

## DIALOGUE WITH THE TEXT (Mk 3:20f, 31-35)

### Interactional Bible Interpretation

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#### Abstract

*The article explains some basic concepts and procedures of 'interactional Bible interpretation', a novel approach developed by the author. The method is illustrated by applying it to the narrative of Mk 3:20f and 31-35, in which the concept of Jesus' family is developed as a new metaphor. What is presented here, is based on a series of guest lectures by the author at the University of Stellenbosch in 1988.*

#### 1. Preliminary remarks

Bible interpretation as *Interaktion* is a mode of operation of the structural and depth psychological method. Text and reader are in correlation and interact.

While the depth psychological Bible interpretation uses *Interaktion* as a way of bringing unconscious strengths back to consciousness and of integrating into the process of self-finding or finding of identity, the structural working with the text remains on the level of consciousness. The individual acts of reading are contrasted and clarified in their potential variety. The dialogue with the text activates the own unlimited ways of comprehending and the learning faculties of the reader. From the perception of the pluriformity of *Handlungsräume* (areas of action), uncovered by the biblical text, a new way of conduct comes to the fore.

#### 2. Jesus' family as a new metaphor (Mk 3:20f, 31-35).

Narrative texts are especially suitable for interaction. But also *besprechende* (discussing) texts like the letters of Paul are suitable for dialogue, for example the *Philemonbrief* (Dormeyer 1983,1988).

For a series of guest lectures at the University of Stellenbosch in October 1988, I used the narrative in Mk 3:20f, 31-35 as a basis for the interactional dialogue with

students in Biblical Studies and Theology. The text was presented to them in the following structured way:

Mk 3:20f, 31-35

S 1     20 Daarna het Jesus huis toe gegaan.  
           'n Menigte mense het weer saamgedrom.  
           sodat daar selfs nie geleentheid was om 'n stukkie te eet nie.

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S 2     21 Toe sy familie hiervan hoor,  
           het hulle gegaan  
                     om Hom te gaan haal,  
           want hulle het gesê:  
                     'Hy het van sy kop af geraak.'

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S 3     31 Sy moeder en sy broers het toe gekom. Hulle het buite bly staan  
           en 'n boodskap na Hom toe gestuur  
                     om Hom te roep.

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S 4     32 'n Menigte mense het rondom Hom gesit.  
           Hulle sê toe vir Hom:  
                     'Kyk, u moeder en u broers en u susters daar buite soek U.'  
           33 Maar Hy sê vir hulle:  
                     'Wie is my moeder en my broers?'  
           34 Hy het die mense aangekyk  
                     wat in 'n kring om Hom sit  
           en gesê:  
                     'Hier is my moeder en my broers!  
           35 Elkeen wat die wil van God doen, is my broer en  
           my suster en my moeder.'

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The text was accompanied with some suggestions to the students on how to approach the text.

a) Identification with a person/protagonist/figure (phase of appropriation and discovering), considering the following questions:

Which person is appealing/not appealing?

Which person/figure would I like to be?

b) Retelling of the plot from the point of view of one person (phase of dissociation by comprehension).

- 'I-speaking', by identification with a person. You should talk in the past tense.

- Fill out and widen the given information of the situation and the plot. Embroider the details, complete the plot by adding new figures, and explain the motives of the figure with whom you have identified.

c) Discussion with the interlocutors about common and different points of view of norms, understanding and religious experiences. These points of view should be compared with those of the retold figures.

Two groups of four to five members prepared a drama, two groups discussed the relevance of the roles Jesus, family, disciples, and the crowd. One group performed in outline its understanding of the biblical drama.

The words of the narrative were retold *verbatim*, without any comment, while the narrative frame-work was performed in pantomime.

After these procedures were carried out, a discussion began which focussed on the following issues:

- What did the actor feel while playing the drama role?

- Why did she/he choose this role?

- How would she/he explain her/his action in the form of an internal monologue?

These questions inevitably led to an examination of the method forming and procedures that form the basis of interactional reading.

### 3. Method and procedures

In the process of interactional reading, the individual reader, text and circle of readers are factors of a triangular relationship. It sets comprehending reading to in motion, and leads to an effective result. None of the factors dominates as a subject. There is a constant change in the subject-object relationship, a permanent interaction. In concrete terms, this means that either the text in its structure and intention rules the interpretation, or the individual reader and circle of readers function as subjects and find their experiences and intentions back in the text. W Iser has proved that this kind of 'Eisegese = reading in' is a necessary component of comprehending reading.

Furthermore, there is a correlation between individual reader and circle of readers. The single reader injects his subjective experience into the text and evolves his own

interpretation in interaction with the text. The standards of the interpretation are imparted to the individual by the native speech-community. Individual and prevailing interpretations come into dialogue. A round of talks makes this social learn/teach process a conscious activity. The circle of readers becomes the subject of the interpretation. It exposes narrow passes, enriches experiences and remodels horizons.

A direct confrontation with the biblical text allows the discovery of interesting relations between reader and text. This method works best if there aren't any comprehension barriers and if it is allowed to infuse the text with everyday experience.

Every teacher and group-leader know that the participation of the listeners increases after a compactly lectured narration and leads to short evaluations and identifications.

The depth-structure of narrative makes it possible to translate even totally strange narratives into the everyday experience. The elements protagonist (role), event (sequence) and world (fictive situation) contrast narratives from *besprechenden* (discussing) texts. And everybody who is able to identify intuitively the protagonist of a narrative, and who is able to pursue the changing plot and to fit together the elements of a world, can give subjective sense to a narrative and can act with it further. In contrast to pretentious poetic stories, biblical narratives do not resist everyday comprehension. They belong to popular literature and have a schematical tendency, as has been shown convincingly by the *Formgeschichte*. Seen from the literary presentation, they are even fit for children.

The observance of the literary quality is necessary for examining the scope of relations between reader and Bible, and the creative possibilities of this relation.

Beyond basic activities such as reading and listening, the appropriation of a narration can be deepened by further procedures. Biblical education has developed many 'hermeneutical' methods to relate experience of life to biblical texts. (Langer/Thiele 1987).

While reading, three phases have to be distinguished: the phase of appropriation and discovery, the phase of dissociation by comprehension, the phase of understanding and creative transfer. The transitions between the phases are fluent.

In the first phase the identification is prepared by the expression of feelings and problems in the form of painting, pantomime and word description and definition (excitement-word-method). Alternatively, identification is reached immediately by reading and listening.

The second phase represents the transition from the level of feeling and everyday experience to the level of dissociation by comprehension. The biblical narration can be experienced as a separate world in which the re-narrators participate and discover new possibilities of conduct.

Evaluation, discussions and the transfer of roles, plot and world into their own reality take place in the third phase (understanding by comprehension). Jesus, the

followers, the adversaries and the people constantly offer roles that are similar and in contrast to their own identity. In this way, the liberating message of the Bible can be heard.

#### 4. Narrative analysis of Mk 3:20f, 31-35

Our narrative is constructed by four events = sequence (S).

The action develops through three stages in a sequence:

- 1. status of action without balance or changing of status
- 2. counter-action
- 3. new status with or without balance.

(If no balance exists, the event is still 'open' or uncompleted, and requires a further act).

In S 1 of our biblical narrative, Jesus changes the former situation ('daarna) by going home ('huis toe gegaan'). The crowd performs a new action by coming together ('het weer saamgedrom'). Counter-action does not mean a hostile deed, but a new setting of the action. Now Jesus has to react. He tolerates the assembling of the crowd and suffers hunger with his disciples = the new status without balance ('sodat daar selfs nie geleentheid was om 'n stukkie te eet nie').

S 2 starts with the family hearing the news and developing a counteraction. The same person can perform the three stages of the sequence. The famous example is the narrative pronouncement of Caesar: *veni, vidi, vici* - I came, I saw, I conquered.

The indented line ('om Hom te gaan haal') explains the intentional deed, being part of a future anticipated action in the mind of the family.

The end of the sequence reports a locutive act ('hulle het gesê'). The reader has to interpret form and content of this speech-act. The family forms a constative speech-act, emphasizing the proposition that Jesus is crazy. The relationship between him and his family is disturbed. The new state of the second sequence also lacks the balance.

The following sequences, 3 and 4, close as chiasmus (a: S 1; b: S 2; b: S 3; a: S 4). The arrival of the relatives takes the open action of the former sequence, (S 2), a step further. Sending a message to Jesus is the counter-action of the family forcing a decision by Jesus. The indented line contains the content of the message.

The lack of an outcome is a 'gap' (Iser), to be filled by the reader/hearer. A next sequence, S 4, is necessary to enable the reader to do this.

In sequence 4 the crowd has reached Jesus in the meantime, like the family before them. In local opposition the crowd sits around Jesus, while the family stands outside. Like the family, the crowd asks Jesus and repeats the question of the family.

Jesus reacts with a word accompanied by a symbolic deed ('Hy het die mense aangekyk'). A further statement completes this sequence.

In this way, sequence S 4 completes the whole narrative by taking up the first sequence S 1. The construction of the extended family of Jesus completes the assembling of the crowd. The chiasmic bracket 'crowd as extended family' blocks the intention of the family and opens up a new relation between family and crowd.

Both the crowd and family press near to Jesus, both demanding a relationship with him: thus he explains in the last sequence the right way to achieve a relationship with Jesus and God. Roles, events, space and time build up the syntactic structure of narrative.

H Weinrich traces the contrast between narrative (*erzählen*) and discussion/argumentation (*Besprechen*) to two different attitudes of speech. In narrative theology and religious narrative research this differentiation became an important issue. The switch from narration to discussion signals the beginning and the end of a narration, or indicates turning-points within the text.

Further elements which structure a sequence are: information of place and time, unit of protagonist and plot, tense of the verb (past tense indicates narration, present tense indicates discussion). The narrative describes a fictional world, which integrates the hearer into the narrative community by identification and dissociation and opens new points of view.

The semantic structure is produced by the codes and semantic fields. Eating (S 1) opposes saying and looking (S 4) in the sense of teaching. Hearing (S 2) opposes saying (S 2), sending a message (*apostello*) and calling (S 3). Assembling (S 1) is formed by sitting in a circle (S 4). Going (S 2) is formed by staying outside (S 3). Being crazy (S 2) opposes doing God's will (S 4). Being own, biographical family opposes being crowd-family.

The pragmatic structure consists of a declaration of intention and the acceptance by the intention of the hearer. The hearer has to activate the semantic fields, to fill up the syntactic gaps and to realize the pragmatic prescripts as questions/imperatives, etc.

The sequences 1-3 function indirectly as appeal. The assembly abstained from eating. The hearing of the family leads to concern and an attempt to reinstate the old position (*Zurückholaktion*). The sending and calling call for refusal.

Sequence 4 outlines the pragmatic dimension. The direct appeal 'see' is transformed into a narrated deed, which shatters the prejudice of crowd, disciples and family. The redefinition of family leads to a double answer. The argumentation of these answers provides a comment on this break with the natural family of Jesus, and the establishment of his real family.

## 5. Interactional reading as group work

The multifunctional filling of the text-structure is made possible by interactional reading in small groups. The main elements of the structure are observed throughout.

The focus of discussion is the possible links between the structural points. Why does Jesus handle the crowd in this way and not in another way?

The results of the group work revealed the following possibilities of linking and filling of the structure.

### Jesus

- sending of the crowd
- concerned for the crowd
- irritated - family
- opportunity for a new pronouncement
- patient
- call for following
- no distinction family/disciples
- break with family

### Family

- question to disciples
- concerned
- afraid
- blame
- recalling
- hurt

### Disciples

- hungry
- angry
- disrespect in the mind of the crowd and in own mind vs understanding

### Crowd

- excited
- hungry
- seeking Jesus
- mediator
- honoured
- no understanding
- following
- patiently awaiting

The statements of the groups differed on important links. The motivation of Jesus was interpreted differently. How does Jesus react to his disturbed meal? Between sequences 1 and 4 lies a gap. Both (opposing) reactions as 'sending away' or 'concerned' about the crowd are possible.

In the narrative about the loaves and the fishes (Mk 6:30-44), which follows later, Mark, the author, inserts a discussion between Jesus and his disciples in which each one of these possibilities is considered. The disciples want to send the crowd away, Jesus wants to eat together with the crowd.

The opposing descriptions of Jesus' relationship with family provides the basis for the new metaphor, 'family of Jesus'. As prophetic wisdom teacher Jesus uses the unique opportunity to utter a new pronouncement.

But this role-taking is not merely a rationalized process. Jesus is emotionally linked to his long-standing biographical relations, which remain obscured in the narrative. Surely he is both irritated and patient.

These hidden relations play an important role in the interpretation of the final double-word.

What does doing the will of God mean for the family? Exclusion (break) or inclusion (call to discipleship; no distinction family - disciples)?

In the whole of his gospel narrative, Mark expands both possibilities. Between sequences 1-2 and 3-4 is embedded the struggle pronouncement of scribes against Jesus (3:22-30). The hard word about the unforgiven blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (v 29) is extended by v 30 to the pronouncement of the family. 'Hy is van 'n bose gees besete' (v 30) has the same meaning in the ancient world as 'Hy het van sy kop af geraak' (v 21).

On the other hand Mark emphasizes the fourth command three times (7:10[2x]; 10:19). Until cross and resurrection, the family faces the antithetic decision of blaspheming Jesus and losing the relations according to God's will or following Jesus and opening the relations for all disciples. The new metaphor 'mother, sister, brother of Jesus' keeps open this process of decision, also for the crowd until and after Easter.

The interpretations of the family did not produce great tensions. 'Concerned, afraid, fear for blame, hurt' are feelings and attitudes which circle about the self-experience only and cut the alienation experience produced by the adult son, Jesus. The family is unable to understand its alienated member as autonomous person. So it is prevented from new experiences and definitions created by God's ministry. 'Boodskap stuur' (*apostello*), opposes the boodskap (*-euangelion*) and mission (*apostello*) of Jesus. The message of the family is the expression of *Selbstmächtigkeit*, which is closed against God's will, as pointed out by Jesus. Separation from God and separation from autonomous development of own and other 'subjects' correspondent. The opening for the other to form an extended family is identical with the opening for God's will.

The disciples play a marginal role. V 20 merely signifies the presence of the disciples as 'hulle' (*autous*). Explaining the missed reactions to sequence 4, the disciples build up the alternative of misunderstanding, starting with 4:10-13, which follows our narrative. In contrast to the biographical family, the disciples represent the attitude for changing to form the extended new family of Jesus.

In Mk 3 the crowd plays an important part. Excited by the foregoing miracles and pronouncements (1:21-3:12) the crowd sides with Jesus against the hostile scribes.

The theme of the crowd, seeking with hunger, will be taken up again, and outlined in the story of the loaves and fishes.

The crowd as mediator forces the redefinition of the family, and in terms of fixed criteria. The crowd fails to make an explicit decision for Jesus, in contrast to the disciples.

The failure of a proper response by the crowd opens up four opposing possibilities to fill this gap: 'honoured', vs 'no understanding', vs 'following', vs 'patiently awaiting'. All these possibilities are realized in the gospel. The crowd is honoured in



the summaries: 1:32-34; 3:7-12; 6:53-56. The crowd follows Jesus furthermore in his closed first speech, 4:1-34.

The distinction between 'following' and 'patiently awaiting' is outlined in Mk 4:10-13. The crowd around Jesus and the twelve become insiders, while the awaiters, the biographical family and those hostile to Jesus, become outsiders.

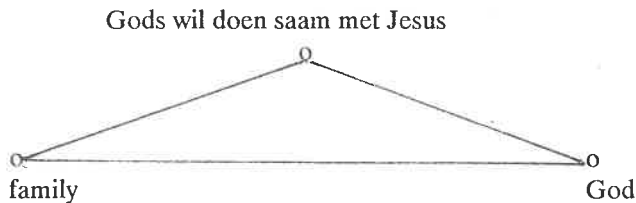
The crowd functions as a pool of resources, that provides disciples as extended family, excited but patiently awaiting people and hostiles, who originally came from outside, but at least in the passion narrative emerge from the crowd: Mk 15:11-15.

The gospel of Mark is a network of narratives, which ties human experiences together and shows multiple possibilities of behaviour and faith.

Therefore Jesus introduces opposing elements in the central concept 'family', which tie together the selfunderstanding of himself, the disciples, the crowd and the biographical family.

The connection with God's will changes the tensive concept into a metaphor. The extended family of Jesus according to God's will shatters the biographical separation (*apartheid*), without destroying the biographical relations.

The family as the sender of the picture is related to God as the receiver. The new field of picture (Bildfeld), is 'Gods wil doen saam met Jesus', (doing God's will together with Jesus).



All three points interact and change together. God opens himself for a human family - the later narratives of Jesus' childhood in Matthew and Luke will explain this new act of revelation.

The family has to answer the call of God - this obligation explains also the narratives of childhood, and it remains as background in Mark and John. John 7:1-10 expresses clearer than our narrative (Mk 3:20f) the refusal of God's call by the family of Jesus prior to Easter. (Cf Lategan 1985:20-21 for a discussion of the 'two families' as they appear in the structure of Matthew).

The connection between family and God is made possible by Jesus. The extended family of Jesus is the right way of doing God's will. God and men find each other in the opening of separation, and in Jesus' trusting in God's leading.

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