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The Idea of Transformed Hermeneutics

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Preface

The 21st century is an era of advanced technology and information. Nevertheless, the church has been losing its influence on society in spite of living in a more congenial atmosphere than in any other era of history. The church is in part surrendering to secular religions rather than taking the lead in the new era. There are external influences on the church (namely the historical-cultural atmosphere) but the main reason for

the surrender is internal: the authority of the Bible, on which the church stands or falls, has been deconstructed. It is no longer considered as the Word of God for today. We need a renewed hermeneutical concept that will affirm the spiritual authority of Scripture and to accept Scripture as the Word of God.

In this paper I will firstly diagnose today's hermeneutical crisis and then suggest a new hermeneutic to overcome it.

1. The challenges of deconstructivism: the crisis of text and the discovery of the canonicity of Scripture

Deconstructivism removes the idea of 'book' and suggests the idea of 'text'. The idea of 'book' is a product of western theological thinking. The book, by its very existence, asserts that truth and values are already determined. Deconstructive thought claims an openness of text, denying the idea of book. Text is radically opened, in contrast to the closure of book. This openness is a function of the irreducible contextualization of

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Scripture. All texts reflect their contemporary context.¹ Text is no more than inter-text. In the text world there is no original; all are nothing more than copies of what went before.² There is no fact except the text; no reality outside the text. Here text means a story. A reality is nothing but text.

Deconstructivism denies the canon. The result of denying an objective meaning to text is an anarchism of meaning. By saying 'the play of the meaning is unrestricted'³ there is an infinite variety and choice of meaning. Scepticism is the result of denying the fixed meaning of the letter. Deconstructivism dissolves the truth into the intertextuality of text. It says there is no fixed truth but rather a relative, infinite interpretation of text.

By denying as well as doubting the meaning of text, deconstructivism, falls into radical nihilism, which results in suspicion being cast on the being and significance of self, existence, history, and the cosmos. The root of nihilism, as proclaimed by Nietzsche, is the denial of the existence of God. The being of self, existence, text, history and the cosmos is grounded in the divine creation and the creation thought of God by the logos. The negation of creation thought causes the deconstruction of all the values, culminating in radical nihilism, as Nietzsche said.

Deconstructivism wanders in an endless labyrinth. It wants the deconstructed languages to become the new data for the postmodern imagination. Deconstruction is the hermeneutic of the death of God.⁴ Deconstructivism undertakes to escape from a world where the book makes up the totality of the meaning. Deconstructivism disapproves of archaeology seeking for the first naivety, as it also disapproves of utopian teleology seeking for the last purpose. If viewed through literal logic, deconstructivism has neither a pure origin nor a realized end. The end is regarded as strictly death without life.⁵ Deconstructionist paradise, or the ideal world, is nothing but a world which has lost all meaning. Such a world is one of pure absence.

Deconstructivism reduces the concept of traditional theology into a syntactical phenomenon. Meaning is not univocal but a diverse, equivocal, endlessly drifting phenomenon. Here purpose and salvation are no longer expected. Here writing has no purpose or end; it is a play of endless straying and wandering. So all of the traditional canon can be deconstructed. But this deconstruction comes to nothing, denying even the process itself. A deconstructive theology is an endless maze.

¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: a Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 178.

² Hungghyo Kim, *Deconstructive Philosophy of Derrida* (Mineum Sa, 1993), p. 369.

³ Taylor, *Erring*, p. 173.

⁴ Taylor, *Erring*, p. 6.

⁵ M. Taylor, 'Errance: Lecture de Jacques Derrida: Un essai d'a-théologie postmoderne', (Trad. M.Barat. Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1985), p. 149.

2. Overcoming deconstructivism

2.1 A new interpretation of inspiration

In order to overcome deconstructivism, the canonicity of the Bible needs to be reestablished and the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible rehabilitated. Canonicity is the doctrine stating that Scripture is the inspired Word of God. Inspiration is the doctrine that Scripture is written by the illumination of the divine Spirit. To confirm the canonicity of Scripture, its inspiration needs to be endorsed. The Princeton theologian, B.B. Warfield, explained inspiration of the Spirit as a 'confluent act' whereby the work of the Spirit and that of the human writers come together or converge. The illumination of the Spirit removes human prejudice and broadens the horizon of understanding. It protects the writer from erring and provides the work with a divine nature not achieved by human power alone.⁶

The Bible is inerrant,⁷ for the inspiration of the Spirit impacts on the author's selection of words in the parts and the whole of Scripture. Today's evangelical theologians generally accept the confluent theory of inspiration.⁸ The inerrancy of Scripture through the confluent act of the Spirit is ascribed only to the autographs of the Bible. Today we

do not have the autographs. However, we have become convinced of biblical inerrancy through the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*, as Calvin says. As readers, we can repeat today the experience of the confluent act of the Spirit impacting on the writer, for the same Holy Spirit gives today's believers right understanding. The Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, works confluent on believers just as the same Spirit of truth did in the eras of the Old Testament, the New Testament and the historical church. The Spirit, who worked on the original writers in their own context, works today on readers and gives knowledge of truth from the writer for this day and age.

The 1978 Chicago Declaration on Biblical Inerrancy declares that the Holy Spirit, who is the divine writer of Scripture, convinces us of its truth by inward testimony and helps us recognize its meaning, opening our heart.⁹ In the inward testimony of the Spirit there is a confluent act between the Spirit and the reader. The earlier Berkouwer expressed such an organic relationship between the Spirit and the human writer with the notion of adaptation (*aansluiting*).¹⁰ Adaptation means that God comes down to a human level and tells us about himself just as a father communicates by coming down to the level of his children.

⁶ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Samuel G. Craig (ed.) (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), p. 158.

⁷ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, p. 173.

⁸ Don A. Carson and John Woodbridge (eds.), *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 45.

⁹ Norman L. Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), pp. 494ff.

¹⁰ Henrik Krabbendam, 'The Functional Theology of G. C. Berkouwer', in G. Lewis and B. Demarest (eds.), *Challenges to Inerrancy*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 287-294.

By the application of critical methods to the extant texts we can reconstruct a copy very close to the autograph, even though we do not have the biblical autograph today. Therefore, the absence of the autograph cannot be the grounds for claiming biblical errancy. As Article 2 of the Chicago statement declares, the range of the inspiration is not partial but plenary. Scripture should be believed in all it claims as the instruction of God, obeyed in all it demands as the commandment of God and accepted in all it promises as the assurance of God.¹¹ So the 1978 Chicago Declaration on Biblical Inerrancy suggests a methodical framework to allow the Word of God to be revealed through Scripture.

2.2 Demanding a new hermeneutical thinking: biblical realistic thinking

A new hermeneutical method, as suggested by Tübingen New Testament scholar, G. Maier, is required to overcome the current, defective historical-critical method.¹² Rhetorical criticism (James Muhlenberg), structuralist criticism (Roland Barthes), canonical criticism (Brevard S. Childs), reader-response criticism and the lesser known lines of analysis are all new efforts to overcome the limitations of the historical-critical method.

What evangelical hermeneutical thinking warns against most is accommodation to the presupposi-

tions of Enlightenment scepticism, agnosticism, rationalism, idealism or existentialism. Whereas Enlightenment scepticism is suspicious of the possibility of recognizing the transcendent, agnosticism insists on not knowing the transcendent, and rationalism approves only the rational or tries to affirm the transcendent within the limits of reason. Moving on from that point, idealism denies the transcendence of God, and existentialism denies that we can come into a rational relationship with the transcendent.

Using the scientific-interpretative method, evangelical hermeneutics does not adopt the presuppositions of the secular, non-biblical and atheistic systems. The biblical text should be interpreted by considering its literary form and genre using grammatico-historical exegesis. This means that Scripture interprets itself, as the Reformers insisted. When analysing the text and questioning the data behind it, biblical hermeneutics avoids relativizing or devaluating the teaching of the text or denying the relevance of the authorship of the texts. In this system, literary tools have a positive role in helping readers to understand the Bible, but also a negative aspect, if the reader is caused to misinterpret Scripture by their use. Therefore biblical hermeneutics uses the tools not absolutely but critically.

True critical interpretation of Scripture is not that form of biblical criticism which uses any critical methodology at all, but rather a self-criticism of Scripture facilitated by the interpretative tools. The funda-

¹¹ Geisler, *Inerrancy*, p. 495.

¹² G. Maier, *Das Ende der Historisch-Kritischen Methode* (Wuppertal, 1975)

mental presupposition in biblical interpretation is the recognition of Scripture as the authoritative God-given canon. The essence of biblical interpretation consists in listening to the biblical message and letting it emerge from the passage and context. It is important to accept the canon in its final form, and to grasp the true meaning of its message. It is not desirable to criticize it on the assumption that the editors changed the contents; when this view is adopted, the contents are hardly considered as facts at all. A true biblical interpretation recognizes the apparent disagreements, conflicts and tensions between the texts.¹³ A hermeneutical thinking is needed to resolve these tensions, but it should be one that does not lead to content criticism. Instead, it possesses an expectation of more accurate knowledge in the future.

In a limited way, true hermeneutical thinking accommodates historical criticism within its framework to reveal the divine revelation using the critical tools that are appropriate for listening to divine revelation. It recognizes validity in form criticism and approves a normal literal meaning in biblical interpretation. This literal meaning is the grammatico-historical one biblical writers used. Genesis 1-11, including the creation and flood reports, are inerrant facts for they are divine, revelatory events, difficult for natural scientific reason to understand. True biblical interpretation understands the results of con-

temporary natural scientific research in the light of the biblical revelatory truth, instead of the reverse.

True critical interpretation claims no hermeneutic uniformity. This allows critics to separate out possible meanings of the text. Those listening to and interpreting it can interpret the text in diverse ways, for the text is speaking to us with authority. As Ricoeur says, it has a surplus of hermeneutic meaning. The method which does not view critically what the Bible actually says but is actually open to its message is a biblical realistic one.

2.3 A pneumatological hermeneutic situation

That the Bible is the Word of God is confirmed by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the experience of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is a true way of recognizing the canon. The fact that the Bible is the Word of God is not merely a dogmatic tenet, but should be accompanied by subjective assurances. This is one reason the doctrine of the cessation of the charismatic gifts should be revised.

A. Kuyper, B. B. Warfield, A.A. Hoekema, J.D.G. Dunn, R. Gaffin, and others, all in the Reformed tradition, insist on the doctrine of the cessation of the charisma. They deny the continuation of the gifts, affirming instead that the Spirit poured them out once for all in the early period of the church.¹⁴ According to this view, charismata ceased when

¹³ Geisler, *Inerrancy*, p. 501.

¹⁴ Youngbae Cha, 'Pneumatology', *Bible and Theology* 7 (1989), pp. 137-151.

the canon was complete¹⁵ because the gifts were meant to be temporary, given in order to consolidate the basis of the church in the apostolic age. 1 Corinthians 13:8, 'when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away' (RSV), is suggested as exegetical grounds for this position, with the 'perfect' thing considered as the completion of the canon.

Donald G. Bloesch critiques the position of confessional evangelicals who build on Reformed confessions and transmit the Dutch tradition, such as Westminster Theological Seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary. He claims that by emphasizing the confessions and the spirit of Reformation, they devalue the living work of the Holy Spirit who was active throughout the history of the church.¹⁶

Such a doctrine not only destroys the relevance of the charismatic gifts for the life of the historical church, but it also lacks biblical grounds.¹⁷ On the other hand, in favour of the doctrine there are some strong voices. First, St Augustine, who withdrew the idea of the cessation of charismata in his later book (*The City of God* 22:8), referred to innumerable instances of the continuity of charisma.¹⁸

Then the work of the Holy Spirit was evident in Jonathan Edwards' revival movement of 1735-40. Edwards understood the work of the Holy Spirit to include giving divine and supernatural light immediately to the human soul. He preached this understanding as 'a biblical and reasonable doctrine'.¹⁹ In this great awakening movement, there appeared such supernatural phenomena as tears, falling down, sighing, bodily pain, crying, violent shaking, visions and ecstasy.

Finally, at 3:00 a.m. January 1, 1739, in the early dawn, Wesley prayed through the night with seven pastors and sixty members in Peter Lane. He witnessed many fall down on the floor as God's power descended strongly; Wesley himself was also included in this number. Because of such phenomena, he was criticized and rejected by the church leaders. In his letter to Thomas church in June 1746, he affirmed strongly that he did not think there had been any age when God had not been acting in sovereignty.²⁰

Even in modern Korea, charismatic phenomena such as speaking in tongues and prophecy have been appearing and spreading widely in the mainline church.²¹ Furthermore, the strong charismatic phenomena

¹⁵ R. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979)

¹⁶ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 38.

¹⁷ Youngbae Cha, 'The view of R. B. Gaffin and problems', and 'The once-character of pentecostal Spirit pouring', *Pneumatology* (1987)

¹⁸ Augustine, 'City of God', in J. Defferrai (ed.), *The Fathers of the Church Volume 24: St. Augustine, City of God, Books 17-22* (DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), pp. 431-445.

¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, 'A Divine and Supernatural Light immediately imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine', in *The Work of Jonathan Edwards* Volume 2, pp. 12-17.

²⁰ John Telford (ed.) *The Letters of John Wesley* Volume 2, (London: Epworth, n.d.), p. 261.

²¹ Yu Youngki, 'On the charisma experience in the Korean Church', *Bible and Theology* 15 (April 1994), pp. 75-81.

are evident in various mission fields. Here they stand over against the systematic opposition of indigenous religions or militant religions, such as Islam, and once again undergird the foundation of the church, and in so doing, witness to the Christ's salvific work.

3. The consequence of historical criticism: the crisis of the Bible – the crisis of the church community

Historical criticism, influenced by the Enlightenment and leading to the negation of the church and tradition, considered the church not as a faith community but merely as an historical religious institution. It made critical reasoning absolute and did not take Scripture as the Word of God, but rather as an historical document which is a product of human religious experience. Historical criticism set up human reason as an absolute criterion for historical research on the assumption that humans can reconstruct objective truth through reason. Thus, in interpreting biblical history, it rejected divine intervention and miracles. In the pre-suppositions of critical historical research lies a Hegelian dialectical philosophy of history or a historical positivism of the Lange school or an existentialism of Heidegger, rather than biblical thinking.

Over against the historicist concept of the 19th century religions-historical school, Gerhard von Rad proposed the concept of salvation-history. In saying biblical salvation-history was a history of Israel's faith confession, he tried to reconstruct it

with a contemporary historical critical method. This resulted in viewing the exodus event of the twelve tribes of the Israelites, their conquest of Canaan and the narrative in the books of Moses and Judges not as real historical events but as events projected by a faith confession.²² Historical criticism loses the real history in which divine salvation has been realized. The history of faith without real history is merely an existential history. Von Rad's concept of salvation-history is nothing more than 'a fideistic-poetical literature construction' (*eine gläubig-dichterische Literakonstruktion*).²³

Through the literary criticism of the Old Testament text and research into the historical geographical background of the Philistines, the A. Alt – M. Noth school drew the conclusion that the history of Israel was not a real history but a kerygmatic one. This school comes into the category of 'historical nihilism', especially in its denial of the history of the patriarchs and the historicity of Moses and the Exodus event.

Historical criticism concentrates only on the illumination of the historical dimension of the text, as seen in the background of the author, his character and the history of the text. It assumes the key to interpretation is outside the text, namely, in its origin

²² G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Volume I, D.M.G. Stalke (trans.) (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p.111.

²³ Helge Stadelmann, 'Hermeneutische Erwägungen zur Heilsgeschichte', in *Glaube und Geschichte, Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie* (1986), pp. 44-49.

and background.²⁴ Thus, it does not recognize the inward message, the salvific revelation of God and the theological implications the Bible conveys. It neglects the effect the biblical text had in Christian history, the faith experience of the church and its members who have understood the inward message of the text. Historical criticism completely breaks the biblical text into fragments by understanding the text merely as a product of human religious experience.

The following critique of the British biblical scholar, I. Howard Marshall, is relevant. 'From the outset the historical-critical method is committed to an explanation of Christianity which is different from that of the Bible. The assumption not simply that parts of the Bible may be false but they actually are false is built into [this] method.'²⁵ The historical-critical method resulted in the conclusion that the Old Testament reports are completely isolated from the real historical events to which they purport to refer. They are viewed as a story made in a faith setting or a historical story which a later faith community has written as a religious document, although projecting the authorship and historical setting into a period earlier than its own.

4. An idea of new hermeneutics: a dynamic relationship of text centred and reader-response – transformed hermeneutics

4.1 Need of a new hermeneutic

Higher criticism has reflected the conflict between opinions and interpretations held among its scholars.²⁶ These conflicts can be seen in the procedures chosen and the various analytical and complex processes of criticism such as text criticism, text translation, literary criticism (data criticism), form criticism, transmission history criticism and redaction criticism.

Such hermeneutic artificiality was mentioned by Gadamer in his volume, *Truth and Method*. Truth is not discovered by method; rather method is a hindrance to discovering truth. Instead of helping us hear the voice of God, today's higher critical hermeneutic has obscured the revelation of truth through the artificiality of its work. Rejecting a methodological approach, Gadamer suggested the hermeneutics of effective history to make the text's own message apparent.²⁷ The proper task of biblical hermeneutics is to listen to the voice of the living God speaking through the biblical text.

Reformed theology should neither unconditionally criticize nor blindly follow contemporary historical criticism, but instead search for a way to

²⁴ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 1-13.

²⁵ Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, (Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 84 ff.

²⁶ Kim Joongeun, 'What is the evangelical Study of the Old Testament?', *Bible and Theology* 19 (1996), p. 88.

²⁷ Kim Yung Han, *From Heidegger to Ricoeur*, 4th ed., (Pak Young Sa, 1993), pp. 257-265.

overcome its methodical shortcomings. The positive contribution of historical criticism is to provide relevant knowledge of the formative historical process of Scripture (namely, the initial compositional process of writing, content, transmission and final form of the text) and to help understand the meaning of the biblical text.²⁸ Because the Bible itself demands an historical appreciation, historical interpretation is an important task an interpreter has to carry out in order to search for the meaning of the text.²⁹

Historical criticism should be used according to a theory of history informed not by positivism but by biblical faith. Biblical scholarship needs to abandon its one-sided method which on the one hand considers only the historical meaning but neglects theological meaning (Gabler etc.) or on the other hand, considers only the theological meaning, but neglects the historical meaning (Eissfeldt etc.). Instead it should carry out an integrated historical-theological methodology to explain the historical meaning and, by extension, its meaning for today.³⁰

Evangelical scholars affirm that the meaning of text is in the intention of the author and the historical background. They undertake a historico-grammatical approach to biblical interpretation and they endeavour to

interpret Scripture in the light of its historical origins. However, the difference between them and historical critics lies in their identifying the text with its final form, namely, the canonical form. The Old Testament was the canon for the historical Jesus and the early church. As Childs indicated, accepting the Bible as canon suggests a way to overcome higher criticism. Walter Kaiser, especially, uses a biblical hermeneutic to identify the meaning of text and the intention of the author. He applies Hirsch's hermeneutics, oriented to the intention of the author, to biblical interpretation: 'The author's intended meaning is what a text means.'³¹

Evangelical historical interpretation considers the sovereignty of God and the fideistic experience of the church as important. During the 1980s, American evangelical biblical scholars working in the area of gospel studies suggested a new literary criticism as an alternative interpretative method to overcome the limitations of traditional historical criticism. Historical criticism until then dealt with the issues in terms of the source of the whole process of writing, including the origin of the gospels. Thus it was called 'source criticism' or 'literary criticism'.

Such a literary criticism made efforts to explain the world behind the text (namely, the historical Jesus, the situation of the early church and the situation of the author and community) by concentrating its hermeneutical concern on the

²⁸ W. S. Vorster, 'Historical Criticism: Through the Eyes of a Historian', in Hartin, P.J. and Petzer J.H. (eds.), *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 15-43.

²⁹ Vorster, 'Historical Criticism', p. 16.

³⁰ Jung Kyu Nam, *The Pulse of Old Testament Theology* (Doo Ran No, 1996), p. 39.

³¹ W. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 33.

authoring process of the text (origin/event to oral tradition; transmission to proclamation to editing/writing). Thus, in historical criticism, the present text is understood as a kind of window through which to view the world behind the text. Of course, it is necessary to understand the background out of which the text has come in order to better understand the presently available text. In this case, historical criticism should be used as an instrument to help comprehend the intention of the author, as it appears in the text itself

In reality, however, historical criticism was used not as a tool but as an end in itself. As a consequence, the gospel was considered not as a historical biography but as a social (faith/theological/literary) product devised on the basis of the faith of the early church. Historical criticism resulted in the text being cut into fragments, thereby reducing the value of the final text and author by artificially analysing the text according to the origin (source criticism), transmission (form criticism) and editing (redaction criticism) of the source.³²

In contrast, the new literary criticism should have a major hermeneutical concern in comprehending the content and message of the gospel, which is the final text conveyed to us. By concentrating on the meaning of biblical text, it is possible to find the unity (structure, plot) of the biblical text and the intention of the text/author (as indicated by the text itself); this process is assisted by an

understanding of the genre (which is mainly concerned with the form of the text).³³

This new understanding, which takes seriously both the historical facts and the revelation presented by the Bible, argues that general literary interpretation neglects these two aspects and thus uses it in a limited manner. Such an interpretation was developed in the centre of Society of Biblical Literature of North America. The evangelical representatives include Longman of Westminster Theological Seminary, Ryken of Wheaton College and McKnight of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.³⁴

However, special methods, such as the new literary criticism or rhetorical interpretation, are not the only tools for interpreting the Bible. Rhetorical interpretation contributes to the comprehension of the intention of the author as it appears in the text. It also seeks to understand the stance of the audience (reader) through a rhetorical analysis of the structure, and to comprehend the logic and intention of the author corresponding to it.³⁵

The new literary criticism has to consider the following points. Firstly,

³³ M.A. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 6; T. Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books-Zondervan, 1987); L. Ryken and T. Longman III, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993)

³⁴ Sang Bub Shin, 'The Trends of Evangelical New Testament Scholarship', *Bible and Theology* (April, 1997), pp. 37-70.

³⁵ G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Interpretation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984)

³² N. R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 12.

the historical character of the Bible. The Bible is not merely literature, but is based on a history which underlies the creative expression of the work. Secondly, there is the theological character of the Bible. If there was a situation where a new literary interpretation did not accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God but understood it merely as a rhetorical product of religious group, a different interpretation would result. Therefore, the new literary interpretation here needs to be pneumatological, canonical and theological.

Concretely, a new literary interpretation understands the gospel as a genre of 'historical narrative'³⁶ which is based on a history of revelation and the faith of the reader growing out of the historical fact of Jesus' life. In so doing, it takes the form of the text into consideration while maintaining an emphasis on the content of the gospel as a historical fact. Furthermore, this new literary interpretation takes into consideration the intention of the author and the rhetorical effect on the reader.³⁷

Thirdly, this new literary criticism takes account of the power of the Bible to transform the reader. It relates the meaning of the text to the world and also to the structure of the text by understanding it as an autonomous work independent of the world of the author. However, the meaning of the text comes out of the author's intention through the

text and the world of the text is brought into the reader's world. Biblical interpretation does not end in the interpretation of the text, but brings this interpretation into the contemporary situation. This is reader-response criticism.³⁸

This interpretation emphasizes the current situation of the reader of the text. Today's situation is not that in which the text was formed, but it is the situation in which the text reveals its meaning. Through the reception of the text by the present readers, the text secures the position of the canon and carries out the role of the Word of God, namely, being the living text for today. This interpretation accepts the biblical text as a whole without fragmentation, and accepts it as a canon for today's faith community, namely, for the life of church.³⁹

I agree with Edgar Conrad's proposal for interpreting Scripture: the practice of biblical theology needs to be carried out by its readers in communities of faith who explore the otherness of the biblical text. Conrad's contribution is an alternative to, and supplement for, the shortcoming of the historical critical interpretation carried out by critical analysis which does not consider the aspect of the faith-world the biblical text owns. As the Word of God for this age, the Bible transforms the life of the reader and community who accept the text as the Word of God.

³⁶ R.A. Culpepper, 'Story and History in the Gospels', *Review and Expositor* 81 (1984), p. 474.

³⁷ Sang Bub Shim, 'An Understanding on the Historical Essence of the Gospel', *Theological Navigator* 248 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 210-214.

³⁸ Longmann III, *Literary Approaches*

³⁹ Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah: Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 161.

Biblical interpretation used by Reformed theology has to go further than merely searching for the world behind the text or the world of, or in, the text. Instead, the task of interpretation is to illuminate the meaning of the text for today's concrete reality situationally and ethically. However, today's radical reader-centred interpretation as it appears in liberation theology, black, Minjung and feminist theologies, cultural criticism or the late colonialistic criticism, makes an error by changing the text's own meaning and historical context as it transposed the text into the present situation. A true situational meaning of the text is revealed only when the original meaning of the text is rightly elucidated.

Interpretation should not be bound by method. Diverse methods can be used. For the right interpretation, a proper discussion and dialogue between the biblical text and community has to be searched for and a method of multi-dimensional biblical interpretation is required. An integrated historical, literary and theological interpretation should be implemented. No individual or denomination can speak for the whole truth of the Bible. God alone possesses this truth. We can understand biblical truth only by dialoguing in the church community and learning from each other in the Spirit with an open attitude.

4:2 A transforming power of text

Paul Ricoeur moves the focus from what lies behind the text to what occurs in front of the text. A hermeneutical concern is to listen to

what the text says to the reader, not simply stopping when the reconstruction of its history is complete.

The individual or collective ego-centred horizon should be expanded in a way that de-centres the ego. The text opens a new horizon for the reader and brings a change. Therefore, the text is related to the author in a way that can productively transform the readers' horizons, attitudes, criteria, and their community and interpersonal situations. The method of transforming reading rearranges the expectation, presuppositions and purposes the readers bring to the text. If the readers respect the distinctiveness of the textual horizon in challenging their own horizon, a creative interaction between the horizons can occur. The distance between reader and text contributes to a positive hermeneutic function. If the readers are caught prematurely by the horizon of the author, they remain locked in his own closed horizon, or worse still, the readers may be captured by the fantasy that the text has spoken to them sufficiently. In the case of premature assimilation, no interaction occurs between the horizons of the reader and text.

It can also happen that no transforming event accompanies the reading of the biblical text in a Christian community. The reason is that the reading process is dominated by the horizon of expectation already formed by the community of readers.⁴⁰ Often preachers draw what they want from the text. The

⁴⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 44.

congregation likewise reads the text in a way that confirms the identity and lifestyle of the community they are enjoying. In such a situation, biblical reading is made subordinate to dogma and becomes instead an institutional mechanism which confirms the continuity of identity and the collective belief.

The word 'transformed' does not mean the reader views the tradition negatively and negates it. Rather, the word 'transformation' means 'creative interaction'. The reader's pre-understanding of the biblical text and horizon is formed by the tradition of that reader. This preunderstanding comes out of a productive event occurring in the broad context of this tradition.

The biblical text draws the reader from self-centredness and conveys a message of judgement and love. Therefore, an encounter with the text is an encounter with others and, through that, an encounter with God. As Paul Ricoeur says, if a reader encounters others despite the distance in time and culture, then there occurs a true encounter with the text. Through understanding others, the reader searches for a growth in self-understanding. Hermeneutics is self-understanding through understanding others.⁴¹

God's Word encounters readers in the sharpest way when it treats us as an adversary, revising and correcting our old thinking and expectations. When the horizons encounter and interact, the biblical reading has the

capacity to become a transformed reading. A transformed hermeneutics means the biblical text, received as the Word of God, encounters us as a transforming text. The text transforms the recognition, understanding and action of the reader and reading community. The text also suffers from the pain of transformation in the hand of the readers and of the understanding community, because they can misunderstand and misuse the text. This happens when readers use the text as a tool to confirm their own prejudice and belief.

The transforming power of the text stands itself as a potential; its transforming effect becomes reality only as the reader opens up to the text. Markus Barth says as follows: 'The unique power of the Bible flows from the fact that the biblical words [are words] of love . . . between God and man. The reading of the Bible therefore should be compared to reading love letters rather than the study and use of a law book.'⁴² The recipient of a love letter does not respond by acknowledging receipt of information. Reading here becomes transactional. This entails an act of acceptance, commitment and deeper bonding. Texts shape and transform readers in many different ways. For example, a narrative text draws the readers into a projected world in which a flow of events and feelings is imaginatively experienced at a pre-reflective level. In this case, the transaction lies in the readers' willingness to step into this world and to let their

⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essay in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 17.

⁴² Markus Barth, *Conversation with the Bible* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 9.

feelings and imagination be directed by the world of the text.

All readers bring to the text a horizon of expectation – a mind-set or system of reference. The biblical text challenges and transforms this horizon of expectation. Patterns of habituation in the reader's attitude, experience and reading practice form the horizons of expectation. The representative example is the message of the cross. The message of the cross brings about a reversal of evaluation and, at the same time, conflict and a change in the horizon of expectation (I Cor. 1:18, 23-4). The ground for a transformed horizon of hermeneutics is a theology of the cross. In the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-15), the horizon of the readers possessing a general concept of justice is shattered and transformed by the Word so that it conveys a generosity of grace. The parable of the Pharisees and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) clash constantly with the horizons of the every day expectations of the reader. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount breaks up the horizons of hermeneutic expectation. Before he experienced justification by faith, Luther read the Bible in an attitude of anger and fear toward the divine righteousness. After reading Romans 1:17 he was born again and experienced an entry into paradise. Luther came to experience the great love of God as much as he feared divine righteousness.

The closing words

In this 21st century, Reformed theology needs to develop a firm view of

Scripture and a new biblical hermeneutical method, which are faithful to Christian experience and theology. Basing itself on traditional pneumatology, it needs to establish a concrete and experiential pneumatology to explain the worldwide activity of the Spirit today. It needs to prepare for a hermeneutical situation in which the church community receives the Bible as the Word of God.

In the 21st century, characterized as an age of complex technology and advanced communication facilities, the church needs to have a post-critical attitude which goes beyond both a pre-critical and the critical attitude. It needs to go beyond both the pre-critical naivety of intuitive and emotional understanding and the critical attitude of objective, scientific and analytic understanding; yet it needs to include both these understandings. Post-critical thinking is holistic and it is the thinking of transformed hermeneutics. As Ricoeur says, one needs to have a second naivety to go beyond destructive criticism and reach a positive one. This is possible by understanding the spiritual dynamics of the Bible as the Word of God. Therefore, Bible reading in the church should be conducted within the horizons of transformed hermeneutics. The direction of transformed hermeneutics is twofold: to inwardly experience the work of God descending through the Word to the reader, while outwardly transforming the reader, church and society.