

# 'TEXT' IN A MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXEGETICAL APPROACH<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The quest towards a multidimensional exegetical approach arises from the present state of the exegetical discipline. Presently, this discipline is characterized by an overwhelming variety of methodologies, but also by exclusivistic claims made by exegetes. In developing a multidimensional approach, various theoretical issues should be taken into account. One of these important issues is the development which took place in literary and biblical studies with regard to the concepts 'text' and 'meaning'. A short overview of this development is provided. Thereafter, a proposal towards a multidimensional exegetical approach, namely that of Daniel Patte, is described and evaluated. The article ends with the formulation of guide-lines for research towards a multidimensional exegetical approach, and with a short discussion of the author's own proposal.*

## 1. Introduction

To deal with two such slippery concepts as 'text' and 'multidimensional exegetical approach' in any scholarly discussion, is certainly not an easy task. On the one hand, 'text' has become a much-debated topic. Under the influence of modern literary criticism biblical scholars have come to ask questions like 'what is a text?' 'What constitutes a text?' or 'what is the meaning of a text?' These questions not only ask for an ontological description of the concept 'text', but they also have immense epistemological implications.

On the other hand, the concept 'multidimensional exegetical approach' is a relatively new one in scholarly discussions.<sup>2</sup> Until recently, and presently,

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1. This article (in a shortened form) was delivered as a paper at the SBL International Meeting in Rome.

2. In the South African context this discussion is mainly conducted in New Testament circles. Cf amongst others the following contributions: Combrink (1983, 1986, 1988 and 1990); Late-

the main trend among exegetes was and is to develop and refine their particular methods in accordance with the traditional exegetical approaches. The recent quest towards a multidimensional exegetical approach arose from the present state of the discipline. In a recent dissertation<sup>3</sup> the state of the discipline was characterized with the concepts 'variety' and 'exclusivity'. With due regard to the fact that the description under these two single headings can lead to a reductionistic view of the problem involved in biblical exegesis, they will, however, be used for pragmatic reasons. It must be emphasized that this is not the only manner in which the present exegetical dilemma can be described.

The variety in exegetical methodology is constituted by several factors. The situation is not as simple as merely distinguishing, for example, among a historical-critical,<sup>4</sup> a structural,<sup>5</sup> a narratological,<sup>6</sup> a sociological<sup>7</sup> and other broader approaches.<sup>8</sup> In general, every exegete, practising one of these broader approaches, has his/her own specific application of the method(s) involved. Of course this is also due to an intricate pattern of hermeneutical views,<sup>9</sup> as well as dogmatic-confessional<sup>10</sup> and ecclesiastical<sup>11</sup> differences. The variety in exegesis is further expanded by the overwhelming number of scholarly specialization areas which each contribute a particular set of information to be used in the exegetical process. The exegete is bombarded with grammatical constructions, archaeological data, historical information, icono-

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gan (1984, 1987 and 1988); Rousseau (1986, 1988a and 1988b); Vorster (1989) and Botha (1991).

3. Jonker, L C (1993). *Exclusivity and Variety: A Typological Study Towards the Integration of Exegetical Methodologies in Old Testament Studies*. Unpublished D Th dissertation, University of Stellenbosch.

4. Cf in particular the numerous exegetical publications from the German speaking world. The following may serve as examples of more recent historical-critical text books: Richter (1971), Koch (1988), Fohrer *et al* (1989) and Steck (1989). Although Richter prefers to call his methodological proposal 'Literaturwissenschaft', it can still be classified under the rubric 'historical-critical'.

5. Patte (1990b and 1990c), implementing Greimas's structural semiotics, may serve as representative.

6. The following publications serve as illustrations: Alter (1981), Berlin (1983), Sternberg (1985), Bar-Efrat (1989), Ska (1990), and Powell (1990).

7. Cf for example Gottwald (1980).

8. No wonder that Alonso Schökel (1986:285) compares contemporary biblical scholarship to a tree: 'Methods and models are branching out in different directions. It was not like this before, when each method developed as a continuation of the previous one, so that the development could be compared to the rings of a cedar or the notches of bamboo.'

9. Feministic and liberation theological views can be mentioned in this regard. For a discussion of some of these views and their relevance for the South African hermeneutical debate, cf West (1991).

10. Cf for example the discussion between Neusner (1983) and Childs (1987) on the different views of Old Testament Theology held in Judaism and Christianity respectively.

11. The South African ecclesiastical situation is a good illustration of this point. Cf Esterhuysen (1989).

graphic material, cultural-historical backgrounds, etc. which are presented in an overwhelming number of scholarly publications. Add to it the insights from 'neighbourly' subjects such as sociology, anthropology, general linguistics, modern literary criticism, communication theory, semiotics, pragmatics, etc. Enough to confuse every exegete!

The other side of the exegetical coin is constituted by the exclusivistic claims made by exegetes. Exclusivity manifests itself when exegetes claim that their own specific approach and accompanying method is the only legitimate one, and the only one which can lead to valid results<sup>12</sup>. Only a few (if any) exegetes make this claim knowingly. Rather, exegetes tend to claim exclusivity in a sublime way (or unknowingly / unsaid). As a consequence of the era of specialization we live in, <sup>13</sup> every exegete presents his/her scholarly work as important for the exegetical process. Normally it is left unsaid that he/she is of the opinion that his/her specialized work is not only important, but also the most important to be taken into consideration in the exegetical process. These claims are usually closely associated with the *Sitz im Leben* of every exegete. His/her-world view, his/her view on history, on truth and on what constitutes meaning, etc. are all influencing factors on his/her exegetical methodology.

Against this background it is thus understandable that the question whether a multidimensional exegetical approach is desirable and possible, is increasingly being asked in methodological discussions. <sup>14</sup> The aim is to evade the problems posited by variety and exclusivity in exegetical praxis. One such a proposal towards a multidimensional exegetical approach was made by Prof Daniel Patte in a paper delivered at the SBL Meeting in Vienna (August 1990). Closely connected to the present discussion on exegetical theory is the discussion which was stimulated by modern literary scientists on the questions 'what is a text?' and 'what is the meaning of a text?'. The remainder of this article will thus be devoted to an evaluation of Patte's proposal in the light of different opinions among literary scientists on the issue of the identity of the text. This discussion will be concluded with the formulation of certain guidelines which should be followed in future research on the desirability and possibility of a multidimensional exegetical approach.

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12. For example, for Bultmann (1957:410) 'unabdingbare Voraussetzung aber ist *die historische Methode* in der Befragung der Texte. Exegese ist ja als Interpretation historischer Texte ein Stück Geschichtswissenschaft' [his italics]. Carson (1980:20) offers another example: 'Some movements with hermeneutical ramifications have developed somewhat exclusivistic attitudes or (otherwise put) a kind of inner ring syndrome. Structuralism for instance, often stumbles into this pitfall. Such an attitude is to be strenuously avoided: it is not axiomatic that one or two hermeneutical methods may justly claim either exclusive rights or sufficient power to exclude some other methods.'

13. Gordis (1970:93ff) points out how specific scholarly interests and specialization areas can lead to exclusivistic claims.

14. Cf e.g. Leon-Dufour (ed) (1971); Buss (ed) (1979); Crossan (1982); Rousseau (1986, 1988a and 1988b); Patte (1990a in particular). Cf also the discussions of Vorster (1988), Van Aarde (1988) and Lategan (1988).

## 2. What is a text?

At present, as is clear from scholarly discussions, the question 'what is a text?' is not an easy one to answer. To mention only one example from scholarly literature: <sup>15</sup> in a volume compiled by Valdés and Miller (1985), various opinions by several literary critics on 'the identity of the literary text', are presented. Some of them go as far as denying that the text has any identity, and others assert that the question as to the identity of the text is an inappropriate one.

From this publication (and others) it is quite obvious that the question 'what is a text?' cannot be answered without considering the question 'what constitutes meaning?' The objective of the present discussion is not to provide a final answer to these questions, but merely to feature some of the major points in the current debate on this topic.

A few decades ago it would have been far easier than today to supply an answer to the question: 'What is a text?' Before the advent of poststructuralism and postmodernism, literary critics and biblical scholars alike considered texts to be objective entities over and against the reader / interpreter as the subject in the process of determining the meaning of texts. A text was almost unanimously regarded as words and sentences (or signs), ordered in a specific way, representing a certain reality to be conveyed to the reader / interpreter of the text. Meaning was regarded as inherent to the text, owing to the author(s) who brought that about. This meaning had to be discovered or uncovered through the process of interpretation. In biblical exegesis one even came to speak of an archaeological mode of interpretation: the meaning had to be 'dug out' from the text by an interpreter who operated from outside the text. Because it was generally accepted that the biblical text had gone through a long process of transmission and growth, the history of the text was also taken into consideration in establishing the meaning of the text. This meaning was often regarded as something unitary, and was designated with expressions like 'the meaning of the text', 'the intention of the author', or 'the message of the text'. Some even argued that a text only has one valid meaning. <sup>16</sup>

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15. Cf also S J Schmidt (1972 and 1989).

16. Stout (1982, 1 ff) argues that the question 'what is the meaning of a text?' is an inappropriate one, because the meaning of the term 'meaning' has become ambiguous. He illustrates the confusion with regard to 'the meaning of a text': 'Marxists will say that the meaning of a text is a matter of its position in a context defined by the history of class struggle. A Freudian will say that the real meaning is a matter of personality and family romance as construed by the devices of psychoanalytic theory. The structuralist will say that textual meaning reflects the deep structure of human consciousness, which can be understood only in the light of what Saussure and Jakobson tell us about the nature of language itself. An intentionalist will say that meaning is a matter of what agents intend by what they say, and that no-one ever (consciously) intended meanings like the ones Marxists, Freudians, and structuralists ascribe to the texts they study. A 'New Critic' will say that the meaning of a text is determined by a system of relations internal to the text itself, irrespective of historical context or authorial pretext. And on it goes' (1982:5). Referring to Stout, LaFargue (1988:341) opts to speak not of 'the meaning', but of 'the determinate substantive content' of a given text.

Although it is mainly the situation in the past which is illustrated above, this view on what a text actually is, is still prevalent in biblical exegesis today. As in previous decades various exegetical approaches are still built upon the assumption that meaning has to be recovered from the text (as the object) by an exegete (as the subject). However, unlike decades ago, this basic assumption is now being challenged by poststructural and postmodern views on what a text is. Before focussing on these challenges, it is deemed appropriate to mention the variants on this basic premise which have gradually developed.

Whereas the main emphasis was initially on the author(s) and his/her intention with the text, there has been a shift of interest to the text, and subsequently from the text to the reader and the act of reading. A more active role in the reading process has been allocated to the reader / interpreter.<sup>17</sup> However, in some circles it was still argued that the text provides its own constraints or contours as a guide for the reader to find meaning in the text. Some literary critics<sup>18</sup> described the reading process as a process of 'gap filling'. Although it should consequently be possible to discover more than one meaning in the text (provided that they are all discovered inside the limits provided by the text), the text is still regarded as determinate with a limited number of possible interpretations.<sup>19</sup> With the shift of emphasis to the reader and the reading process, the distinction between the meaning and significance of the text was also becoming important.<sup>20</sup> Meaning is then regarded as that which the original author intended the text to say. Significance, on the other hand, depends upon both the text and the readers, and is a function of their mutual interaction. 'The meaning of a text is constant and objective, whereas its significance may vary for different readers' (Marshall, 1980, 5).

Poststructuralist approaches challenge these very views on what a text is, and what constitutes meaning. The role of the reader is emphasized even more than before, with the result that the text is being regarded as nothing more than black spots on paper. By means of specific strategies of reading, the reader then creates meaning, or assigns meaning to the text.

The subject-object relation between reader and text (which was described earlier) came to be denied. Fish (1980), for example, denies the dichotomy be-

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17. Vorster (1986, 351ff) illustrates how the succession narrative (2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2) can be read from a reception theoretical perspective. Deist (1988:39ff) shows how the recent developments have prompted exegetes with the choice between "controlled" exegesis and/or "creative" interpretation'. Meyer (1991:15) summarizes the challenges put to the historical-critical methodology by this shift of interest to the reader and the act of reading: 'Erstens die Herausforderung an historisch-kritische Exegeten, auch die letzten verdeckten Bindungen an den Positivismus zu kapfen; zweitens die Herausforderung, intensiv und andauernd auf den impliziten Autor oder die Stimme des Textes zu achten; drittens die Herausforderung, nicht eine bloße Pluralität von Sinngehalten, sondern die Fülle und Multidimensionalität des Sinngehaltenes des Textes zu entdecken.'

18. Cf Iser (1978).

19. Cf also Vorster's (1989:56) discussion.

20. Cf Hirsch (1976) in this regard.

tween subject-object, because he regards both (i.e. the formal features of the text and the reader) as products of an interpretative community.

Derrida, in his deconstructionist view on literary criticism, also challenges the traditional view on textuality. He criticizes the fact that readers have traditionally searched for a finite meaning in the text. By extending Ferdinand de Saussure's model of a differential system to all of reality, Derrida argues that each concept is defined relationally, with reference not only to other concepts, but to the totality of a person's culturally bound life-world. The written word can therefore never have a presence, because it is deferred indefinitely.<sup>21</sup> Meaning is never absolutely present or absent in a text.<sup>22</sup>

According to this view, texts can no longer be regarded as closed systems or objects as was the case before. Meaning is thus not inherent to texts (because it was put there by an author), and even not assigned to texts by readers, but it is a function of their relationship with other texts in a network of intertextuality.<sup>23</sup>

From the above-mentioned description it should be clear that the answers to the questions 'what is a text?' and 'what constitutes meaning?' play a crucial role in the formulation of a multidimensional exegetical approach. But this will be elaborated on after the description of Daniel Patte's model.

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21. Cf Derrida's term *différance*.

22. LaFarge (1988:347), in his discussion of Derrida's view on the indeterminacy of texts, denies that there are no grounds for defining the determinate contents of texts. 'To deny the absoluteness of any given 'center' is not to deny the possibility that it can function as a center. As I pointed out earlier, in relation to Saussure's linguistics, there is no necessary connection whatsoever between the model of a differential system and the thesis of indeterminacy. Determinacy of meaning is perfectly possible without absolute foundations' (1988:350).

23. Cf Van Wolde's (1990:333ff) evaluation of the development which took place from Michael Bakhtin to contemporary applications of intertextuality. She raises two points of criticism against the 'ruime opvatting van intertekstualiteit' of Kristeva and followers (e.g. Derrida): i) The concept 'intertextuality' is being used too vaguely. 'Het begrip intertekstualiteit kan alleen functioneren als analyse-instrument en verklaringsmodel, wanneer het nauwkeuriger wordt gedefinieerd, en niet in zo algemene betekenis wordt opgevat dat alles (inter)tekst is' (1990:336). ii) She finds unacceptable the contrast between an infinite text universe on the one hand, and individual intertextual reading on the other. 'Het lijkt van weinig belang in een dergelijk oneindig universum een paar willekeurige herhalingen of intertekstemmen te constateren, zoals het ook geen zin heeft in een brede rivier enkele druppels water te onderscheiden' (1990:336). She continues to develop her own opinion on text and intertextuality in a hermeneutical-semiotic context. Vedder (1988:253) criticizes the fact that contemporary views on intertextuality give preference to the synchronic aspect. 'De synchronie heeft de voorkeur boven de diachronie. Bij de bestudering van de doorwerking is echter de gedachte van de diachronie naar mijn oordeel niet opzij te zetten, omdat het bewerkte altijd later is dan het werkende.' He compares this synchronic view on intertextuality with the 'wirkungsgeschichtliche' text analysis which can be traced back to Gadamer. He describes this mode of text analysis as 'diachron intertekstuee; onderzoek' (1988:253). Cf also the theoretical description of 'Wirkungsgeschichte' and intertextuality in the introductory chapter of Van Ruiten's dissertation (1990). For a more extensive overview of the exegetical-hermeneutical discussion in the Netherlands cf Oost (1987).

### 3. Description of Patte's proposal <sup>24</sup>

Patte is a well-known New Testament scholar, notable for his application of a semio-structural methodology. <sup>25</sup> Behind his argument towards a multidimensional exegetical methodology, a two-fold impetus can be discerned. Firstly, in recent years he came into contact with exegetes from various backgrounds. In his conversation with exegetes from Africa, Jewish and African-American scholars and students, critics from feministic circles and Latin-American exegetes (3), he came to the conclusion that the traditional exegetical practice often alienates those who are not part of the exegetical mainstream. Due to the fact that these scholars all read the Bible with different perceptions, a variety of interpretations exists. The traditional exegetical practice can hardly accommodate this variety of interpretations. The second impetus behind his proposal is the challenge towards 'an exegesis that would be both critically and ethically responsible' (2) which was expressed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her SBL presidential address. <sup>26</sup>

Patte has come to the conclusion that the traditional quest 'for the single semantic coherence of a text' constitutes the centre of the problem'.

The irony is that the various kinds of exegetical methodologies do not demand that we conceive exegesis as a quest for 'the' single coherence of a text. Rather, they point to a plurality of coherences in a text, each elucidated by one or another of the several methods that each methodology includes (3). <sup>27</sup>

It is possible to comply with the solicitation of being critically and ethically responsible in exegetical praxis by acknowledging the fact that there can be more than one meaning, all with equal status, in a specific text.

It has already become evident that Patte has specific conceptions regarding 'text' and 'meaning'. To understand what he means by these concepts it is necessary to consider his distinction between 'critical exegesis' and "common reading" and hermeneutical interpretation' (9). According to Patte, text *an sich* has no meaning. However, text can generate meaning by means of its variety of dimensions (or teachings). Critical exegesis, then, is the description of the manner in which the text generates meaning. It should be borne in mind, according to Patte, that a description of the meaning-producing dimen-

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24. This discussion is a reaction on Patte's paper "Toward an Exegesis without Boundaries" delivered on 8 August 1990 at the SBL meeting in Vienna (Austria). Citations, however, come from his draft (dated July 5, 1990a) of *Discipleship according to Matthew* on which the paper was based. The introductory chapter "Toward an ethically responsible practice of critical exegesis" is applicable. Only the page numbers will be mentioned in this section. The writer hereby expresses his gratitude towards Prof. Patte for the suppliance of the material. Cf also Jonker (1991:552ff) for a discussion and evaluation of this work.

25. Cf his *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts* (1990b) and *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics* (1990c).

26. Cf E Schüssler Fiorenza (1988:3-17).

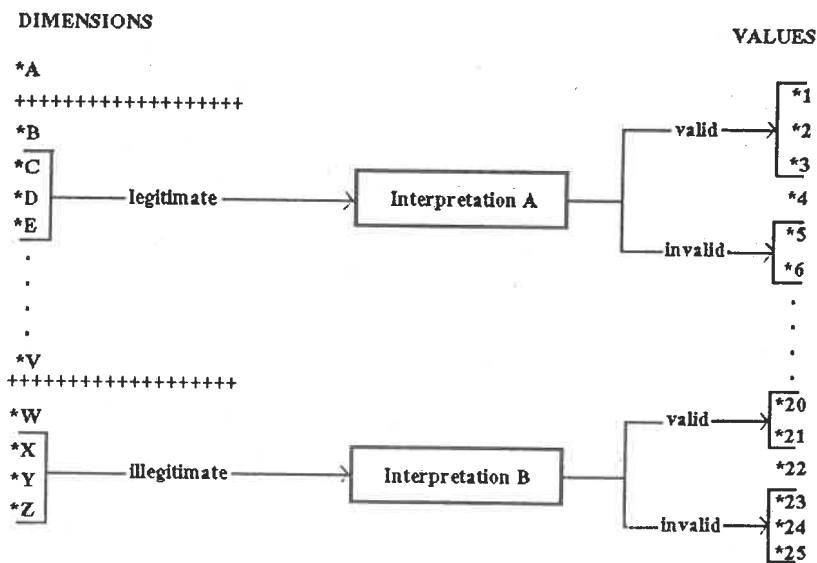
27. Cf also Patte (1990b:25ff).

sions of the text is not equivalent to a description of the meaning of the text. Critical exegesis is only a description of the textual features which contribute to the production of meaning. 'Common reading' and hermeneutical interpretation, on the other hand, can be described as the process in which the reader produces meaning, according to the dimensions of the text.

A common reading is always a hermeneutical interpretation, a quest for the 'meaning of the text' for us [but not universally relevant - LCJ], a quest for a single [but not the only - LCJ] coherent meaning (10).

Patte subsequently describes the relationship between 'critical exegesis' and 'common reading' by the designations 'legitimate interpretation (properly grounded in the evidence of the text)' and 'ethically valid or authoritative interpretation (appropriate in terms of a specific set of cultural, religious, or social values)' (10). This relationship can best be described by means of the following diagram:

**DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF DANIEL PATTE'S PROPOSAL TOWARDS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXEGETICAL APPROACH**





In the diagram the possible meaning-producing dimensions of a text are represented by the letters A to Z in the left-hand column and the cultural, religious, or social values of readers by the numerals 1 to 25 in the right-hand column. Dimensions A, W, X, Y and Z represent dimensions which do not contribute to the meaning-production of a specific text, while the dimensions delineated by the '+'-signs symbolize the true meaning-producing dimensions of that text. Interpretation A, based on true dimensions of the text (C, D and E) is a legitimate reading. Interpretation B, in contrast, is illegitimate, because it is based on foreign dimensions (X, Y and Z). Both of these interpretations (A and B) can either be valid or invalid depending 'upon the appropriateness of this choice for the specific cultural, religious, and social circumstances in which the reading takes place' (11). For example, in a specific community (with values 1, 2 and 3) an interpretation based on a specific set of dimensions (C, D and E in this case) will be valid and authoritative. In another community (e.g. with values 5 and 6) the same interpretation may be invalid, unethical and without authority. The same applies to Interpretation B. However, because Interpretation B is not based on true dimensions of the text, it is illegitimate and must be rejected. Although this interpretation may be appropriate and valid in a specific community (with values 20 and 21 in this case), it cannot be accepted. The aim of a multidimensional exegetical methodology should thus be to produce legitimate and valid readings of the text.<sup>28</sup>

Acknowledging the legitimacy of an undetermined number of different readings, Patte puts the question whether the exegete is not forsaking 'his' role as 'referee' concerning what constitutes legitimate readings (13). This question should be answered both positively and negatively. The exegete does not lose this role to verify, on the basis of evidence of the text, whether or not specific readings are legitimate. On the other hand, he loses his role as 'referee' in the sense that he (the traditional exegete<sup>29</sup>) no longer exercises it alone. The composition and nature of the group of exegetes change.

The exegetical domain can be envisioned as including the interests and concerns of a diversity of groups *which have equal status* [his italics - LCJ]. This is envisioning a pluralistic exegetical domain where the integrity of each group is respected (13).

It is already clear from the previous discussion that Patte does not propagate a particular relativism. He states explicitly:

... I object to the relativism - any reading is as legitimate (or illegitimate) as any other one - which results from overemphasizing the role of

28. This diagrammatical discussion could easily be illustrated by examples from the interpretational reality. Cf e.g. the completely different ways in which a European and an African community will receive the same interpretation of a text. It must also be emphasized that in reality the situation is much more intricate than can be shown in the diagram. It is important to point out, however, that a variety of legitimate interpretations is possible.

29. According to Patte 'i.e., primarily, male European-American exegetes' (13).

the readers to the point of denying that the text provides constraints for the interpretations (16).

By acknowledging the fact that the dimensions of the text provide constraints for the production of numerous legitimate interpretations, the opposite assumption is that it should be possible to discern which interpretations are illegitimate.<sup>30</sup>

#### **4. Evaluation of Patte's proposal**

It has become clear that Patte attempts to find a way between the extreme dangers of 'exclusivity' and 'variety'. In his model he endeavours to overcome the one-sidedness of exclusivism, without abdicating to the relativism of variety. He has shown that a multidimensional methodology has the advantage of allowing every method to make its own unique contribution. The other positive factor is that Patte acknowledges the role of the 'receiver' (i.e. the religious, social and political aspects) in the reading process, and incorporates the distinction between valid and invalid readings in his model. 'Critical exegesis' does not take place in a vacuum.

However, not everything in Patte's description is above criticism. As was clear from the above-mentioned description, the concept 'text' plays a central role in Patte's model. The dimensions of the text supply the criteria according to which one can determine whether an interpretation is legitimate or illegitimate. The exegete is not a subjective 'referee' in this determining process. He has to keep to the meaning-producing dimensions provided by the text. Three points of criticism should be raised against Patte's model.

i) It is not clear from the available material what precisely Patte means by the 'dimensions' or 'teachings' of the text.<sup>31</sup> According to him these dimensions are constraints provided by the texts to guide the reader/interpreter in the process of hermeneutical interpretation or common reading. On the one hand he states that meaning is not inherent in the text, but is only produced in the interaction between the dimensions of the text and the reader/interpreter (with his/her specific set of religious, social and political values). On the other hand, these dimensions are seemingly not 'meaningless', because they can act as criteria for determining the legitimacy of interpretations. Are these dimensions perhaps only formal criteria? The relationship is also not clear between Patte's use of the term 'coherence' (which is understandable in the light of his own semio-structural background) and the term 'dimensions'. By propagating

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30. Cf Patte (1990b:32-33): 'While allowing for a great multiplicity of meaning-effects, the textualization posits semantic constraints that limit the range of possible meaning-effects. While a multiplicity of valid readings is possible, certain readings are excluded (or can be excluded) as illegitimate.'

31. Although Patte's theoretical foundation, namely Greimas' 'generative trajectory' (described in Patte:1990b), provides a solution to this problem, it is still not completely clear how these dimensions operate as constraints for the production of meaning and how they assist in determining the legitimacy of interpretations.

that there are more than one coherence in the text, he seems to refer to the interpretations produced along the various constraints provided by the text. When the distinction between 'meaning' and 'significance' is applied in this case, Patte seems to be working with the second concept.<sup>32</sup>

ii) Furthermore, if 'critical exegesis' is a description of the 'textual features that contribute to the production of meaning' (10), how do the different 'methods' relate to the 'dimensions'? Does it mean that a specific method makes use of a specific set of objectively known dimensions in the reading process? Or are the dimensions described by the methods? This point still remains to be clarified.<sup>33</sup>

iii) A critical question should be asked with regard to his remark on the danger of relativism. Reference is made to his statement:

... I object to the relativism ... which results from overemphasizing the role of the readers to the point of denying that the text provides constraints for the interpretations.

From the quotation the impression is created that any methodology which denies that meaning is inherent to the text (or in Patte's case: that meaning can be produced from the constraints provided by the text) should be excluded from his multidimensional model. Exegetes from these circles then might just as well accuse Patte of exclusivistic claims. This argument is thus contrary to the aim of his multidimensional model which he states in the words:

The exegetical domain can be envisioned as including the interests and concerns of a diversity of groups which have equal status. This is envisioning a pluralistic exegetical domain where the integrity of each group is respected.

Although it is possible to criticize certain aspects of Patte's model, the development in the direction of a multidimensional exegetical approach must be regarded as a step in the right direction. A few guide-lines for future research in this direction can now be formulated.

## 5. Guide-lines towards a multidimensional exegetical methodology

Patte's proposal towards a multidimensional exegetical methodology has been discussed above and numerous others have been mentioned. From these proposals the following theoretical issues emerge as fundamental to the discussion:

(i) When studying the (in)compatibility of exegetical methods in a multidimensional and/or integrational methodology, it is of the utmost importance to

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32. Cf further Patte (1990b:25ff).

33. Although Patte (1990c) explains how his six-step semio-structural method relates to the 'generative trajectory', it remains a question how other methodologies relate to this theoretical foundation.

be familiar with the term 'exegesis', and with how the task of this discipline is defined. It should be evident that the manner in which exegesis is practised (the 'how' of exegesis) depends entirely on the definition which is ascribed to it (the 'what' of exegesis). Research conducted to determine the (in)compatibility of methods in a multidimensional and/or integrational methodology should be sensitive to this issue. This also implies that the interrelation between exegesis and hermeneutics should be accounted for.

(ii) The concepts synchrony and diachrony feature prominently in methodological discussions. These discussions can benefit from the insight that synchronical and diachronical procedures are not mutually exclusive, but do in fact complement one another.

(iii) It should be noted that the integration of methods does not necessarily lead to a multidimensional methodology.<sup>34</sup> Integration normally means that the epistemological presuppositions of a particular method function as framework within which procedures of another method are then incorporated. The danger then exists that the presuppositions of the second method are ignored or misrepresented. A multidimensional methodology, on the contrary, takes seriously the presuppositions of each method, and endeavours to interrelate these methods on another level.

(iv) Text and meaning, as was clear from the above discussion, are central concepts to this discussion.

(v) Various scholars make use of a communication model in their proposals towards a multidimensional exegetical methodology. That the biblical texts constantly operate within various communication situations cannot be negated.

How these theoretical issues can be duly accounted for in a multidimensional methodology, is worked out as Model III in chapter 6 of the author's dissertation. The refinement and implementation of this model will be done in future discussions. This model proposes that each methodology is implemented within its own theoretical framework, and that interaction between methodologies takes place on a broader hermeneutical level, rather than on an exegetical level. Without repeating the elaborate description of this model, the following presuppositions can merely be mentioned here:

(i) The principle of a pluralism of exegetical methodologies is accepted in the formulated model. The proliferation of theories is a fact which cannot be ignored or avoided.

(ii) The hermeneutical framework in which the plurality of exegetical methodologies operate is an adapted communication model. The three basic elements of the communication process (namely sender, medium and receiver) constitute this model.

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34. Cf Nel's (1989) warning in this regard.

(iii) The synchronical, as well as diachronical aspects of exegesis should be taken into consideration in the formulation of each of the elements of the adapted communication model which functions as hermeneutical framework.

(iv) The historical and religious dimensions of the biblical texts cannot be ignored in the formulation of a hermeneutical framework within which exegetical methodologies should operate. Not only does each element in the communication model have a historical and a religious dimension, but the interaction between these elements should also be understood in these terms.

(v) Within the hermeneutical framework of a communication model, specialization in a particular exegetical methodology does not become redundant. Rather, this model has an ecclesia of exegetical research as a prerequisite.

## 6. Conclusion

This discussion commenced with a characterization of the exegetical discipline with the concepts variety and exclusivity. The centrality of the questions 'what is a text?' and 'what constitutes meaning?' was emphasized and the developments which took place in the field of literary science were described. Patte's proposal towards a multidimensional exegetical methodology was then evaluated against the above mentioned background. From his proposal (and others) certain theoretical issues were identified which should feature in a discussion on this topic. How these theoretical issues can be implemented in a hermeneutical model within which methodologies can interrelate, was then briefly discussed. In conclusion, it can be asserted that the formulated model provides the framework within which the danger of an uncontrolled methodological variety can be managed, and within which the possibility of any exclusivistic claims can be obliterated.

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