cannot see that. How does he know that? The binary oppositions certainly do not prove that. Is it perhaps some kind of psychological interpretation that we have here, without the psychological theory being spelled out? Can one really say that it is "how the text actually disseminates, explodes, and spreads itself"? To put it bluntly: I can understand the reading process when deconstructionists openly state that they are using the fact of intertextuality to juxtapose the particular text with anything they like, thus generating totally new readings/writings. Hartin, however, confuses me by suggesting that deconstruction is in fact trying to read the text itself, and in the process employs traditional methodology. Is it, for example, correct to say:

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 (my italics)?

2.4 Are the strategies reading or reading into?
It is fairly obvious that several of these methods are, sometimes very explicitly, not so much strategies of exegesis than of eisegesis. They are not always reading the text but also reading into the text. They are (seemingly)
not so much interested in either the author's intentions or the text's own meaning, than in something else, which they then want to illustrate by means of the text.

A prime suspect in this regard is, of course, always the psychological interpretation!

*Every exegete has learned that psychological exegesis is poor exegesis. It interpolates between the lines things that no one can know* - thus Theissen starts his own provocative attempt to revitalise psychological exegesis. Scheffler's discussion highlights this very issue. He is at pains to explain that psychological exegesis cannot be limited to a single approach. It is almost impossible to combine the results of different approaches into one. Why? Because the results depend completely on the theory that is applied, and the theories exclude one another. The obvious question then arises: is it possible to find something "new" in the text, or is the text only there to illustrate what the exegete already knows, by means of the specific theory employed? The suspicion must be very strong that it will be impossible to find anything new. The theories cannot be so incomplete that they can be developed further by the first text one prefers to read. No, all that can happen is that the text will be seen in a new light, that new ways of understanding the human actions described in the text will come to the fore; but the ways will be already known, and far better known, to the psychologist. The text becomes an illustration of knowledge already available. The (very interesting!) ways in which Scheffler applies different theories to the pericope, serve to demonstrate this. He says, for example, explicitly that "our text is a classic example" of the analytic-psychological view on the archetypes, but the same applies to all four of the analyses. The text illustrates the theory. That of course, does not deny that it may be extremely helpful! It is indeed helpful, to the extent that the specific theory is helpful. The point is simply that within this approach the text does not really provide new knowledge, information, perspective, or whatever one may wish to call it. The text becomes the silent illustration of a theory. It is therefore rather surprising that Wuellner and Leslie call their book on psychological exegesis *The surprising gospel!* The subtitle, however, explains it all: "Intriguing psychological insights from the new Testament". Of course, the insights do not come from the New Testament. The authors actually use helpful psychological insights, in a popular way, to cast new perspectives on human behaviour in the New Testament (Wuellner & Leslie 1984). The fact that the (and: any) method ultimately rests on philosophical presuppositions is very obvious. In Scheffler's words:

*Psychological exegesis emphasises the fact that every exegesis has an interpretative character which depends on philosophical or operational points of departure.*

Sociological and Black theological interpretations are normally also suspected of being reading strategies in which the readers deliberately super-
impose their philosophical presuppositions and their material grid on the
text. The two discussions offered here, however, seem to try to avoid that.

I have already hinted that Sebothoma is reversing the usual logic of Black
theological hermeneutics by first trying to find the main theme(s) of the
pericope and then applying them to the Black experience. Many Black theo­
logians would start with the Black experience as an hermeneutic grid. The
question, of course, then arises as to whether this reading is really capable of
listening to the text or the author, as traditional exegesis seemed to claim was
possible, or whether it is a deliberate acknowledgement that they are "using"
the text to further the interests that they have chosen. Several Black
theologians would, in fact, support the latter view, arguing that it is
impossible to read a text in any other way, that traditional exegesis was based
on false presuppositions, and that all readers use texts to support their own
hermeneutic and ideological grids. Sometimes they will prefer to select only
those texts that make their interpretations easier. Sometimes they will go so
far as to say that the whole text of the Scriptures is almost useless. Some
others would, however, support the claim that they are indeed listening to the
text and/or author itself, by arguing that materially the gospel/New Testa­
ment/Scriptures is meant for the poor, since it proclaims the God of the
poor, and that finally theirs is the "correct" or legitimate way to read the texts.
Perhaps Sebothoma is following this latter course - at least with regard to the
Gospel of Luke, thereby avoiding the accusation of a deliberate ideological
reading.

This is, of course, also the issue at the heart of the hermeneutic debate
within the circles of feminist theology (for a very instructive discussion, see
Fiorenza 1984:1-96). A feminist contribution would have been very helpful
during the congress.

Van Staden also tries to avoid the accusation of being ideological, and of
reading viewpoints into the text. He therefore uses the seemingly "neutral",
"descriptive" approach of the sociology-of-knowledge of Berger/Luckmann,
coming to the fairly "general" and "innocent" conclusion that "Luke is con­
structing and propagating a new symbolic universe by means of his narrative.
Acceptance of this symbolic universe implies a new perception of reality at
the least, but can (and does) include a new form of social interaction and
social action".

In doing so, of course, he is not following the more usual approaches of
sociological interpretation. According to the well-known classification of
Scroggs, two types of sociological interpretations are evident:

social history that tries to identify the social composition of Christian
groups, and sociological analysis that seeks to discover the larger underlying
dynamics at word within the groups and in their relation to wider society
(Scroggs 1983:337).

We do not have any contribution dealing directly with the social history in
which this text was generated. In several contributions that kind of informa-
tion is needed, but then it is taken from Strack-Billerbeck (Van Staden), or other sources, without any systematic and critical research and reflection. To my mind, that certainly leaves a gap in our discussion.

But more than that, apart from Schnell’s short construct à la Parsons, and Van Staden’s use of Berger, we do not have an attempt at sociological analysis either. And once again, that is a pity. Berger’s approach, concentrating on the conscious and the cognitive purposes of the author, Luke, is furthermore akin to the cognitive and even the behavioristic psychological interpretations, dealt with by Scheffler. Aspects like the collective unconscious processes, the influences of society on both author and readers, the social conflicts involved, and the ideological function (in the pejorative sense) of the text are not discussed at all.

A materialist reading of this text, with the obvious use of class categories (master; slave), and with the implications that power, knowledge, authority, truth, praxis, history and eschatology and so forth are involved, could have highlighted the issues at stake in a full-fledged reader-response interpretation theory.

But, to return to Van Staden and Berger, and given the criticism that Luke’s deliberate construction is here taken for granted, without any critical consideration of the unconscious processes involved: is this approach really as descriptive and neutral as it seems? Is it capable of bringing the real issues to the fore? Berger has been severely criticised for the conservative, world-maintaining function that he accords religion, as such a stabilising, orderly, symbolic universe or better: “sacred canopy”. Gregory Baum, for example, writes:

While Berger recognizes that religion is both world-maintaining and world-shaking, he chooses the world-maintaining function as his essential definition. Is this just a matter of taste? Or is such a choice associated with value-laden consequences? By defining religion as a sacred canopy Berger suggests that critical religion is a rare phenomenon and in fact an anomaly, and since paradigms are heuristic devices, his definition makes critical religion almost invisible.

Now, Van Staden is actually only using Berger’s earlier writing on sociology, in which he leaves the theoretical possibility of world-transforming religion more open than in his later writings on religion itself (1969; 1970; 1976; 1980). But even so, Van Staden’s own analysis sounds, at times, rather world-maintaining:

(Peter’s) question is answered by implementing the role of the manager. As, in the world domain, someone from the rank of the slaves is appointed manager, so it is in the church. The responsibilities of the manager are twofold: (i) to ‘run the household’, that is to see to the orderly function of the church; (ii) to “feed the other slaves”, that is, to provide in the spiritual needs of the other members of the community. To be able to perform his
duty properly, the manager needs to know what the master wants... dereliction of duty would result in extremely serious consequences... (my italics).

Can the descriptions of the duty, given in italics, not function extremely conservatively and be world-maintaining even in a situation where there is a strict hierarchical system of church government, where "the orderly function of the church" implies that due respect should be paid to authorities within the church, and where care is taken for the "spiritual" needs of the other members without any personal involvement or sacrifice on the part of the "masters" in the church? Why, for example, "spiritual" needs? Is the immense potential for world-transforming religious praxis, so convincingly demonstrated by J G du Plessis in his analysis on "implicature", not completely lost? And so forth. In Van Staden's final comment, the same issue is raised. He explicitly states that Luke's new symbolic universe was also meant to rearrange priorities and transform actions, including those of Theophilus. Then he adds:

*If the master himself is willing to serve, so should the "manager". It is important to note that it is not the structural relations that are inverted - the master does not become a slave, and the manager not a "common" servant. The distinctiveness of their behaviour lies in their willingness to act atypically, namely: to serve (cf 3.3.1.3) (my italics).*

But 3.3.1.3 is the passage just quoted. Does that mean that it is important for the readers, the masters in the church, to note that structural relations in the church should not be affected, but merely that they should serve - that is, should see to it that the church functions in an orderly manner, and that the spiritual needs of the other members are taken care of? Why, and for whom, is it so "important" to note this? For Luke? Are there indications in the text that this is important to note? Or is it important for the present-day readers? It seems as if Van Staden is taking away what he has given.

To my mind, I think one must rather say, in the words of Ricoeur, that the text here provides the reader with "a productive imagination at work in the text itself". The text itself suggests "itineraries of meaning", "the key to the heuristic functioning of the productive imagination". The text makes one think. It incites the imagination. It provides a certain "course", "the transforming dynamism of the narrative", "a rule-governed form of imagination, encoded, but authentically productive of meaning". Creative, imaginative reading then calls for a second imaginative step, namely the unceasing operation of "decontextualising and recontextualising" these itineraries of meaning in the present, of re-applying this encoded, heuristic imagination (Ricoeur 1981:49-57). Therefore, although the text may not actually say that the "structural relations" in the church are affected, it certainly also does not render this impossible. The imagination at work in the pericope (in Van Staden's words: Luke's new symbolic universe) certainly can entice the imagination of new readers, in concrete circumstances, to rethink creatively the structural
relations existing in their own churches, and even in society at large. It is not clear to me why it is important to note that such cannot be the case.

The question is: is such a world-maintaining, legitimating outcome due to inherent limitations in the sociology of knowledge approach, or not? In other words, is even this almost descriptive kind of sociological approach a strategy to superimpose a grid of meaning on the text, and therefore "reductionist" - the accusation commonly brought against sociological exegesis?

An interesting example of this process is the way - already referred to - in which Schnell's definition of the kingdom of God influences his tradition-historical reading of the text. He admits that it is a "construct" of his own making, and acknowledges that this choice fundamentally shapes the outcome of his exegesis. In fact, his precise purpose is to show that the same applies to all the other attempts to describe the "extra-textual referent or object", that is the "meaning" of the parables as well, even in those cases where exegetes fail to admit this and accordingly present their interpretations as the original or correct meaning. What does that mean? It means that even historical criticism, in the past often acclaimed as scientific and objective, and capable of escaping dogmatic, doctrinal, confessional, and other evil kinds of interpretation, because it delves into the original, true meaning, is just as heavily dependent on a grid, on presuppositions, on Kurzformeln des Glaubens, which are taken for granted, and are then read into the texts. Historical criticism has to construct some kind of "essence of Christianity" beforehand, and perhaps unconsciously, in order to have a grid that can be applied. The results of the investigation then serve to prove the presuppositions. The fact that it does not acknowledge this, only makes it even more dogmatic, and the grid more influential and less open to criticism, than in the case of, say, confessional exegesis.

In a very illuminating way - precisely since he is dealing with a theory of the reading process itself, and not with another method of reading - Botha argues this point. The "ideal" situation may be that the implied reader understands the text just as the author intended, but quite obviously that is absolutely impossible. Any reader fills the gaps, that is, completes the picture, draws the conclusions, makes allusions, understands the norms involved, and so on, in his or her own way, in terms of his or her own repertoire. Every reading therefore becomes unique, and in every reading the person of the reader - that is the presuppositions, beliefs, knowledge, fears, and expectations of the particular reader - plays an influential role.

A deconstructive reading, inevitably, puts the same question on the agenda. To my mind, Hartin has given us a fairly "conservative" rendering of deconstruction, trying to make it as acceptable as possible, and not use it vandalistically, willfully destroying and ridiculing everything we have attempted. Accepting then, for a moment, this friendly approach, deconstruction also draws attention to several important reasons why every reading
must, of necessity, be a kind of "adding to" the text itself. A text is not a container but an open weave (Miller 1987), it invites reading, and this reading inevitably becomes further weaving, in fact, it becomes new writing. By each new reader/writer the text is related to other texts, understood in their light, so that new "texts" are generated. Texts are weaved into the texture of life by each new reader, the loose ends are used, ever anew, in new combinations in new textures. I would like to argue, with Hartin, that there are some constraints in all of this, and that reading does not need to become completely relativistic, but there is certainly an element of basic truth in this that cannot be denied or ignored.

3 ARE THE METHODS PHILOSOPHICALLY EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE?

There is, however, also a second important question that one should ask in searching for a responsible hermeneutics. It is the question of whether the different methods themselves are legitimate or valid.

This type of question includes several others, for example: are all the methods responsible, or only some? Do they exclude or complement one another? Which of them do, and which do not? Can one answer these questions in an abstract way, or will it depend on the nature of the literature? Is it possible that some of the methods can be more legitimate for certain types of literature, and others for different kinds? But what will determine this decision: the nature of the text, or the purpose of the author, or perhaps the purpose of the reader? What is the philosophical background to each method, and what about it? Are there things such as "legitimate" interpretations, and "more" or "less" legitimate interpretations? Is one interpretation "valid", and another one not? And, addressing the most basic issue, what is interpretation? What does "reading" mean, or, as some prefer to ask, what does "listening" mean?

In short, these philosophical or epistemological questions must also be addressed in the search for responsible hermeneutics.

Of course, these are the eternal questions that have fascinated philosophers through the ages - and from which literary critics make a living. And I suspect these were the questions the organisers had in mind when they included this topic at the end of the congress.

However, whether these questions can be resolved in an abstract and timeless way, applicable to literature in general, I doubt very much.

Perhaps one can argue, in a moment of optimism, that the broad community of critics or interpreters will generally show a kind of consensus regarding the fact that responsible hermeneutics will have to be a comprehensive approach, which includes methods focusing on the history of the text, the text itself, and the readers of the text.

It is, however, immediately obvious that it will be a fragile consensus, and that serious exceptions exist.
Several important reasons for these exceptions can be enumerated. In the final instance, different methods can be traced back to different philosophies. Readers' attitudes to what they are reading are inextricably bound up with who they are, what they think and believe, what they eat and drink would be to see it within, what we may call, although it gives rise to serious misunderstandings, the context of the Bible.

Of course, it can also be read differently, simply as another literary text; then any reading strategy will be valid, depending on the purpose of the readers, but that will be less responsible in terms of the nature of this specific text.

This decision to read a Biblical text within the parameters of the Bible, can be argued in many different ways. One could, for example, follow Bar- because one will encounter bedrock, deeply hidden personal and collective convictions about life and reality itself.

In his very instructive Plurality and ambiguity, Tracy has shown that the need for method in interpretation only arises whenever the interpretation, or as he prefers to call it: the conversation between reader and text is interrupted by conflict. These interruptions, or conflicts, make argument necessary. Argument needs method, explanation and theory. Ultimately, therefore, what is at stake in the argument between different methods is the respective theories, encompassing views of reality, history, language, life itself (1987).

It is therefore impossible to find reasons, at the level of hermeneutic questions themselves, why any historicist-positivist, structuralist, Marxist, existentialist, or whatever philosophical reading strategy, may be more legitimate than the next. These decisions are made beforehand, on a more fundamental level - and they must be argued on that level, if necessary.

With that, however, an extremely important aspect of "responsible hermeneutics" comes to the fore: the interpretation, or reading, of texts, is not an aim in itself, but a part of human life itself. We read in order to live, and as part of life. The way we read belongs to the way we live. The reasons for which we read form part of our interests and aspirations in life. And the strategies with which we read are also determined by the latter.

More must be said. The choice between reading strategies is also influenced by the specific purpose with which readers, on a specific day, read a specific text. Do they read to relax, to enjoy, to get information, or what? And this purpose is certainly not always determined by the intention of the author or the nature of the text. A single text can be read by different readers with many different purposes. And for each of them the specific purpose will determine the most appropriate reading strategy. In fact, one and the same person can read one and the same text on different occasions with totally different purposes, and accordingly with totally different reading strategies.

The answer I want to suggest to the original question must be clear: reading strategies, or methods of interpretation, can never be seen as more or less
legitimate in themselves, in a timeless and abstract way, but only in terms of the purpose of a specific reader on a specific occasion.

If the purpose of the readerristians read the Bible because they want to live. Reading the Bible therefore forms a part of the more encompassing striving of trying to live, to understand life, and to live life.

Responsible New Testament hermeneutics ought to keep that purpose in mind as well. The truth-question that we ultimately ask, is not what this text really says, but how it can help us to live. Because we regard it as a religious text, we ask: how can this text help us to live better, more responsibly (cf. Booth on the chose of the reader is to examine the text as an illustration of particular psychological theories, still other reading strategies will be more appropriate and responsible.

And can there be any reason why these, and many other, purposes may not be legitimate with a view to any particular text? Can there be any reason to deny someone the legitimacy of reading a specific text in a particular way? Not that I can see - as long as it is clear what the reader is doing with the text.

In short, in dealing with ordinary readers and ordinary texts, the question concerning more responsible methods and readings can only be answered in terms of specific purposes.

Of course, some purposes may seem more obvious than others. Factual accounts of history or of events, for example in a newspaper, will normally be read as trustworthy and informative. It is obvious that some reading strategies will be more adequate for reading texts like this, and others will be more artificial or, at least, uncommon. But there is no reason why other reading strategies could not prove to be extremely valuable and completely responsible for reading the same texts, for other readers, with different purposes, on specific occasions. One can also read a factual account in a newspaper as propaganda, or to improve your knowledge of the language, or even as a joke. Humorous stories, love-letters, obituaries, even road signs, all ask, in the first place, to be read in an obvious, natural, naive, manner suitable to their own nature. But that does not exclude the possibility that other reading strategies may be very useful and responsible for readers who have interests of their own in these same love-letters or road signs.

Perhaps one could say that speech-act theories, in which texts are seen as actions of communication, will be a "normal" way to serve the purpose of readers reading many kinds of texts. This will then involve author, text and reader.

In the interpretation, reading, analysis and criticism of literature, fiction, prose, narratives, poems, and so on, the idea of what is "normal", "naive", or "obvious", however, becomes very vague and contentious. There may be certain restrictions in the purpose of the author, and there may be certain signals embedded in the text itself, and therefore constraints, but it seems to me that the critic and the reader will usually be free to do whatever they wish with literature of theologians, Russell 1985; Fiorenza 1983; 1984). We should
learn to practise a hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, in analysing the "masters of suspicion", Nietzsche, Marx, Freud). In a situation of ideological conflict in particular, such as in South Africa, believing communities and systematic theology need New Testament scholarship which is self-critically aware of this (Smit 1986b).

Finally, the question of history will again become important, in addition to the attention given to the text. An interesting understood? Does the reader see the text as the typical product of the sociohistorical conditions, the public discourse and the power structures which it merely reflects? And so on. Whatever the viewpoint, the reader and critic might choose the most appropriate reading strategy in terms of that purpose, and then one could argue whether that was indeed the best choice possible, and the most responsible method of serving the particular purpose.

Finally, this will lead, as far as literature in general is concerned, to a legitimate plurality of meanings, which readers can either get out of or read into a text, meanings that may be complementary, but also contradictory.

4 HAS LUKE 12:35-48 BEEN READ RESPONSIBLY?
The question of whether we have read Luke 12:35-48 responsibly has not yet been answered. This is because Luke 12:35-48 is not simply another literary text; and we are not merely another group of readers, but a particular one.

Some ideology critique now becomes necessary. In order to answer this question, we should first ask: Who are we? What are we doing (here)? Why are we doing this? Whose interests are served by what we are doing here? Why do we read this particular text, and not something else?

4.1 Luke 12 is part of the Christian Scriptures
Luke 12:35-48 forms part of the Gospel of Luke, which is part of the Christian tradition, in fact, a part of the Christian New Testament, accepted by most Christians, and finally part of the Holy Scriptures, accepted (albeit in slightly different forms) by the Christian community through the ages.

Normally, no-one will read Luke 12:35-48 on its own, as a separate literary unit, autonomous, without author, history or context. No-one has any real interest in such a text. To isolate this text, as we have done, in order to focus more sharply, is necessarily a temporary and functional abstraction. If we completely lose sight of the broader framework or context, we are not really dealing with Luke 12:35-48 any longer. In fact, the mere fact that we can use this heading (Luke) and these numbers (12:35-48) already refers to the context to which it belongs.

In short, the normal and obvious way to read this text would be to see it within, what we may call, although it gives rise to serious misunderstandings, the context of the Bible.
Of course, it can also be read differently, simply as another literary text; then any reading strategy will be valid, depending on the purpose of the readers, but that will be less responsible in terms of the nature of this specific text.

This decision to read a Biblical text within the parameters of the Bible, can be argued in many different ways. One could, for example, follow Barr in his discussion of the Biblical canon as the classical model for the understanding of God, as the classic structure of the Christian faith, in spite of all the conflicting traditions involved and the contingency surrounding the formal delimitation of the canon (1973). Or one could follow Childs (1979; 1986) or Sanders (1984) in their different types of canonical criticism. One could even look at quite different positions, such as that of Frye (1982), or Croatto, who, in his recent theory of reading as the production of meaning, argues strongly for the "closure", the "cut-off", the "delimitation", changing an open intertextuality into intratextuality, which, of course, is then again read in a new intertextuality, in the ongoing process of reading as the production of new meaning (1987). One could perhaps use the concepts of a holistic approach, or the final "narrative context" (Combrink), or even the concepts of "tex- tuality" (Winquest 1987) and "intertextuality", although both of them can also be seen as directly opposing the idea of a canon.

One could also agree, with Wuellner, explaining Kennedy, that the final rhetorical unit, that is the "argumentative unit affecting the reader’s reasoning or the reader’s imagination", which is therefore "either a convincing or a persuasive unit", is "the collection of all documents into a stated 'canon'" (Wuellner 1987a:455). Or one could listen to Ricoeur, with his emphasis on the "textuality", which characterises and distinguishes Biblical faith, his use of the Christian "network of texts", his bias that God has been adequately "named" or identified in this network of Biblical texts, in short, his "unabashedly intraBiblical... presupposition" (Wallace 1986; also Klemm 1983).

Of course, these approaches differ fundamentally from one another, because the issues involved are so complex, but at least they all point, albeit in such diverse ways, to the importance of somehow reading Biblical texts, like Luke 12:35-48, within the wider context of the Scriptures as a whole.

4.2 Scripture is the religious classic of the Christian faith
It is, however, not enough to state this. The fact is that Scripture is not any book, or any compilation of texts, but a religious classic, a "sacred text" for the Christian church.

Although I prefer the expression "religious classic", as developed in great detail by Tracy (1981; 1987), to the notion of a "sacred text", as for example explained by Detweiler (1985), the latter does show that it makes a difference to the reading strategies when the reading community sees a document as such.
It is, to my mind, not necessary or indeed helpful to introduce a concept like "inspiration" to explain this aspect of a sacred text or a religious classic. Theories of inspiration have to do with the way specific believing communities see the origins of their "sacred texts" and with the reasons why they regard these texts as sacred. All believing communities, however, do not have theories of inspiration, and normally they do not really influence the way these texts are being read.

The fact that a reading community regards a text as a "religious classic" can have several implications. Firstly, it can change the attitude of the readers. The community may have some kind of expectation and trust when they read. They want to know what the specific text or pericope has to say to them. They expect some kind of personal application. They are, for example, willing to become involved in the narrative. They encounter such a text with "an aggressively 'faithful' attitude", says Detweiler (1985:214). They are willing to practise "a hermeneutics of consent" (Stuhlmacher 1977). Their basic attitude is a "fiduciary" one (Wallace, comparing Barth and Ricoeur, 1986). This is the aspect discussed by Detweiler, and others (cf also the interesting article on William Blake and the recovery of fideism, Lewis, 1986).

A second implication, however, of more direct importance for the question under discussion, is that the religious classic is often seen, by the religious community, as "a single rhetorical unit" (Wuellner, following Kennedy, 1987:455). That means that the readers look for a message, a thrust, a central perspective, some kind of unifying centre in spite of all the seeming differences. They want to understand each particular part of the religious classic in terms of their understanding of the whole message. They look for "an organising center", "a coherent center" (Wallace 1986:10-11).

Because of that, the traditions of the particular believing community come into play; these include their convictions and morals, their doctrine and ethics, the history of the community, important historical events, influential figures, their overall spirituality and their experiences in worship. They read against a grid.

Of course, Scripture does not have such a single meaning, message, or scope in itself. As a text it possesses polysemy, and the Christian Scripture, being a compendium of traditions and a library of genres and documents, is indeed a very complex "text" or "rhetorical unit". Any idea of the so-called "message" of the Bible, or "the scope" or "purpose" or "centre" of the Bible, any idea of a canon within the canon, of a Mitte der Schrift, of a unifying principle, or a single rule for interpretation, for example, was Christum treibt, or a "semantic axis running right through the Bible", like freedom (Croatto 1978), or a "Christological concentration", is necessarily a construct, that has developed socially and historically within a particular tradition and community.
Of course, religious communities need not have such a "reduced" idea of the "meaning" or "thrust" or "message" of their particular religious classic. In fact, some religious communities, for example the rabbinic tradition, or Islam, do not have such a "logo-centred" view of their classics, and they do not use their classics in this way. Their respective "grids" are less verbalised, and determined more by factors such as ethics, cult, and worship. And, within Christianity, important traditions show similar characteristics. The question to which I will return is whether these uses of sacred texts must be called "reading" or "interpretation" in any strict sense of the word.

This is the issue, as I see it, to which Stanley Fish, in his later phase, since

Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities, has drawn attention in his radical and controversial way. He rejects the idea of Hirsch and others that "a text is an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next". The text is (only), he says, the structure of meanings that is obvious and inescapable from the perspective of whatever interpretive assumptions happen to be in force (1980:vii).

The so-called text is constituted by the interpretive community,

made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties.

Disagreements between interpreters can be debated "not because of a stability in texts, but because of a stability in the makeup of interpretive communities".

Of course, he adds, such a stability is always temporary and changing, unlike the timeless stability that interpreters long for in a fixed text.

The notion of interpretive communities thus stands between an impossible ideal and the fear which leads so many to maintain it. The ideal is of a perfect agreement and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation. The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realised if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop (1980:171-172).

Two remarks are relevant. Firstly, Fish has certainly pointed to something extremely important for exegesis and systematic theology. In a less radical manner, McKnight makes the same point in showing that the reader has always been present, in all interpretations (McKnight 1985, developing ideas from his earlier 1978, in a very instructive analysis of the role of the reader).

In a very definite sense the Biblical "canon" itself is not fixed, "remaining the same from one moment to the next", the same for each and every interpreter. When Christians and theologians read particular texts within the larger framework of the "classic", the "canon", and "Scriptures", they in fact work with different classics, canons, and Scriptures. They make their own constructs. What their religious classic comprises, really depends on their own presuppositions and preferences, that is, those of their interpretive com-
community. In that sense, the relief, contours and scope of a canon are always changing, even for particular interpreters themselves. And particular texts are accorded "meaning" within this "context", constructed by the community or interpreter.

Within systematic theology, and within the believing Christian communities, many construals of this kind have been made in order to come to grips with the "objective material" of the Biblical documents. On a large scale one can think of mechanisms such as the law-gospel, the succession of the covenants, the (different) relationships of the Old and New Testaments, Christological concentration, justification by faith. On a smaller scale, also, believers organise the material they read in terms of their own constructs of the Bible, its structure, its scope.

I would, therefore, have difficulty with the idea of "foolproof composition", which makes "counter-readings" impossible (Combrink, following Sternberg), if it was meant to indicate that the Scriptures as such do not possess contradictory traditions. It is the conventions, serving as a grid, of a particular religious reading community that help them to account for the different trajectories within Scripture and to keep them together within a single, comprehensive interpretation of the Biblical message as a whole. And neither any particular parts of Scripture, nor this general "message" of the Scriptures, are themselves "composed" in such a foolproof and obvious way as to make counter-readings impossible, without a grid.

In some Christian traditions and communities deliberate attempts have indeed been made to reduce the polysemy of the Scriptures to a single theme, idea or doctrine that can be verbalised. Normally, this results in fundamentalism and orthodoxy and spells the end of interpretation and genuine reading. The polysemy of the Biblical text is interchanged for a propositional message, for the believers' "subjective construal of the text's unified propositional meaning in the form of a system" (Wallace 1986:11, explaining Ricoeur's objections to orthodox Protestantism).

It is, however, more common for Christians to live with the tensions, and to acknowledge the polysemy of the Bible itself - in contradiction with the popular view of "theological", "confessional", or "dogmatic" interpretation of Scripture.

This brings us to the second remark concerning Fish's position. It raises the important issue of the constraints in "the text", the "objective", "given", "document" itself, as the debate has shown. This is indeed extremely important, not only for critics, but especially for believing communities and systematic theologians.

In his penetrating analysis of the pluralities and ambiguities involved in interpretation, Tracy underscores the fact that somehow interpretation ought to ask the truth-question as well. He emphatically resists what he calls the rule of "more of the same" in interpretation, for example the kind of relativist...
cycle in which an interpretive community can find itself. He concludes by saying:

My principal concern in this narrative has been to describe a... modest but crucial hope, and one suggested by the conflict of interpretations on interpretation itself. That hope is this: that all those involved in interpreting our situation and all those aware of our need for solidarity may continue to risk interpreting the classics of all the traditions. And in that effort to interpret lie both resistance and hope.

...The hope that interpretation will show us a way to resist is a fragile hope in a nuclear age. It may be less than we deserve, but it may also be more than we usually allow ourselves to envision, much less act upon.

...There is no release for any of us from the conflict of interpretations if we would understand at all. The alternative is not to escape into the transient pleasures of irony or a flight into despair or cynicism. The alternative is not a new kind of innocence or a passivity masking apathy ...


Thus, the search for a unifying centre, some kind of "essence of Christianity", is at the same time an impossible quest, that will never be resolved, as well as an important regulative idea, a quest without which Christian faith and living would be impossible (cf Sykes 1984).

In order to live from the religious classic, a community of believers/interpreters must have some kind of grid with which to organise the diverse possibilities in the canon. At the same time, this grid must be open for change, correction, adjustment, and even to contradiction, if necessary. We talk to one another, "with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop" (Fish), or better, in the words of Tracy, with the hope that this conversation in itself will show us a way, not to end the conversation, but to live.

Therefore, as I understand it, in order not to forever give way to the ultimate silence of "more of the same", Ricoeur has stressed that the "reservoir of meaning" is also, somehow, present in the "text" itself, waiting, as a potentiality, to tease the imagination of new readers.

To be sure, (even) a good pluralist should always be able to discern the differences between good, bad and downright awful interpretations (Isaiah Berlin).

In the interpretation of a particular Biblical text, like Luke 12:35-48, the sociohistorical construct of the essence of the Biblical message, which the interpreter shares with others, whether fellow-believers, or other scholars, will necessarily influence the reading of the particular text. The ideal would be that this grid should also be subjected to criticism and change in the process of reading and interpretation, subjected to the conflicting views and constructs of other interpretive communities, but also to the teasing of the imagination by the text itself.
4.3 New Testament interpretation ought to serve the church

In a broad sense, the work of New Testament scholars is meant to serve the Christian church and tradition. That does not mean that every single New Testament scholar should deliberately be doing that, but ultimately, the social project of New Testament scholarship can only be understood and legitimated with a view to the existence of the Christian church and tradition. If there were no Christian church and believing community, society at large would not have put such value on the study of this literature to establish, maintain and fund numerous departments at universities, as well as scholarships and societies for New Testament studies.

The final "public", which New Testament scholarship as a social project serves, is the church, and not the academy (cf Tracy's distinctions, 1981:1-98). Of course, one can also argue that the Bible is "a document of the university" (Betz 1981; Ebeling 1981), but this argument will again rest on the Christian community at large, and its influence in the sphere of the university; or one can show that Scripture is indeed a human classic, with enormous symbolic, mythological, narrative and imaginative potential for human existence itself (Ricoeur's work; Wilder 1982; and many others), but this is certainly not the primary context for the work of New Testament scholars, and, in fact, this potential is, historically speaking, also due to the fact that the Bible story is "the great code", embedded in important streams of human history.

The concepts of "epistemological priority" (liberation theology), "privileged reader" (Detweiler), "interpretive community" (Fish) and "reader-context" can all be applied to discuss this role of the believing community in a responsible reading of New Testament texts.

This implies that ultimately the results of New Testament scholarship must be useful for the believing Christian community in its widest sense, for preachers, pastors, and believers. Responsible New Testament scholarship ought to be aware of this.

4.4 New Testament interpretation ought to serve the Christian life

Recently, Thiselton et al have introduced the notion of responsibility into hermeneutics in a further valuable way. They write:

*To compose and to interpret texts is to engage in responsible action.* The literature on the subject of hermeneutics often implies that what makes interpretation so important is our human desire to know the truth. And often it is assumed that our goal is to achieve a single correct interpretation because the truth cannot accommodate conflicting views. We wish to claim, however, that no less fundamental than the question of truth is the question of ethics; no less fundamental than our concern for true knowledge is our concern for right action. Because understanding is itself an action or a sequence of actions, it is closely related to all of our other actions and the purposes we have for them. We organise our activities in relation to the goals
we want to achieve, and the means we use to reach those goals reveal what we regard as responsible action....

The failure to acknowledge the role of ethics in hermeneutics accounts for much of the strife we discover in the history of interpretation....

In Biblical studies, too, a sharp division has emerged between those who believe that Biblical "sciences" are free of questions of value and those who believe that a prior "faith" attitude is a necessary hermeneutic principle....

Hermeneutics is not simply a cognitive process whereby we determine the "correct meaning" of a passage or text. Questions of truth and universality are important, but so are questions of cultural value and social relevance. Because the interpretations of texts cannot avoid the historical contexts and actions of both authors and interpreters, questions of ethics and responsible interpretation are as germane to hermeneutics as questions of validity and correctness....

Instead of attempting to isolate ethics and hermeneutics, we should strive to understand the relationship between them....

...It is better to conceive of behaviour and responsibility as the context within which formal understanding is pursued. Yet understanding does exist in a reciprocal relationship to behaviour, and the importance of hermeneutics is precisely that interpretations influence actions even as actions establish the contexts within which interpretations are made. What is at stake in hermeneutics is not only the truth of one's interpretation but also the effects interpretation and interpretative strategies have on the ways in which human beings shape their goals and their actions (Lundin, Thiselton & Walhout 1985:i-ii).

This is certainly true of the way the believing Christian community reads the Scriptures. Finally, when reading Luke 12, for example, Christians are not interested in understanding the text itself, or even the broader text of the Bible, but in life itself, in Christian living. Christians read the Bible because they want to live. Reading the Bible therefore forms a part of the more encompassing striving of trying to live, to understand life, and to live life.

Responsible New Testament hermeneutics ought to keep that purpose in mind as well. The truth-question that we ultimately ask, is not what this text really says, but how it can help us to live. Because we regard it as a religious text, we ask: how can this text help us to live better, more responsibly (cf Booth on the characteristics of religious rhetoric, 1985)?

Five remarks are relevant. Firstly, the idea of the hermeneutic circle, or spiral, once again becomes important. Understanding leads to involvement, and playing games with texts, or cynicism, are also variations of involvement. In recent years, this concept has been used in an important new way by liberation theologians, especially by Segundo (1976; 1984; 1985; 1986).

Secondly, an essential part of the hermeneutic circle is the praxis of the interpreting community. Members interpret from within their own practices, and with a view to their practices. Once again, important theoretical work has
been done in this regard that has a bearing on New Testament interpretation. For example, during an important symposium on the changing paradigms in theology today, Matthew Lamb has argued in great detail that the most crucial paradigm-shift taking place today, not only in theology, but in general, is exactly the shift towards "praxis and dialectics" (Lamb 1984).

Thirdly, in order to be able to reflect from within and on the praxis of the interpreting community, adequate social analysis is extremely important. In order to do that, one needs social theories more capable of dealing with the dynamics of human society, the conflicts involved, and the possibilities for transformation, than those of Berger and Parsons. One example would be the influential theory of social structuration, developed by Giddens (1976; 1979; 1982), and employed in hermeneutics and interpretation by Thompson (1984; cf also 1981). Many other possibilities are suggested in Gottwald's work (1983).

Fourthly, in order to deal with the dynamics of human society, interpreters will have to be aware of "the politics of interpretation" (Mitchell 1983), of the relationships between "knowledge and power", and "interpretation and power" (Foucault 1972; 1979), of "the ideological function of criticism itself" (Eagleton 1984). Indeed, "every discourse, by operating under certain assumptions, necessarily excludes other assumptions. Above all, our discourses exclude those others who might disrupt the established hierarchies or challenge the prevailing hegemony of power" (Tracy 1987:79).

Ideology-critique of text, tradition and interpretations will be necessary (cf the Gadamer-Habermas debate, Misgeld 1976; and the critical voices of feminist theologians, Russell 1985; Fiorenza 1983; 1984). We should learn to practise a hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, in analysing the "masters of suspicion", Nietzsche, Marx, Freud). In a situation of ideological conflict in particular, such as in South Africa, believing communities and systematic theology need New Testament scholarship which is self-critically aware of this (Smit 1986b).

Finally, the question of history will again become important, in addition to the attention given to the text. An interesting example, often referred to, is the Holocaust. Tracy, for example, acknowledges that some recent rhetorical analyses of the tropes employed in the writing of history suggest, in fact, that history and fiction are interchangeable genres. But then he adds:

But it still matters to us to know what actually happened in history with whatever degree of historical certitude is possible.

It is ethically obscene to state that it does not matter if the Holocaust happened or not. It did matter when the smoking gun appeared in the Watergate tapes. These are not beliefs, much less fictions, but established, historical facts. It does matter to know whether Churchill ordered the death of Sikorski or why Truman decided to use the atom bomb. Such facts matter; however painful, they free us from illusions. They demand ethical response because
their statement as fact is an exercise in ethical responsibility. It is morally irresponsible not to care what occasioned what, what actually happened, and what consequences ensued in all the classic events that formed our culture, such as the English, American, French, and Russian revolutions. It is irresponsible, for example, for Christians not to care if Jesus ever lived at all and then to go on to state their firm belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (Tracy 1987:36).

Shapiro compares "post-Holocaust writing" and "postmodernist writing" as two instances of "aporias of representation", two types of writing preoccupied with "the limits of representational discourse". She asks whether "the failure of speech and expiration of breath" in trying to relate the events of the Holocaust is the same as "the general limitation of referential discourse", and denies this. According to her, the Holocaust "challenges theories of discourse that cannot valence historical events within the limits of referential discourse" (Shapiro 1987; Winquest 1987).

The Holocaust becomes a test-case for the ethical responsibility of all theories of interpretation, and a special challenge to those methods that prefer to ignore historical questions.

In short, here systematic theology has urgent questions to put to New Testament scholarship, and even warnings to sound not to remain in the safe waters of the carefree world of the narrative, where "more of the same" can rule forever, but to interpret responsibly, that is to remain part of real life, where interpreting communities struggle for human existence.

4.5 Legitimate interpretation will depend on the purpose of the believing community

Perhaps one should say that there is no single, legitimate way of reading "sacred texts", just as there is no single legitimate way of reading literature. The appropriateness, validity and responsibility of a reading strategy depends on the purpose of the readers.

Believing communities, however, do not have the same purpose in reading. Barr has, for example, demonstrated the fundamentally different ways in which the Christian community and the Jewish community read the same "sacred" texts of the Old Testament (1981:25-48). Green, too, has recently argued that Rabbinic interpretation was, strictly speaking, not really a reading strategy at all (1987).

Green challenges the fashionable viewpoint that rabbinic hermeneutics can be seen as "a harbinger of current dissenting theories of literature such as psychoanalysis and deconstruction". Considering rabbinic interpretative practices within the context of the religion that produced them, he sees no such analogy. In fact, he rejects the "old model of rabbinic Judaism as a bookreligion", a model which "makes reading and interpreting the Bible the quintessential rabbinic activities". He continues:
By assimilating religion to reading, the book-religion model effectively reduces rabbinic Judaism to a process of exegesis and thereby marks other rabbinic activities as secondary and derivative. The model's analytical focus on how rabbis read makes Biblical exegesis into rabbinism's driving force, and, more abstractly, the interpretation of literature becomes the decisive variable for our understanding of rabbinic religion.

The book-religion model has dominated most of modern scholarship on ancient and rabbinic Judaism and its present appeal is understandable.... Rabbinic Judaism emerges as Bible-centered - the Bible read, the Bible studied, the Bible interpreted, the Bible put "into practice" - and thus a kind of religion easily recognizable and comprehensible in the modern west. Indeed, the picture of ancient rabbis as Bible-readers expounding their religion out of Scripture has a powerful plausibility in a culture where religion is conceived largely in Protestant terms. Moreover, because in our world "Bible" is merely a species of the genus "text", it takes hardly any imagination at all to place these Bible-reading talmudic sages into the more general category of literary exegetes and to suppose that for them - just as for us - the interpretation of texts was a principal passion and preoccupation.

He then denies the truth of this model, saying:

Scripture neither determined the agenda nor provided the ubiquitous focus of rabbinic literary activity and imagination.... Rabbinism's initial catalyst was neither the canonization of the Hebrew Bible nor readerly research of Scripture but the demise of the second temple and its divinely-ordained cult, the rites of which guaranteed God's presence in Israel's midst.

Accordingly, their purpose was to replace this loss. Part of their program was their use of Scripture. "Rabbinic rules of interpretation provide instruction on how fragments of holy writing can be mixed and matched to reveal patterns of signification. But the patterns can be meaningful only if they are constructed within a sealed frame of reference.... For rabbinism, Scripture's sphere of reference was constituted of rabbinic practice, ideology, and discourse, but, most important, of the community of sages themselves."

He rejects the idea that the rabbis were confronted with "endless multiple meanings" in their use of Scripture.

As heirs and practitioners of a levitical piety, rabbis could afford little tolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty, or unclarity.... By controlling the Scripture both as sacred artifact and as intelligible text, sages guaranteed that it would always refer to their concerns and interests, that it would always validate and justify their halakah and the religious ideology that undergirded it. In their various literary compositions rabbis did not so much write about or within Scripture as they wrote with it, making it speak with their voice, in their idiom, and in their behalf. The rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, therefore, was anything but indeterminate or equivocal. Rather, it was an
exercise - and a remarkably successful one - in the dictation, limitation, and closure of what became a commanding Judaic discourse.

And one only has to look at the history of interpretation in the Christian tradition itself, to be reminded of the diverse ways in which the Christian church itself has read the Scriptures through the ages (cf for example Grant & Tracy 1984).

At least four remarks can be helpful in this regard.

First. Perhaps one should acknowledge that legitimate, or responsible, readings, will depend on the purpose(s) and expectation(s) of the particular believing community at a specific point in time.

If a particular believing community prefers to read their sacred texts allegorically, or spiritually, or with a fourfold sense, or fundamentalistically, or legalistically, or confessionalistically, or whatever, it is not possible to deny them that convention, and to say that it is wrong or irresponsible. As long as they acknowledge what they are doing, and do not make other claims concerning their reading, that reading is the one that makes best sense to them.

For example: believers who use any of the abovementioned reading strategies, ought not to claim that the way they understand, say, the Christian Scriptures, is in what the text actually says, or that it is what the authors intended to communicate, or that it reflects the original function and meaning of the texts. They ought to be aware of, and admit, that it is simply their own reader-response, that it reflects merely their own ideas and convictions, and the way they prefer to read the Bible.

Of course, in his fine summary, McKnight has convincingly shown that the reader has always played a role (1985). Still, it is possible, albeit difficult and often controversial, to distinguish between readings that are "relatively adequate" and those that are not. To the extent that this is possible, namely to argue across the borderlines between different interpretive communities, and to persuade people that they are in fact doing eisegesis, and not exegesis, it may be important simply because many groups do not realise and acknowledge what they are in fact doing. Very often they may indeed claim the sacred, or divine, authority of the Scriptures to support their views and practices, while in fact they are reading their own positions into the text through interpretive conventions of eisegesis.

Scholarship may serve these groups through a critical reminder that they are deceiving themselves, and are in reality reducing the texts, through their own set of convictions and actions, in a subjective way.

Indeed, important strands of Christianity read the Bible in ways not that dissimilar, in practice, to rabbinic hermeneutics, that is they read and write "with the Bible", making it speak with their own voice and on their behalf, incorporating authoritative words, expressions and ideas in their own "sealed sphere of reference", legitimating their own practice, ideology and discourse.

Scholarship may do well to employ a hermeneutics of suspicion against them, on their own behalf, making them aware that their religious and Biblical language is only a coded version of something else.
Then again, many groups will readily acknowledge that they are doing this. They may not be interested in what "the text itself" has to say, but may be consciously reading the text through glasses of their own, whether pneumatic, materialist, confessionalistic, psychological, or allegorical. And it may be more difficult to convince them of anything.

Secondly, one must keep in mind that a particular believing/interpreting community can have different purposes when reading the Scriptures and therefore employ different reading strategies that may range the full scale, from as close as possible to a "relatively adequate" reading to a reading that is very free and subjective.

To illustrate: Reformed Christians may generally claim to adhere to the meaning of Scripture itself, that is, strive for a reading that is relatively adequate. That will apply especially to their confessions and doctrinal convictions. They will try to affirm those beliefs that seem central to the Biblical message itself, as they understand it in terms of their grid. In practising theology, however, they will be willing to speculate a bit, and to make use of other trajectories in the Scriptures, of contradicting traditions, and so forth. In defending practices of church polity, or ethical decisions, they may actually also try to claim that Scripture is legitimating their positions. In preaching, many of them will feel even more free, and accentuate the particularity and strangeness of a particular pericope, even if it seems to contradict the grid as a whole. In meditations, and songs, they may become even more free to use the words and expressions of Scripture in new contexts. And, of course, in writing ordinary (non-religious) literature they may use Scriptural allusions quite imaginatively.

Empirical studies of reader responses, which take into account the genres of the responses, may provide interesting information in this regard.

New Testament scholarship may, in fact, demonstrate all these attitudes towards the text as well, and also serve different purposes within the life of the believing community. It will, however, be important to indicate exactly what it is doing in particular readings.

Thirdly, it must be kept in mind that the different ways of reading Scripture within the Christian tradition reflect the changing paradigms in society itself through the ages.

Küng has demonstrated this in a very instructive way in his analysis of the major paradigms still present within Christianity, and their historical origins (1984). He distinguishes six major periods in the history of Christianity, in which six different, all-embracing, cultural paradigms pervaded society, with inevitable effects on Christianity itself (1984:25, for a sketch).

Serious implications are obvious. It raises the question of whether paradigms can indeed become outdated in religion, as they can in natural sciences? And what about the fact that major strands of Christianity still retain the characteristics of, say, second-century patristics, or the scholasticism of the
Middle Ages? Does that make their paradigm invalid, illegitimate or already "falsified"? In other words, how does the conversation between different religions and interpretive communities develop? The conflict of interpretations is in the end a conflict between all-embracing cultural and historical paradigms.

It also reminds us that the historical and linguistic approaches, now taken for granted in the theory of interpretation, are themselves the results of (fairly recent) switches of paradigms, during the rise of modernism. That means that they are not as timeless and as authoritative as they may seem and, according to many, they are already in a process of decline, in an era of postmodernism, to be replaced by, not yet known, paradigms of interpretation (Martin 1987).

Finally, if the interpretive community, however, like the one in which I find myself, has a different purpose and claim, namely not to read their own set of convictions and ideas into the texts, but to understand the Bible itself, then different criteria become important.

Perhaps one can say that the convention, or the consensus regarding Biblical interpretation, in a large part of the Christian community in the world today, is to try to understand the Bible in its literal and historical sense.

Of course, this is also the effect of sociohistorical changes taking place in recent centuries in the West.

If this is the purpose of the Christian community, New Testament scholarship can serve this purpose in a paradoxical way by showing the believing community the implications of this reading strategy.

In many parts of the believing Christian community, at least in these parts where we live, the historical quest has never been taken entirely seriously. New Testament scholarship may serve the church by confronting them with the consequences of their own claims.

In many parts of the believing Christian community, at least in these parts where we live, the literary quest, respecting the Scriptures as text, has not been taken entirely seriously either. Again, New Testament scholarship may serve the church by confronting them with the consequences of their own claims.

Now, both these services may actually be experienced by the believing community as a disservice, and a threat, but that would be the result of the fact that the church is unaware of the implications of its own claims.

In fact, if postmodernism is the awareness that confidence in both history and language has been mistakenly placed, that they are both disseminating, not unifying forces, and that both lead to irreversible pluralities and ambiguities, scholarship which becomes aware of this should warn the believing community of the fundamental problems involved in their very aim, and in their trust in the historical and literary quests of interpretation (Tracy 1987).

The service rendered to the church by the social project of New Testament scholarship may, at a particular point in time, therefore consist of ongoing tension, of criticism, and of struggle.
Perhaps it is useful to say something regarding the concept of "theological exegesis". Through the ages this concept has been understood in many different ways. Usually it has indicated the way in which a particular believing community has understood the Scriptures. Whenever a conflict arose between new "scientific" methodology and the believing community, the term "theological exegesis" has been used in a positive way by the believing community (for example, by Barth) and in a negative way by the scholars with their new methods. In this process the term itself has been applied to many different reading strategies.

Wuellner makes some interesting comments in this regard. In answering the question "Where is rhetorical criticism taking us?", he says:

*Rhetorical criticism of religion takes the exegetes of Biblical literature beyond the study of theological or ethical meanings of the text to something more inclusive than semantics and hermeneutics.*

I am not sure what that means. Later on, he explains. Quoting Perelman, he says that rhetorical criticism helps us to elaborate a logic for judgments of value that is indispensable for the analysis of practical reasoning as one major component of religious texts (among other components) - his italics. He adds: "Rhetorical criticism leads us away from a traditional message- or content-oriented reading of Scripture to a reading which generates and strengthens ever-deepening personal, social and cultural values". And then he goes on to enumerate many other valuable and indeed exciting functions of rhetorical criticism. Now, obviously he understands the study of the theological and ethical meaning of the text as something than has now been surpassed, because it had only to do with a traditional message- or content-oriented reading of Scripture. If indeed, however, rhetorical criticism helps us "to appreciate the practical, the political, the powerful, the playful, and the delightful aspects of religious texts", and if the believing community wants to respect the text as text and as literature, I can see no reason why rhetorical criticism should not be seen as part of "theological exegesis", especially if we are reminded that it represents only one component of the text (Wuellner 1987a).

Why should theological exegesis not make use of Kenneth Burke's dictum: "Use all that can be used"?

To end: if this is how the believing community defines its purpose in reading the Scriptures, it now becomes possible to evaluate the diverse readings and readers anew, in the light of this idea of responsible hermeneutics.

4.6 A new look at the readings and readers

It is obvious that the readings focusing on the text will be important. The syntactical reading, and the different literary readings all become valuable (I J du Plessis; Van Aarde; Wuellner; J G du Plessis). Combrink's emphasis on speech-act theories is extremely appropriate.
The "wandering-viewpoint" idea becomes useless as a method, as Botha himself suggests, not only because it cannot be put into practice, but also because Biblical texts are, by definition, read and re-read, by the believing community, and not merely read for the first time. As a theory of reading, however, it provides valuable insights.

It is very interesting that even the readings that one could expect to concentrate less on the text itself, in fact prefer methods which do focus on the text, cf Van Aarde's ideological reading, Van Staden's sociological reading, Sebothoma's Black theological reading and even Hartin's deconstructive reading. The same can be said of Schnell's tradition-historical reading. (The papers by Von Tilborg and Wuellner were not yet available when this response was written.)

It seems as if the intuitive awareness that the text itself is important (for the believing community, or for the relevant academic, and literary circles?), at this moment dominates the work of interpretation in this society.

The concentration on the text in the papers may be because of the preference in the believing community for the text, but could it not also be because of the ideological nature of such a society, and of the fear for the doctrinal and ethical implications and responsibilities, once this Lucan text was read against its sociohistorical backdrop, or with a view to church polity and Christian practice (that is concrete reader responses) in the present South Africa?

This leads me to five final remarks and questions. Firstly, we have not received a single contribution that really focused on the (social) history. To my mind, that is a serious omission (cf for example the different possibilities in Gottwald, including Brown 1983, as well as Pixley 1981, and Keifert 1985 on the importance of the historical paradigm in an inclusive approach).

Secondly, we had only one reading, namely that of Scheffler, which took reader-responses seriously. Lategan and Rousseau's contributions are very important and instructive with a view to further work. The distinction between readers and critics is very important. In Tracy's imagery: interpretation is conversation; argument, method, and theory represent interruptions of this conversation.

Thirdly, although several papers read the text within the context of Luke-Acts, few, if any, related it to the rest of Scripture. Would it not have been useful to try a kind of canonical approach as well, since that is what most of the readers of this text are in fact trying to do?

What about attempts to read it in the light of Christian doctrine? Is, for example, the present discussion in the Roman Catholic Church, and in the World Council of Churches, on the nature of the ministry and of the serving character of Christian authority and leadership, not an important context into which this "encoded imagination" could "explode"? Are modern psychological theories a more legitimate grid of interpretation for New Testament scholars than, for example, Christian doctrine, or the liturgical church year? Of
course, this would mean actually completing the hermeneutic circle, and New Testament scholars could claim that that falls outside their jurisdiction, but is reader-response-theory or psychological reading really anything different?

Fourth, issues of ethical responsibility have hardly been dealt with. Theories involving social analysis, of past and present, ideology critique, praxis-theory and so on, have been almost absent. Is, for example, the emphasis of liberation theology on a preference for the poor and a serving church, a church with a human face, not a very suitable context in terms of which to read this pericope?

Finally, systematic theology itself has in recent years become very much aware of many of the issues with which interpretation theories are dealing. Systematic theologies are often explicitly hermeneutic. They acknowledge the implications of historicity. They acknowledge that they are dealing with language, as in the different doxological theologies (Schlink 1983; Wainwright 1980), the attempts to practise narrative theology (Fackre 1984; Roth 1985), the attempts to analyse the logic and the rhetoric of theology (Ritschl 1987), the widespread interest in the metaphorical nature of God-talk (McFague 1982), and the work on the role of symbols in systematic theology. They are aware of the role of imagination and vision in theology (Tracy 1981; McCann & Strain 1985). They acknowledge the role of paradigms, models and trajectories in theology (Dulles 1974; 1983). They are very sensitive to the historical nature of tradition, and confessions, and to the dangerous distortions that have taken place in history. They often admit that the nature of doctrine is regulative rather than positivist (Lindbeck 1984). They often acknowledge the implications of postmodernity, of intertextuality, and of the radical pluralities and ambiguities involved in tradition and interpretation (Tracy 1987), of the fact that the practice of theology is in fact the writing of new meaning (Croatto 1987). It even seems that they are often more critical of self and more aware of the importance of ideology critique and social analysis than some New Testament scholars. In short, as a systematic theologian I find the work done here extremely exciting and helpful. It will help us if we could get rid of some of the existing caricatures of systematic theologians. After the methods of interpretation have had their day, the results must be organised in some way so that people can believe, hope and act - and someone must do the job. Perhaps the time is ripe for an interdisciplinary congress to help us ahead.

WORKS CONSULTED


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