THE INTERFACE BETWEEN TRAINED READERS AND ORDINARY READERS IN LIBERATION HERMENEUTICS
A CASE STUDY: MARK 10:17-22

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ABSTRACT

Working within liberation hermeneutics and using a participatory research paradigm, this article examines the interface between the trained reader and the ordinary reader. More specifically, the article reflects on readings of Mark 10:17-22 with ordinary readers. The focus of the article is on the reading or interpretation produced by reading the Bible with ordinary readers.

A series of workshops with ordinary readers provides the research context for this investigation. The hypothesis of the research is that a close and careful reading of Mark 10:17-22 in the South African context with ordinary readers would produce an interpretation of this text which included both individual and structural sin.

INTRODUCTION

In recent studies of reader response criticism in biblical studies Stephen Moore reminds us of the absence of 'real readers'. 'For biblical studies the moral is plain: criticism is an institution to which "real" readers need not apply' (Moore 1989a:90; see also Moore 1989b). While this absence is certainly anomalous in the field of reader response criticism, it is deeply disturbing in the field of liberation hermeneutics, where there is a particular commitment to the epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed (Frostin 1988:6-7; West 1991:63-79).

Fortunately, there has been some recognition of the need to hear the ordinary reader in the South African context (West 1992; West 1991:161-180; Mosala 1989; Smit 1989; Draper & West 1989; and Lategan & Rousseau 1988). This article continues with this work.

In this article I am concerned with the interface between the trained reader and ordinary readers in liberation hermeneutics, the challenge stands for anyone interested in the interface between biblical studies and the church and community.

1 While my discussion concentrates on the challenge of ordinary readers to liberation hermeneutics, the challenge stands for anyone interested in the interface between biblical studies and the church and community.
and the ordinary reader. More specifically, I am concerned to reflect on readings of Mk 10:17-22 with ordinary readers.

In some of my previous work I have explored aspects of the relation between three modes of reading (behind the text, on the text, and in front of the text) and ordinary readers (West 1991:104-141, 161-163; West 1992). For example, I have argued that there is no one mode of reading which has a privileged relationship to liberation struggles. Each of these modes of reading, whether focusing behind the text (eg historical and sociological readings), or on the text (eg literary, structuralist, and narratological readings), or in front of the text (eg thematic, metaphoric, and symbolic readings), offers a coherent and theoretically well-grounded hermeneutics of liberation (West 1991:139-141).

Drawing on four case studies of ordinary readers reading the Bible (West 1991:142-173), I also demonstrated that there is no 'typical' ordinary reader and that while there may appear to be some affinities between 'ordinary readers' and the three modes of reading, the situation is more complex. A crucial point that is made here is how different ordinary readers' modes of reading are from those of trained readers. While there are certainly interesting similarities, we must recognize that something fundamentally different is going on in the modes of reading of ordinary readers. The majority of ordinary readers read the Bible pre-critically. If 'pre-critical' is understood as it is usually used in biblical studies, then ordinary readers have little choice in how they read the Bible. They read it pre-critically because they have not been trained in critical modes of reading. In other words, although there are important similarities between the modes of reading of ordinary readers and the modes of reading of 'expert' readers, there is nevertheless this crucial difference, namely, that ordinary readers read the Bible pre-critically, while the three modes I have outlined are all critical (or post-critical) readings of the Bible (West 1991:139-141).

The implications of this point are important. For example, Itumeleng Mosala argues that black interpreters like Allan Boesak and others 'have been surpassed by the largely illiterate black working class and poor peasantry who have defied the canon of Scripture, with its ruling class ideological basis, by appropriating the Bible in their own way using the cultural tools emerging out of their struggle for survival' (Mosala 1986:184; see also Mofokeng 1988:40-41). However, while there is definitely a 'critical consciousness' on the part of some ordinary readers, this is not quite the same as the sort of historical-sociological critical approach advocated by Mosala, Norman Gottwald, and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The ordinary reader may be 'politically' or 'conscientised' and so have a general critical consciousness towards society and texts, but they do not have the historical and sociological tools to be critical of the biblical text in the same way as Mosala, Gottwald, and Schüssler Fiorenza. When young workers in Young Christian Workers (YCW) appropriate the Bible as the story of liberation they
are doing so on the basis of selected texts (and not various redactional layers) and of selected historical and sociological information (and not a systematic reconstruction of the social system behind the text) (West 1991:152-157). The political critical consciousness of some ordinary readers may predispose them to a critical approach to the Bible, but as ordinary readers they are not there yet.

Similarly, J Severino Croatto seems to argue that the poor and oppressed actually read the Bible in the way that his in front of the text mode of reading articulates. But once again it is important to recognise that while many ordinary readers do read the Bible thematically in its final form as a single canonical text, this is not quite the same as the linguistic-symbolic post-critical canonical approach of Croatto (or the similar approaches of Ruether and Schneiders). When the ordinary reader reads the Bible thematically in its final form they begin with creation (and not exodus) and read selectively (and not along a semantic axis). So while the ordinary reader may be predisposed to such a post-critical in front of the text reading of the Bible, they are not there yet.

Within liberation hermeneutics it is crucial that we recognise both the difference and the complexity of the readings of ordinary readers. If the crux of liberation hermeneutics, the epistemological privilege of the poor and the oppressed, is really going to shape our readings of the Bible then we have to recognise these factors. But we also have to go beyond recognition and begin to read the Bible with the poor and oppressed, with ordinary readers.

As I have argued before (West 1991:163), a first step in this direction requires a willingness to discover who the ordinary readers are and how they are reading the Bible. This we have begun to do in South Africa (West 1991:161-180; Mosala 1989; Smit 1989; Draper & West 1989; and Lategan & Rousseau 1988). A second step in this direction requires that we honestly analyse the relationship between trained readers and ordinary readers in liberation hermeneutics. Some preliminary work in this area has been and is being done (West [1993]).

It is the second of these steps that is the concern of this article. I have already reported on research that explores how ordinary readers respond to the three modes of reading (West [1993]). While the focus of that report was on methods of reading, the focus of this article is on the readings/interpretations produced by reading the Bible with ordinary readers.

Before I proceed with the exploratory research which forms the body of this article, it is important to delimit exactly what I mean by the terms ‘reading with’ and ‘ordinary readers’.

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2 Jonathan Draper and I have two postgraduate students who are working in this area. Ashley Mkhonza is doing research in the black community in the Natal region, and Gertrud Wittenberg is doing research in Brasil.
1 CLARIFYING THE TERMS ‘READING WITH’ AND ‘ORDINARY READERS’

1.1 ‘Ordinary readers’
I use the term ‘reader’ in the phrase ‘ordinary reader’ to allude to the shift in hermeneutics towards the reader (Abrams 1958:8-29; Barton 1984:201-207; Lategan 1984:3-4; McKnight 1985:2-3; Eagleton 1989:119). However, my use of the term ‘reader’ is metaphoric in that it includes the many who are illiterate, but who listen to, discuss, and retell the Bible.

The term ‘ordinary’ is used in a general and a specific sense. The general usage includes all readers who read the Bible pre-critically. But I also use the term ‘ordinary’ to designate a particular sector of pre-critical readers, those readers who are poor and oppressed (including, of course, women). In the latter sense the term ‘ordinary’ is similar to the terms ‘the people’ or ‘the masses’ as they are popularly used. Because I am working within a liberation paradigm, which has the poor and oppressed as its primary interlocutor, the particular usage usually takes precedence over the general.

1.3 ‘Reading with’
In the work of liberation theologies and the work of post-modernism ‘there is an ongoing tension between avoiding the indignity of speaking for the oppressed and attempting to respond to their voices by engaging in social and political critique’ (Welch 1985:44). The tension probably cannot be resolved (Segundo 1985). But we can continue to work creatively within this tension, and we can come to understand its parameters more clearly. We can only do this, however, when we move beyond ‘speaking for’ the poor and oppressed, and beyond ‘listening to’ the poor and oppressed, towards ‘speaking to’ or ‘speaking with’ the poor and oppressed (Spivak 1988; Arnott 1991). 3

‘Listening to’ presupposes the speaking voice of a wholly self-knowing subject free from ideology, while ‘speaking for’ denies the subject status of the poor and oppressed altogether (Arnott 1991:125). In other words, the danger of ‘listening to’ is that we romanticise and idealise the contribution of the poor, while the danger of ‘speaking for’ is that we minimise and rationalise the contribution of the poor.

Jill Arnott argues that Gayatri Spivak uses the phrase ‘speaking to’ not simply to make the ‘obvious point that the feminist intellectual should consult the women she is researching and invite their participation’, rather, 3

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3 The phrase ‘speaking to’ is used by Arnott and Spivak. ‘Speaking with’ may have been a more appropriate phrase than ‘speaking to’, although it is clear that ‘speaking to’ is a two-way process.
she is pointing to the need to occupy the dialectical space between two subject-positions, without ever allowing either to become transparent. By remaining constantly alert to, and interrogative of, her own positionality and that of her subject, and ensuring that the mediating process of representation remains visible, the feminist researcher may succeed in enabling a dialogue in which the ‘testimony of the [subaltern] woman’s voice-consciousness’ can be heard (Arnott 1991:125).

Arnott argues, and Spivak acknowledges, that ‘such a testimony would not be ideology-transcendent or “fully” subjective’ (Spivak 1988:297; Arnott 1991:125), ‘but it would not be misrecognised as such, and it would, at least, be heard’ (Arnott 1991:125). In other words, Arnott and Spivak are arguing that ‘speaking to/with’ takes seriously the subjectivity of both the intellectual and the subaltern, and all that this entails for their respective categories and contributions.

However, the power relations in the interface between the subaltern (or what I call the ‘ordinary reader’) and the intellectual (or what I call the ‘trained reader’) cannot be obliterated, and they must not be ignored. They must be foregrounded. Post-modern feminists like Arnott, Spivak, Elizabeth Ellsworth, and Audre Lorde emphasise the creative and constructive potential of ‘a genuinely dialectical interaction between two vigilantly foregrounded subject-positions’ (Arnott 1991:127). In other words, ‘Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening’ (Lorde 1984:112; Ellsworth 1989:319).

The intersection of post-modern and liberation perspectives on this point has provided me with a useful theoretical framework for reading Mk 10:17-22 in South Africa. Provided the unequal power relations between ordinary and trained readers are acknowledged and foregrounded, provided the trained reader is willing to learn ‘from below’, and provided the poor and oppressed continue to empower and be empowered, there is hope for something truly transformative emerging from the interface between trained and ordinary readers of the Bible.

Having clarified the key terms in my discussion, I can now describe the background to this research, the research process, and some preliminary results.

4 I do not think that Spivak and Arnott take full cognisance of the practical effects of power inequalities. The only real guarantee of a genuine ‘speaking to’ is the empowerment of the poor and oppressed. The changes taking place in South Africa are no reason for making empowerment of the poor and oppressed any less important. In fact, if we are to learn anything from the experience of the Philippines, where ‘liberation’ came ‘too early’, before the poor and oppressed were fully empowered (de la Torre 1991), then we must recognise that in our South African context the empowering of ‘the base’ is even more important now than ever before. Just what this means in the South African context at this particular historical and political moment must be clarified if we are to heed Elizabeth Ellsworth’s warning that concepts like ‘empowerment’ can and do become ‘repressive myths’ if they are used in an abstract, a-historical and depoliticised way (Ellsworth 1989:306-308).
2 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS: INDIVIDUAL AND STRUCTURAL SIN IN MARK 10:17-22

This research on reading Mk 10:17-22 with ordinary readers was a response to an earlier research project which Jonathan Draper and I conducted with a number of Anglican Bible study groups in the Pietermaritzburg area (Draper & West 1989). That research set out to understand how ordinary readers read the Bible. The Bible study on Mk 10:17-22 (see below) used by all of the participating groups was designed by us in such a way that a series of questions constantly returned the Bible study groups to the text. Other than this focus on a careful and close reading of the text, the Bible study provided minimum input and maximum opportunity for the Bible study group to develop their own readings of Mk 10:17-22. Students from the university were trained to work with the participating Bible study groups as facilitators. Their task was to promote group process, but not to offer any input (in terms of reading method or content).

We have reported in some detail on the results of that research, both in terms of reading method and content (Draper & West 1989). For the purposes of this article it is sufficient to note that almost all the readers in that research, irrespective of their different contexts, understood Mk 10:17-22 as a story about individual ‘sin’ (Draper & West 1989:42-43). In this story the sin was putting wealth/possessions before following Jesus. This was the sin of the man in the story (in the time of Jesus), and this was a potential sin for present day readers. The challenge to the wealthy man (then) and to the participants (now) was to make sure that wealth was not an idol, that possessions did not come between them and Jesus.

In one or two groups, significantly groups from poor and oppressed communities, there was some discussion of ‘structural sin’. In other words, participants in some groups argued that the problem was not only one of individual sin but also one of structural or systemic sin. However, only one group pursued this reading with any persistence (Draper & West 1989:43). But it was this possible reading which provoked my further research, particularly as ‘structural sin’ was a key concept at that time in the struggle against apartheid (Nolan 1988; The Kairos document 1986). I was interested, therefore, in exploring this possible reading of Mk 10:17-22.

A series of workshops which I was invited to facilitate, provided a useful opportunity to continue this research. As the pilot research had suggested, my hypothesis was that a close and careful reading of Mk 10:17-22 in the South African context with ordinary readers would produce an interpretation of this text

5 The focus here was on facilitating what is called ‘group process’ in communication theory. In other words, the task of the facilitators was to manage the communication process in the groups, maximising the participation of all participants.
which included both individual and structural sin.

3 WORKSHOP RESEARCH ON CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY: READING MARK 10:17-22 WITH ORDINARY READERS

3.1 Research methodology
While the research of Draper and West used an empirical research methodology, reading Mk 10:17-22 with ordinary readers within a liberation hermeneutics paradigm required a participatory research or action research methodology. Central to liberation hermeneutics and this research methodology is the participation of ordinary readers. Ordinary readers were not the objects of the research, but active subjects who participated with the researcher in the research. So in accordance with this research methodology, the research emerged from the needs and experience of communities of the poor and oppressed; the research recognised that it was not value-neutral; the research used the interpretative categories of the participants as a basis for the discourse from within which the participants developed their own theorising; the research provided a means by which distorted self understandings of the participants might be overcome by analysing the social forces that shape these understandings; the research linked theory to practice (action to reflection) reflexively offering transformative strategies which might overcome institutional and societal obstacles to democratic and free practices; and the research was motivated by an emancipatory concern where the process is just as important as the product (Luckett 1990; Grundy 1987; Carr & Kemmis 1986). While the core of the research was conducted within a participatory research model, there were aspects of the research process which were not. The final form of this article was not prepared in a participation with the various workshop groups.

My commitment to a process of 'speaking to/with' and to a participatory research methodology entailed that I acknowledge and foreground my own contribution to the process of 'reading with'. As I will describe in more detail below, my contribution to the reading process was limited to constantly encouraging and facilitating the ordinary readers to read the text carefully and closely. It was only in the final workshop of the research that I introduced 'external' information, and I did this only when it was clear that a careful and close reading of the text with ordinary readers did generate a reading of Mk 10:17-22 which included both individual and structural sin.

In each workshop I carefully recorded the reading process and product. My detailed notes, and the notes of the 'scribe' appointed by each workshop group, formed the basis of my analysis and reflection.

6 Each group appointed a person who recorded the responses of the group.
3.2 An outline of the workshop research

The research was conducted during seven workshops. Two of these workshops were held at the Federal Theological Seminary, Pietermaritzburg, one in 1990 and one in 1991, and included first year seminary students, 95% of whom were black. As the workshops took place early in the year, these students had not had very much biblical training. Another workshop was incorporated into a course in the Department of Theological Studies, the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, in 1990, and included Honours and Masters students, 60% of whom were black. Most of these students had had considerable theological training and some biblical training. Another workshop took place at the Anglican Students Federation Conference in 1991, and included a broad range of tertiary level students, 75% of whom were black. Some of these students had had some theological and biblical training, but the majority were students of other disciplines. Another workshop was the Theological Exchange Programme (TEP) National Workshop in 1991, which included ministers, facilitators, activists, and students, 85% of whom were black. Most of those attending the workshop did not have any formal biblical and theological training. The last workshop took place in Namibia and was a part of a larger workshop hosted by the Education and Documentation Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa (EDICESA). This workshop included a wide range of church officials, ministers, activists, and students, 95% of whom were black. Most of the participants had little formal training in theology and biblical studies.

All of the workshops brought together people from all over South Africa (as well as Southern and Eastern Africa in the case of the last). In each workshop women were present, but formed a small minority. A common feature of all workshops was that most of the participants were politically conscientised (Freire 1970).

There was considerable continuity between workshops in that my own contribution had been shaped extensively by the previous workshop(s). In addition, I would also share the comments and questions of previous workshops with subsequent workshops. This enabled a form of dialogue to develop between successive workshops. In a sense, therefore, there was a 'speaking with' me and through me with the participants who had shaped my speaking.

A workshop format was used because it allowed for a participatory research approach. In each workshop a similar procedure was followed. We began with the experience of participants by considering what participants understood by contextual Bible study. Discussion and debate produced, in each case, a similar framework of commitments which constituted our understanding of contextual

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7 I am using the term 'black' as a positive description that defines people in their own terms. While I look forward to the time in our South African context when such terms are no longer necessary, that time has not yet come.
Participants agreed that there were at least four commitments in a contextual Bible study methodology: a commitment to begin with reality as perceived by the (organised) poor and oppressed; a commitment to read the Bible in community; a commitment to read the Bible critically; and a commitment to individual and social transformation through Bible study (West 1992).

Having analysed our experience and understanding of contextual Bible study, we then divided into smaller groups (of between 5-12 people) to do contextual Bible study. In each of the workshops we used the same three Bible studies (see West [1993]), one of which was the Bible study on Mk 10:17-22.

It is important to note that in all workshops, except the University one, the Bible studies were done as Bible studies or as training in methods of Bible study, and not as a research exercise. For each of the groups the Bible was a significant text, and Bible study a serious religious experience. Although the focus was on the way in which the Bible was read (the mode of reading) in each Bible study, groups also recorded and reported on the product of their reading.

3.3 The Bible study (Mark 10:17-22)

3.3.1 General questions
(a) What do you think this story meant in the time of Jesus?
(b) What do you think this story means for us today?

The following questions may help you to answer these two general questions:

3.3.2 The wealthy man
(a) What do we know about this man who spoke to Jesus?
(b) What do you think he did for a living?
(c) Why do you think he owned many possessions?
(d) Why do you think he spoke to Jesus?

3.3.3 The commandments
(a) Why do you think Jesus talked about the commandments?
(b) Why do you think Jesus used these particular commandments?
(c) What do you think the commandments that Jesus used have in common?
(d) Why do you think keeping these commandments was not enough to gain eternal life?
(e) Which do you think is more important to Jesus, to keep the commandments

8 I use the pronoun 'our' here because I too was a participant in this process. See the final section of the paper for further discussion on this aspect of the research.

9 This is an abbreviated and slightly adapted form of the Bible study used in Draper and West (1989).
or to give to the poor?

3.3.4 The challenge
(a) Why do you think Jesus told the man to sell his possessions and give to the poor?
(b) What do you think the link is between the commandments and the challenge to the man?
(c) Why do you think Jesus told the man to do this before he could follow him?
(d) Why do you think the young man did not obey Jesus?
(e) What do you think Jesus meant by ‘treasure in heaven’?

3.3.5 The poor
(a) Who do you think Jesus meant by ‘the poor’ in this story?
(b) Why do you think they were poor?

3.3.6 Today
(a) Does this story say anything to us today?
(b) Who do you think are similar to the wealthy man today?
(c) Why do you think they are wealthy?
(d) Who do you think are the poor today?
(e) Why do you think they are poor?
(f) What do you think Jesus’ challenge means to us?

3.4 Reading with ordinary readers
In each case of my reading Mk 10:17-22 with ordinary readers I was acutely aware of the power dynamics implicit in my presence. My training gave me power in the context of Bible study. There were, of course, other locations of power in each Bible study group. Like Michel Foucault, I recognise that there are multifarious points of power (Foucault 1980; see also Welch 1985). The ordinary readers in the Bible study groups also had power, particularly those who came from communities of the poor and oppressed. They had power because they were the voice of the poor and oppressed in the contextual Bible study process and in the process of ‘speaking to/with’.

Recognising these particular locations of power, I was especially concerned that ordinary readers did not simply defer to my reading/interpretation, but also that they did not simply attach a predetermined interpretation onto the text. So I was determined to foreground my own contribution to the reading, and also to assist ordinary readers in reading the text. I therefore concentrated my contribution on certain aspects of the text, specifically the link between the commandments (v19; 3.3.3 (c)) and the link between these commandments and the command to the man to sell all that he possesses and to give to the poor (v21; 3.3.4
(a) and (b)). Because ordinary readers tend not to read the text carefully (Draper & West 1989:41, 45), one of my roles as a facilitator was to focus their reading on the text. The Bible study questions provided a means of doing this.

When ordinary readers in these workshops read verse 19 carefully, prompted by question 3.3.3 (c), there was general agreement that these commandments were concerned with human-to-human or social relationships (in contrast to the omitted commandments which referred to the human-to-God relationship). Once ordinary readers realised this, they then began to explore why Jesus chose these commandments (3.3.3 (b)), and concluded that there was obviously something wrong in the area of the man's social relationships. This realisation in turn led to considerable discussion and debate as the readers probed for a more precise understanding of the problems in the man's social relationships.

As ordinary readers began to explore and probe these questions they were constantly driven to read the text. For example, many readers went back to the questions under 3.3.2 and then back to the text, but this time with a more focused question. Verse 22, with its reference to 'much property', became a key verse in their attempt to understand this man's wealth. This response of ordinary readers to return to reread the text closely was a particularly exciting development because one of my contributions to 'reading with' ordinary readers was to encourage a careful reading of the biblical text.

Their return to the text generated a certain amount of frustration, because the ordinary readers could not find out very much about the man's social relationships from the text. By drawing on their own South African experience some readers argued that the man probably obtained his 'much property' through exploiting others. However, there were other ordinary readers who argued that this was not the only possible reading, and that this man could have worked hard for or inherited his 'much property'.

Through most of this discussion and debate I attempted to facilitate discussion on as broad a basis as possible, encouraging all participants to share their views. But as I have already stated, my contribution was to pose specific questions which would return readers to the text. So when the ordinary readers themselves recognised the social and structural dimensions of 'owning much property', I drew their reading to the relationship between the commandments (v19), the command to the man to sell all he possessed and to give to the poor (v21), and the statement that he owned much property (v22). In other words, I constantly encouraged the ordinary readers to explore the internal relationships within the text.

Once again my contribution led to a return to the text. Those ordinary readers who had argued that the man had probably obtained his 'much property' by ex-

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10 No one translation was used during these Bible studies. Participants used various translations. I am using the New American Standard translation here and below.
exploiting others, based on their own South African experience, now found textual evidence to support this argument. Gradually others began to see this argument, and so a reading of Mk 10:17-22 which included a concern for social and structural sin.

(In the last workshop Bible study organised by EDICESA in Namibia I also introduced ‘external’ sociological support for such a reading. Once ordinary readers had seen the possibility of such a reading, I then introduced extra-textual material, material which the ordinary readers did not have access to. In other words, I provided the participants with a sociological context against which to read the text. My sociological sketch of first century Palestine included the sociology of the Jesus movement, the temple-state system (Horsley 1989; Waetjen 1989; Wengst 1987; Nolan 1986), and other historical and sociological factors which interested the participants and which assisted their understanding of Mk 10:17-22.)

In summary, my contribution to the process of reading the Bible with ordinary readers focused on facilitating a close reading of the text. (In one case I provided some sociological data.) With my contribution and their own considerable resources we came to a reading of Mk 10:17-22. Once again I must assert that my contributions were extensively shaped by successive readings of this text with ordinary readers. My contributions came from the interface between a concern for the text and communities of ordinary readers.

3.5 Structural (and individual) sin in Mark 10:17-22

Along with many other ordinary readers (Draper & West 1989:42-43), the participants in these workshops understood this text to be about individual sin, the sin of making wealth and possessions an idol, and of allowing wealth and possessions to come between people and God. But the ordinary readers who participated in the workshops also understood this text to be about social and structural sin.

In exploring the relationship between the commandments (v19), the command to the man to sell all he possessed and to give to the poor (v21), and the statement that he owned much property (v22), we understood that the text (and Jesus) made a connection between the socially orientated commandments, the

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11 I use ‘sociological’ to include political and economic, as well as social factors.
12 My sociological sketch was based substantially on the work of these scholars.
13 The introduction of historical and sociological data forms a further component of this ongoing research. I include some preliminary commentary on this aspect of the research below, in brackets, because it was not a component of the other workshops. At present Jonathan Draper and I are extending this aspect of the research in a related research project with an Anglican Bible study group in Sobantu, Pietermaritzburg (West & Draper 1991).
14 Ordinary readers did not distinguish between ‘the text’ and ‘Jesus’. The ideological
wealth of the man, and the poor. We argued that Jesus chose these commandments because he knew that the man had gained his 'much property' by exploiting the poor, whether the man himself had done so consciously or unconsciously. It was also argued that there might have been social structures which produced wealth for the man and poverty for the people, in the same way that the social system of apartheid empowered white South Africans to become wealthy and pushed black South Africans into poverty. So even if the man had worked hard for his property or had inherited his wealth, he was still part of a sinful social structure.

Given this reading, the challenge of Jesus to the man (v21) to sell all he possessed and to give to the poor made sense. The man could not follow Jesus until he had 'repented' of, and made restitution for, his social and structural sin. As *The Road to Damascus* document argues, following Jesus requires structural repentance and conversion.

(My introduction of sociological background information in the EDICESA workshop contributed to this understanding. Recognising that Jesus was from among the poor, and that the early Jesus movement consisted largely of the poor, made it even clearer why the man must first sell all he possessed and give to the poor. The man could not participate in a sinful system and participate in the Jesus movement. He had to make a choice.)

The commandments in verse 19 also took on a new meaning in the light of this reading. The man thought that he had kept the commandments, but he was thinking only on an individual level. While he himself might not have murdered anyone, or committed adultery, or stolen, or given false testimony, or defrauded, or dishonoured his parents, he was a part of and perpetuated a system that did all of these things. The ordinary readers in the workshops, most of whom were black, gave countless examples of how the apartheid system had resulted in murder, adultery, theft, legal injustice, unjust wages, and the destruction of black family life. For example, an inadequate health system for black people, impoverished 'homelands' and townships, and biased and brutal security forces murdered black people everyday. The migrant labour system, pass laws, the group areas act, and single-sex hostels all generated adultery and destroyed family life. Forced removals, no minimum wage, and education for inferiority were forms of theft and fraud. The discriminatory legal system and the state controlled media constantly disseminated false and biased testimony.

(The ordinary readers in the Namibian workshop were fascinated by the sociological world of Palestine in the time of Jesus, and immediately saw South African parallels with the temple-state system, Roman occupation, ruling 'class' perspective of this particular text was not the concern of these Bible studies, although some participants did raise the question when referring to the synoptic parallels (see also Draper & West 1989:41).}
Jewish-Roman collaboration, the Sanhedrin, landowners, day-labourers, peasants, the position of women, etc. While I consistently cautioned against simple correspondences between ‘then’ and ‘now’ (Draper 1992:67; Nolan 1988:7-30; Boff 1987:132-153), this sociological perspective was clearly useful to the ordinary readers and provided a grounding for their reading of the text.

The challenge of Mk 10:17-22 was clear to us. The man, and those who are like him today, must repent and make restitution before they/we could be reconciled to God. This text (and Jesus) seemed to say that there could be no reconciliation with God without repentance and restitution. So while we must be constantly alert to wealth as idolaterous danger of ‘much property’, we must also be constantly critical of our social location in sinful structures and systems.

4 CONCLUSION

Reading the Bible with ordinary readers is a creative and challenging process. From the perspective of liberation hermeneutics there is no choice. If we are serious about the ‘option for the poor and oppressed’ then we must read the Bible with them. This is also true, of course, for all who are concerned to relate biblical studies to ordinary readers in the church and community.

I have argued that ‘reading with’ requires vigilantly foregrounding our various subject-positions. The temptation for trained readers who stand in solidarity with the poor and oppressed is either arrogantly to speak on behalf of the poor and oppressed or uncritically to listen to the poor and oppressed. When we succumb to this temptation we elide our presence and our power. Such transparency means that we trained readers either dominate or do not contribute, and that ordinary readers either do not contribute or are dominated. Reading the Bible with ordinary readers means that we trained readers acknowledge that we have much to contribute to reading the Bible in South Africa, and that we also recognise that ordinary readers have much to contribute to reading the Bible in South Africa.

The participatory research paradigm offers an appropriate research methodology for researching these and other aspects of liberation hermeneutics. The participatory research methodology does not determine the results of the research process any more than other research methodologies determine research results (Hammersley 1992; Guba, Lincoln 1989). The distinctive contribution of participatory research is that it both acknowledges the presence of the researcher in the research process and facilitates the active participation of the research subjects in the research process.

Reading Mk 10:17-22 with ordinary readers has been a challenging and

15 This article is clearly not the place to debate research methodology.
creative process. We have created a cumulative reading which is not found in any academic commentary nor among ordinary readers in the church and community. However, the interface between academic biblical studies and ordinary readers has produced a reading which is profoundly challenging in our South African context. The present situation of transition in South Africa calls, I would suggest, for just such a creative and challenging reading of the Bible. The contextual Bible study process and the process of reading the Bible with ordinary readers offers us an interface in which to learn with each other.

WORKS CONSULTED


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