

DECONSTRUCTION AND BIBLICAL STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This essay notes the widespread, often perturbed, interest in Derridean deconstruction among biblical scholars, and argues for deconstruction's appropriateness for biblical studies in the present South African context, as a style of accusation' rather than as a 'methodology'. The argument proceeds by way of a summary of the essentials of Derrida's thought, followed by its application to a discussion of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, initiated by Professor Bernard Lategan. The essence of the argument offered from this deconstructionist glimpse into Galatians is that the South African socio-political crisis throws into high relief an 'absence' of the gospel so confidently claimed as 'present' by scholars. This insight is used to suggest a re-situation of biblical studies, from its present metaphysical orientation to a thoroughly hermeneutical task, which is to be an unceasing deconstruction of the tendency to rest in final interpretations. Such an hermeneutical orientation would function to force biblical studies into its biblical role of confronter of the status quo. The argument presents the institutionalized dyad, expert/ordinary reader as a tangible beginning to this relocation of biblical studies.

1. Introduction

The last few years have shown that Biblical scholars are both challenged and disturbed by deconstruction, understood in this essay to refer to the Derridean variety. In South Africa, there have been articles in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 54, and *Neotestamentica* 20-22. Overseas, the debate has been carried on in a large variety of journals - but see *Semeia* 23, 40, and 51 especially, as well as the lengthy and vigorous debates in *Christianity and Literature* 34-35, 37-38, and 40. *The Christian Scholars Review* 17, and 19-20 has also featured an extensive exchange on the subject. There has also been a flood of books on Derrida alone and in his relation to Christianity (see especially, Culler 1982; Caputo 1987; Moore 1989; McKnight 1988; Taylor 1984. Ellis 1987 and 1987a is strongly hostile).

This extensive focus on deconstruction reflects a sense that Derridean thought cannot be ignored easily. However, there is often a lack of clarity in the debate, at least as it has been conducted in relation to the Bible and Christianity. As a critical position, which puts fresh questions to biblical texts, Derridean thought is often very close to other deconstructionist theologies. Differences are of emphasis rather than essence, an observation which has led some critics to ponder whether Derrida's style and rhetoric is not a great deal more radical than his substance (Irzik 1990; Ellis 1987a:3-17). As a critical position, then, it is doubtful that Derridean deconstruction is a uniquely radical perspective.

On another level, however, Derridean thought seems to be a substantive attack on (Christian) faith. An articulate and supportive proponent of this view has been Mark Taylor (1984), who has tied together the metaphysical notions of God and Self, so that Derrida's attack on metaphysics becomes an attack on faith in the presence of God, who is the 'Author to whom all authors defer' (quoted in Thiel 1989:36). If Taylor and others are right in their perception that Derridean thought is inimical to faith in God, then Derrida is indeed an extremely radical figure who needs to be correctly used, tamed, or exorcized.

It is Derrida's apparent substantive attack on (Christian) faith which has been largely responsible for the intense debate pointed to above. Unfortunately, this debate has often confused the 'positional' and 'substantive' uses of Derrida. This essay will consider Derrida on the former level, as offering a useful reading strategy for biblical studies. The much deeper questions raised on the level of substance would require a separate essay, and will only be glanced at in passing in the present one.

One cannot, of course, chop Derrida into two neatly-divided halves, and I shall not attempt to do so. Nonetheless, insofar as Derrida provides a reading strategy which shares many features with accepted deconstructive approaches to the Bible and yet offers its own perspectives, he is a provocative figure in the South African context, which, at the moment, is a deconstructive context - that is, a context in which the uncertainties and 'cracks' in what we had thought to be true, have become evident and need to be faced.

I need to declare a few limitations. I shall not enter much into the critical debate about the rightness or wrongness of Derrida's thought, though I will point to some of the literature which does that. Further, I will not attempt a full outline of his thought, the central features of which are well known by now (see Mackey 1983; Leavey 1982; Hunter 1987; Schneidau 1982; Blank 1986 for brief introductions to Derrida. See Leitch 1983; Culler 1982; Norris 1987; Gasché 1987 for book-length introductions; Caputo 1987 is marvellous but much wider than just a book on Derrida). I will focus only on areas of interest to the South African context, and in which I think Derrida has often been misunderstood.

I will proceed [1] by outlining and clarifying some central features of Derrida's thought; and [2] by commenting on an observation by Lategan on Galatians, in an attempt to show how deconstruction affects the reader's approach to the biblical text, for it is often at the point of reading the text that deconstruction is misapplied

as a reading strategy. I will do this with an eye on the role of biblical studies in the South African context.

2. What is deconstruction?

2.1 A philosophical critique

First, it is important to realize that deconstruction is a philosophical critique of the Western metaphysical tradition, rather than a set of tools for literary criticism. Thus, Derrida's major concern is to demonstrate that the Western metaphysical tradition, which holds that meaning is 'present' in language, is an illusion. In reality, because of the arbitrary nature of the sign, and the consequent fact that there is no necessary connection between the signifier and the signified, language enshrines 'absence' of meaning:

The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence. Whether we are concerned with the verbal or the written sign ... the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we encounter the thing itself ... What I am describing here [is] ... signification as the *différance* of temporization (Derrida 1982:9. See Scholes 1985. for a critique of Derrida's interpretation of Saussure).

Hartin (1988) provides a clear example of what goes wrong when philosophical concepts are treated as literary devices.

Whatever its merits as a piece of literary criticism, Hartin's reading of Luke 12.41-X8 is not a deconstructive reading. To take just one example, Hartin misapplies deconstruction in the following passage:

These two passages (12.41-48) read together illustrate how meaning is still being deferred. The coming of the master is something which is hinted at throughout the narrative. The coming is certain, then it is delayed and even forgotten.

Finally the coming inspires absolute fear for the punishment that it is to bring' (382). Here, deferral, is the abused concept. What Hartin is actually pointing to is the literary device of climax, which is a different thing from what Derrida means by 'deferral'.

Derrida's notion of *différance* functions to place the reader in a certain stance or attitude with respect to the text, which someone has called a 'style of accusation', but it does not provide him/her with a set of rhetorical tools. Deconstruction is not a method, in other words (Derrida 1991a: 273; Contra Ellis 1987).

2.2 Language is 'inaudible'

It follows logically from this theory of language that Derrida should resist the idea of a stable, contained, transcendent signified, which stands outside the flow of events.

In traditional linguistics, as Derrida puts it, 'the signified face ... has no need of the signifier to be what it is', because it is 'a meaning thinkable in principle within the full presence of an intuitive consciousness' (Derrida 1991b:45). Derrida's critique is against this position which reduces language to the status of a mere vehicle for ideas that stand apart from linguisticity. Thus, for Derrida, no text is the vehicle for some outside voice, be that the author or God. In Derrida's famous formulation: 'There is nothing outside of the text'. Reality is linguistic.

If reality is linguistic (which Olthuis 1990:354 denies; but see Caputo 1990:165-66) the Self is her/himself nothing but another 'text', not stable and contained, but revealing 'absence', needing to be constituted - pushed, in fact, to the margins. Caputo quotes Augustine: "

'I have been made a question to myself' (1990:167) to demonstrate that this is not such a new or remarkable idea. As Derrida says: 'I don't destroy the subject; I situate it ...' (Quoted in Seeley 1983:165. See Irzik 1990:55-74 for an intelligent critique of Derrida on the question of the subject).

This seems appalling to many Christians (Walhout 1984; Underwood 1985; Olthuis 1990 & 1990a), as well as to many secular literary theorists, especially speech-act theorists. However, I believe that Derrida is not actually as radical here as he seems:

I would not say that there is no interest in referring to the intentional purpose. There are authors, there are intentionalities, there are conscious purposes. We must analyse them, take them seriously. But the effects of what we call the author's intentions are dependent on something which is not the individual intention, which is not intentional. (Derrida, quoted in Kearns & Newton 1980:21).

Here, Derrida seems to retain intentionality, but make the hardly-startling point that authors are not in control of the meanings their texts may have. As Irzik notes, Derrida's theory seems to be widely separate from what he acknowledges to be the case in practice (1990:55-74). The problem seems to be that Derrida's theory postulates intentionality as full, godlike consciousness, where his comment on practice much more realistically accepts intentionality in terms of humans as fractured, partial consciousness. In the second section of this essay, I shall retain intentionality in the sense just quoted.

2.3 Intertextuality

Derrida's re-situation of the Self to the margins relates directly to his notion of 'intertextuality', in terms of which the reader is a 'text', one of many 'text' involved in the act of reading - others may be the reception-history of the 'book-text', the interests of the 'reader-text', factors in the 'situation-text', etc. The important thing is that for Derrida 'text' is not synonymous with 'book': a 'text' ... is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins,

but differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces' (Derrida 1991d:257). Or, as he expressed it in a later essay: 'the text is always a field of forces ...' (1986:168).

Derrida's conception of 'text' has created great confusion. As Irzik notes (1990:33), just because Derrida decides to give 'text' a new meaning does not mean that it thereby acquires that new meaning. Derrida has added to the confusion by denying that he ever intended to transform the world into a library' (Derrida 1991d:257) - here again, his parenthesis seems to contradict the main line of his thought. In terms of reading the Bible in South Africa, what is important is the notion which reader-as-text emphasizes, namely, that the reader is not a locus of full 'presence', but an 'effect' (= production = meaning) of interpretation, integrally a part of the linguistic system, which is characterized by *différance*.

2.4 Dyadic oppositions

As we interpret and inevitably seek, by that act, for full presence, Derrida believes that we establish dyadic oppositions (Irizik 1990; Ellis 1987 & 1987a have critiques of Derrida on this point). Examples of these, some of which we have already encountered are: presence/absence, speech/writing, signified/signifier, oral/written, original/copy, text/reader, male/female, and so we could go on. Derrida argues that these dyads are never made up of equals, but of hierarchies, in which the one element is privileged and the other suppressed.

'Presence' is thought to reside in the privileged element, which becomes the 'tradition', the 'institution', or the 'truth'.

Deconstruction seeks out these hierarchies and subverts them. This means recovering the 'effects' of the suppressed elements. (See Derrida's essay, *Différance in Margins of Philosophy* (1982), for an explanation of his choice of the word, *différance*, as a playful subversion of the speech/writing hierarchy).

It is important, though, that in the subversion of existing hierarchies, the deconstructionist does not rest content with new hierarchies: the deconstructive process is never-ending. Derrida's own commitment to deconstruction has been shown, among other ways, in his continual abandonment of key terms, in order to avoid any one of them becoming a new dominant in a hierarchical opposition. Thus he has run through *différance*, supplement, *pharmakon*, hymen, gram, spacing, and several other equivalent terms: 'certain marks', as he calls them, 'in an open chain' (Krupnick 1983:4. See Irzik 1990:33-4 for a critique).

One of Ellis' (1987 & 1987a) critiques of Derrida is that his theory acts conservatively by always privileging the reading to be deconstructed, so that criticism never moves on from the already-rejected interpretation. However, Caputo shows that Derrida works within the framework of Heidegger's concept of 'repetition', which Caputo (1987:3) defines as:

... not the repetition of the same, Greek re-production, but a creative production which pushes ahead, which produces as it repeats, which produces

what it repeats, which makes a life for itself in the midst of the difficulties of the flux.

The importance of this insight is to clarify that Derrida provides us with a framework for incorporating the past as we move into the future - even more, of making an analysis of the past part of our making a new future. Seen in these terms, Derrida's focus on these dyads seems to me to profoundly interesting.

2.5 The political commitment of deconstruction

The untethering of the signified from the signifier and the apparent absence of voice from the text may well lead us to the assumption that Derrida believes texts to be set free from history, apolitical. Such an idea may seem to be indicated also by Derrida's discussion of context, in which he argues that writing, by its very nature as writing, is severed from its context:

For the written to be the written, it must continue to 'act' and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, whether he is provisionally absent, or if he is dead, or if in general he does not support, with his absolutely current and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his meaning, of that very thing which seems to be written 'in his name' ... This essential drifting, [is] due to writing as an iterative structure cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the authority of the last analysis, writing orphaned, and separated at birth from the assistance of its father ...' (Derrida 1982a:316).

However, Derrida clearly views his discourse as inherently social, and has demonstrated this belief in many of his writings (1983, 1984, 1985, 1987), as well as in the work of the Collège International de Philosophie, of which he was the first Director (Leitch 1986:102-104).

Irzik is one commentator who has questioned this assumption, pointing out that in practice many of Derrida's followers have followed a decidedly apolitical path - North American deconstructionism of the 1970's is one example. Irzik (1990:63) argues that there is nothing inherently social in Derrida's thought, and that, in fact, there are tendencies which could lead quite easily to an apolitical criticism. The first such tendency she identifies is to be found in Derrida's (post)structuralist system-based epistemology, which is abstracted from any particular struggles; and the second lies in Derrida's mistaken assumption that, having removed individual authors, discourse thereby becomes social.

Irzik rightly argues that the important thing is the uses to which language is put. As I have already suggested, Derrida's own usage has been consistently political. Furthermore, It seems to me that his focus on dyadic hierarchies is a useful strategy for a self-consciously political discourse, providing, as it does, a way of taking hold of the myriad power-structures which affect human lives, and demonstrating that their present form is not in the nature of things, but the effect of history. This is not to claim that Derrida's is the only strategy appropriate to a political discourse, but merely that it is an effective one.

If it is true, in Kamuf's phrase (1991:228) that for Derrida 'words are detachable things', they are detachable from a metaphysical notion of 'thing', not from human life. Derridean theory thus offers an illuminating and useful basis for a liberative discourse.

2.6 Deconstruction and historical criticism

I have already suggested that deconstruction is deeply rooted in contingency, but it is important to underline that it seeks a new agenda for historical studies. Derrida's commitment to subversion of the systems of human discourse, as well as his rejection of any transcendental signified implies that the search for origins, which has been at the forefront of the historical-critical approach in biblical studies, is an illusion:

... there is no such thing as an origin: a moment of full presence that can serve as a true beginning: a principium ... The origin of any text is always already lost, and even the most primitive source-text would still be secondary by virtue of its textuality (Mackey 1983:264).

In other words, every text is 'always already' a 'repetition' (Caputo 1987:131). What is important in historical studies is not to mine texts for 'the original (= truest) meaning', which confuses the question of origin with the question of essence, but to conduct the same deconstructive analysis of past systems of power. In this way, interpretation takes on Caputo's agenda as the human attempt to make our way forward through time, 'to produce [our] identity as an effect' (1987:20).

2.7 Meaning is indeterminate

Finally, the disconnection Derrida reveals between signifier and signified, and the resulting 'absence' which all texts reveal, carries the implication that meaning is indeterminate. This is not the same thing as saying that there is no meaning to be found - a widespread misreading of Derrida. Caputo accuses even so astute a critic as Olthuis of misunderstanding deconstruction on this point:

... undecidability does not, as Olthuis mistakenly supposes, 'give up on truth'. Undecidability is not indecision, not the opposite of decision, but the condition of im/possibility of decision. (1990:168. See Olthuis' reply, 1990a:171-2.)

'Indeterminacy' is a 'textual' and not a metaphysical notion. It means that the weave of the 'text' (textere = to weave) has a simply unlimited number of threads, strands, connections, which interpretation constantly tries to limit and control, by sidelining some as irrelevant or secondary to the dominant meaning. Derrida's project is to acknowledge and explore the infinity of the text's weave: to enjoy the free play of endless textual effects made possible by *différance*, by the code of differential, repeatable signs. We have set repetition free. Then we are able to enjoy the endless generation of new words, the excitation of new linkages, the innovations which are possible if one situates oneself in the interstices, the fold, the hymen, between signifiers (Caputo 1987:151).

The term, 'play' is an important one in Derrida's work, where it signifies a strategy which rejects a 'final goal ... or theme of domination', in favour of 'announcing ... the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end' (Derrida 1982:7). In deconstructionist practice, this implies that the reader may not rest in any established hierarchies. Rather (s)he should 'desediment' (Leavey 1982:53-4) the textual strands which have been buried, forgotten, or ignored, take delight in the infinite complexities of the text's weave. The point is that this is necessary epistemologically because, as Olthuis so colourfully says: (o)ur citadels of certainty are sandcastles, insinuations of presence painted over absence (1990:347).

Neither is indeterminacy the reverse side of the same coin, namely, any and every meaning is equally valid (Moore 1989:550 and Jobling 1990:84 accuse North American deconstructionism of misunderstanding this). Derrida emphatically rejects the pluralist option: I am not a pluralist and I would never say that every interpretation is equal but I do not select. The interpretations select themselves (Derrida, quoted in Kearns & Newton 1980:21). Derrida goes on in the same interview to expound this Nietzschean doctrine:

You know that Nietzsche insisted on the fact that the principle of differentiation was in itself selective. The eternal return of the same was not repetition, it was a selection of the more powerful forces. So I would not say that some interpretations are truer than others. I would say that some are more powerful than others. The hierarchy is between forces and not between true and false. There are interpretations which account for more meaning and this is the criterion. (Derrida quoted in Kearns & Newton 1980:21. See Fish 1980, 1985 on the role of the interpretive community. What ethical criteria does Derrida provide here to distinguish interpretations? See Tracy 1987; Rooney 1986; Fowl 1988; West 1991; Schüssler Fiorenza 1988 & 1989; Fowler 1989; Moore 1989; Jobling 1990 for discussions about the ethics of interpretation.)

My point at this juncture is merely that continued attacks on deconstruction for its irresponsible advocacy of meaninglessness/free play of any meaning miss the point.

Despite the problems associated with undecidability (or indeterminacy), Derrida's attack is against the constant danger of attributing 'presence', of seeking to escape contingency. His attack is not directed against the human need to seek truth, nor does it deny that truth may be found. Derrida does argue that truth cannot be found in metaphysics, that it hasn't 'fallen from the sky'. All that we claim as truth is essentially vulnerable, however much it has gained acceptance.

Deconstruction, in my view, is challenging criticism on a much deeper and more subtle level than is allowed by some of its critics.

2. Deconstruction applied to Galatians, in the South African context

In this second section, I take an observation on Galatians offered by Bernard Lategan in his paper, *Aspects of a Contextual Hermeneutics for South Africa* (nd), and suggest directions in which a deconstructive approach might push it. My purpose is to show how deconstruction facilitates fresh perceptions of the text as it examines

hidden and neglected threads, and then to suggest ways in which this approach contributes constructively to the ongoing debate about the use of the Bible in South Africa.

2.1 Lategan on Galatians

Lategan rightly points out that contemporary Christians read Galatians as a 'theological treatise' rather than as an existential response to a new situation posed by Christianity's development outside Palestine:

In the environment of Palestine, the obedience of the Law and following Jewish customs was never an issue amongst Christians. It was only when people without the Law and without practicing the Jewish way of life became believers, that the question arose: is the law really a prerequisite for the Christian faith? The problem was exacerbated by envoys from Jerusalem who insisted that the law was essential. This was the starting point for a radical reconsideration of the essentials of the Christian faith by Paul, leading to his revolutionary conclusion that salvation was through faith and not by 'works of the law'.

What is now considered to be a cornerstone of the Christian faith, was unthinkable in terms of the Jewish-Christian understanding of the gospel (Lategan nd:2).

Put in deconstructive language, the dominant hierarchy in contemporary readings of Galatians is Paul/Galatians, but in the historical situation as Lategan sketches it the opposite hierarchy was dominant, namely, Galatians(Jerusalem)/Paul. Paul was the 'deconstructionist', struggling against the marginalization (and?) the traditionalists, those in power, were inevitably attempting to perform on him.

2.2 Deconstructionist observations

Derrida's notion of *différance* illumines Lategan's observation in a number of ways.

[1] The deconstructionist viewpoint reveals the indeterminacy in the historical situation. What the 'Gospel' was, in other words, was absent, not present. It took the new situation of Gentiles' becoming Christians to demonstrate the 'absence' that was always present in the Gospel. Later in the same essay, Lategan makes a further observation which dramatically highlights this 'absence': he points to the way Paul, in his use of Abraham, completely overturns the traditional understanding of Abraham as the archetypal 'Father' of Judaism, and makes Abraham, instead, the archetypal 'Father' of all who believe, whether Jew or not (nd:8). The argument between Paul and his opponents took place precisely because each claimed to possess the Gospel in its full 'presence'.

From a deconstructionist perspective, Lategan's reading demonstrates that it is the flux of history that is responsible for continuously confronting readers with 'absence', just when they thought they had found 'presence', with its rest from the need for interpretation. In the light of this it is not surprising to note the strong challenge, in recent Pauline scholarship, to the dominant understanding of the 'core' of the Pauline gospel (see Beker 1980; Boers 1988; Wanamaker 1983). In our being

situated within the flux of history, in other words, as everyone involved in the Galatian controversy was, we share with those persons the necessity of interpretation.

Furthermore, it is always moments of crisis that throw up the absences we had ignored or simply been unaware of. In South Africa, for example, this illumines the crisis the Bible faces.

What was thought to be the gospel(in white eyes) has been shown to have been absent of 'presence' - as some black theologians have been pointing out (Mofokeng 1988; Mosala 1989).

Deconstruction provides an approach that helps the accepted, the tradition, to be open always to the marginal, the new, the radical. It is a particularly important stance, perhaps, in times of crisis, when there is also a human tendency is to reach back for the old and familiar.

[2] Today, especially under Luther's influence (as Lategan remarks), most readers assume that Paul possessed the Gospel in full 'presence'; but that is problematized by the Galatian Letter itself, which continues to hold up for us a different view of the Gospel, one which had the strongest possible accreditation at the time. This is not to say that today we might want to reinstate the content of the Jerusalem gospel.

The point is that the presence in Galatians of two 'Gospels', one having the strongest accreditation in the past and the other having equally strong accreditation in the present, captures forever that meaning is found in *différance*, and implies the ever-present task of discovering the gospel for one's own time.

[3] This foregrounds the reality that Galatians is not about Paul's Gospel of salvation by faith alone, but rather about a conflict between radically different understandings of the 'Gospel'. The hermeneutical nature of the letter is perhaps more important than the content of the two 'Gospels' revealed in it. The task of interpreting Galatians, in other words, is to explore the gospel's 'absence' and its impact on the participants. The hermeneutical situation is really the letter's 'content', rather than the doctrines for which it has been mined.

[4] My deconstructive skewing of Lategan's reading shows how oppositional dyads are themselves changed by history, not towards equality, but towards different oppositions. Thus, we saw the Jerusalem(Galatian)/Paul dyad in the originary situation changed by history to its opposite by our time. The deconstructionist focus on dyadic oppositions, with its radical commitment to the overthrow of hierarchies, provides a framework to counter this tendency and to keep the future always open to marginal voices.

These four facets of *différance* highlight Derrida's argument, noted earlier that the value of historical study is not in the privileging of the originary. Rather, I suggest, it is to demonstrate the tendency in human history to 'repeat', but in a fatalistic sense - that is, that we eternally construct oppositional dyads in which to take (we think) refuge. But the purpose of the historical study of such repetition is to 'repeat' in the Heideggerian sense: to go back, in order to retrace our lives within the flux - precisely, in other words, in order to escape mere fatalistic repetition, which we do

only by being aware of, and continuously rejecting, the oppositional stances we so easily take up (see Caputo 1987 for an exposition of 'repetition' in this sense). However valid critiques of Derrida's focus on these hierarchies are, the focus is useful in an adversarial context such as ours. Caputo expresses forcefully what happens when we ignore the reality of these hierarchies:

Indeed religious faith gets to be quite dangerous, and even quite bloody ... when it lack(sic) undecidability. When people think they have gotten beyond the veil of appearances, when they take it that they have been granted an unmediate 'revelation', in an uncritical, undeconstructed sense of revelation ... when they feel themselves inspired, pronounce themselves infallible, anoint themselves chosen, when they announce that they speak the unmediated words of God ... then the rest of us are usually visited with the most massive and oppressive mediations.'

(Caputo 1990:168-169) [5] In his contextual approach, Lategan has argued that the originary context ('dynamic encounter') must be seen in dialectical relationship with the present text ('static' text).

But Derridean 'intertextuality', I have shown, points to the presence of other 'texts' in interpretation, one of the most significant of which is the 'text' who is the contemporary reader, with her/his accompanying 'texts'. Deconstruction thus adds another voice to the increasingly loud call for a new self-perception for biblical studies, for a scholarship that is not metaphysically, but rather hermeneutically, constituted.

This 're-situation' of biblical studies called for by a deconstructive practice is entirely appropriate to the South African context of re-distribution, re-allocation, re-forming.

Biblical scholars are 're-situated' as objects of interpretative practice, as much as they are its subjects also. This clearly problematizes the academy's self-perceived role of 'government' over interpretative practice.

[6] This 're-situating' of biblical scholarship leads me directly to one final aspect of the Galatian situation which Lategan's reading hints at, and which needs a deconstructive skewing. The 'Jerusalem' reading of the gospel is, as we have noted, an attempt by the 'experts' to suppress the 'ordinary' reader who, in that context, was Paul and his Galatian converts (see West 1991:142-180 on the 'ordinary' reader).

As we have also noted, post-Luther readings especially have turned the tables, making the Judaizers the 'ordinary' readers. We also live in a situation in which the dominant readers are 'experts' and the 'ordinary' readers' voices have been suppressed. A deconstructive reading of Galatians provides the theoretical basis for the recovery of lost voices in the text, for a study of the mechanisms by which some strands are suppressed and others privileged etc. And in the South African context, the point of all this is the need for Biblical studies to start listening to the voices of 'ordinary' readers, to draw them into the project of re-situating biblical studies in South Africa.

The Derridean framework undergirds such a project epistemologically, and the needs of South Africa support it politically and religiously.

Thus, it is significant and encouraging that there is a growing number of 'Institutes' attached to universities, as well as organizations of other kinds, working to end the silence of the ordinary reader. One example of the work that is being done is especially interesting. West, in a paper entitled, *The Presence of Power in the Joseph Story: Reading the Joseph Story in South Africa* (1991), having created the expectation in his readers of a reading of 'The Presence of Power in the Joseph Story', refuses, as a deliberate strategy, to actually read the Joseph story. Rather, he points to the contribution he intends to make to a reading of this story in communities of the oppressed. In other words, he rejects his traditional scholarly role and situates himself as a partner with the ordinary reader community. This does not mean that he rejects his training as a scholar; rather, he sees a new function for his scholarship.

Thus West's deconstructive 'gesture' foregrounds a new role for biblical studies in South Africa, and demonstrates how that can be achieved only if biblical studies is prepared to deconstruct its hierarchical practice.

3. Conclusion

A deconstructive reading shares many features with a contextual reading such as Lategan's, but provides a theoretical base from which to radicalize the implications of a contextual reading. The strength of Derrida's theory lies in its focus on a 'clash' of horizons, which complements the Gadamerian notion of a 'fusion' of horizons, as a hermeneutic principle. The notion of a 'clash' of horizons emphasizes the task I have been describing as appropriate to South Africa, namely, all debate as a continuous, forcible re-opening, providing a framework and opportunity for oppositions of whatever kind to be continuously re-examined. Gadamer's 'Fusion', on the other hand, while it has been important in foregrounding the necessity of contextual interpretation, has the limitation in the South African context of suggesting stasis, quite apart from its failure to provide a theory to account for conflicting positions (see Caputo 1987; Diane P Michelfelder & R E Palmer 1989 for comparisons between Gadamer and Derrida).

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