

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY¹

Louis Jonker
Department of Old and New Testament
Stellenbosch University

Abstract

This article firstly summarizes the research results of the project “The influence of different contexts of social transformation on Biblical interpretation”. It indicates and discusses the trends with regard to the interaction between social transformation and Biblical interpretation that became apparent from each of the different case studies that were done. Secondly, a comparative study is done within the interdisciplinary framework that was explored earlier in this project. The comparative study represents an attempt at generalising in order to contribute to our understanding of the intricate relationship between social transformation and Biblical interpretation.

1. Introduction

In a methodological reflection on the influence of social transformation on Biblical interpretation it has been argued that “the interpretation of the Bible never takes place in a vacuum” (Jonker 2000: 1). Explanations of this statement from different perspectives have been provided there. It was emphasised that our methods or strategies of interpretation should reflect the multidimensional character of the interpretation process. Hermeneutical reflection on the influence of a particular factor in the interpretation process can never be undertaken without taking into account that this factor operates within a wider interacting network of influencing factors.

This word of caution preceded the attempt of our project at determining the influence of different contexts of social transformation on biblical interpretation.

On the one hand, the statement “No interpretation takes place in a vacuum” reminds us that we should take into account the sociological dynamics of the worlds in which the biblical texts were produced, as well as the sociological dynamics of the contemporary contexts in which these texts are interpreted. On the other hand, however, this statement cautions us not to perceive sociological circumstances as the only factors influencing the process of biblical interpretation (Jonker 2000: 2).

Within the spirit of these introductory remarks a summary of the research results of the project “The influence of different contexts of sociological transformation on Biblical interpretation” is presented here. Thereafter a comparative study will be presented in order to indicate the general trends that surfaced from this investigation.

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2. A summary of the research results

2.1 Case study 1: The Reformed Churches in Holland and *homophilia*

Summary

This case study concentrated on two documents, namely “*Rapport over gebruik van Schriftgegevens bij vragen rondom HOMOFILIE*.” submitted and accepted by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in 1981 (GKN-report), and “*Verwarring en Herkenning. Over gemeente en homoseksualiteit*.” submitted and accepted by the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk in 1984 (NHK-report). A broad picture of the *developments in biblical research* in Western Europe since the 18th century was firstly provided (Van der Kooij 2000:105-106) in order to indicate the movement away from authoritarian and dogmatic biblical interpretation by the church, to a historical-critically oriented study of biblical writings. The *social changes* of the late 1960’s were then elaborated on (Van der Kooij 2000:107ff.). During these years there was a marked shift in the attitude towards “authority” in general, but also with regard to the views held on the authority of the Bible. In these circumstances where there was a movement away from authority a so-called sexual revolution also occurred in society. The taboos of the past were no longer accepted by a growing number of people.

A next phase was then to describe the functioning of the Bible in the abovementioned reports by two Dutch churches (Van der Kooij 2000:108ff. and 2001). The GKN report contains a rather detailed discussion of the biblical passages regarding homosexuality, particularly Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, as well as Romans 1:24-27. The conviction that these texts have to be studied against their historical-cultural background, is prominent in this report. There is also a more general discussion on some hermeneutical issues such as the matter of the selective use of the Bible, the issue of whether or to which extent the laws of the Old Testament are still valid for Christians (in the Netherlands) today, the matter of the differences between the ancient worldview as reflected in the Bible and the modern Western-European culture in which Christians live and to which they try to respond. Although the NHK report shares the approach to study the Biblical texts against the background of their historical-cultural environment, the emphasis of the NHK report is more on the pastoral aspects and less on that of the study of the Bible. As to the use of the Bible, the NHK report lists several opinions varying from more conservative viewpoints to more modern/liberal views (reflecting the variety of opinions among the committee members). Both reports are not providing clearcut answers to the question how to interpret and to apply the Bible in the case of homosexuality. They are rather meant as a means to stimulate an open discussion about, among other things, the use of the Bible regarding the sensitive matter of homosexuality.

Subsequently, this case study focussed on the trends of interpretation with regard to the texts used in the reports (the Leviticus texts in particular) (Van der Kooij 2001). The position of Lev. 18 and 20 within the so-called Holiness Code was discussed, the relationship of this code to other law collections in the Old Testament was then scrutinized (the prohibition of homosexuality occurs only in the Holiness Code), and the wider horizon of the ancient near eastern religious and cultural setting was investigated. In the end it was concluded that the Holiness Code (of which the stipulations on homosexuality form part) is best understood as a law code made up in a period of drastic experiences, namely those of exile and dispersion. This law code seems to represent a response to dramatic social changes in the life of the community. Hence a great concern for the identity of the own people which in the Holiness Code, due to its priestly theology, is characterized by a marked stress on purity. This was a fundamental issue in the circumstances where a “holy” people was living in dispersion.

Trends

It became obvious from this case study that the developments in Biblical interpretation that occurred in Western Europe (a move away from authoritarian and dogmatic interpretation, and a growing appreciation for the historical-cultural environment in which the biblical texts originated), as well as the social transformation from the late 1960's onwards (reaction against authority and sexual taboos) cooperated in cultivating the ground within which the ecclesial statements with regard to homosexuality were formulated. "Openness" and "anti-authoritarian movement" were dominant heuristic keys, not only in biblical interpretation, but also in understanding the social reality. The *mode of accommodation* can be detected in this case. The social order of accommodating people with different sexual orientations within the mainstream of society was accepted as norm, and the strategies of biblical interpretation that emphasises variety and openness (with reference to the historical-cultural environment of origin, that constitutes discontinuity with the present social order) served the purpose of including others into this order. It was, however, also indicated that another mode of interpretation occurred simultaneously among people from the same church community. These people (although perhaps a minority) rejected the social order of openness towards people of other sexual orientations, and used the Bible for the purpose of criticising the present order. The *mode of resistance* therefore occurred simultaneously.

2.2 Case study 2: Belhar Confession

Summary

This case study focussed on the Belhar Confession that was formulated by the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church (the draft was accepted in 1982 and the final approval came in 1986) within the social-political circumstances of apartheid-South Africa. These circumstances in South Africa's history, also church history, are well-documented. This case study therefore did not attempt to provide a renewed reconstruction of the social-political dynamics. It is, however, important to point out that the DRMC drew its constituency from the politically oppressed and marginalized part of South African society.

The different articles of the confession were analyzed (with special emphasis on the articles on unity and justice) in this investigation (Meyer 2000:113 and Daniels 2001) and the texts used in these articles were identified. A comparative study was then done to see what these texts have in common, and the way in which these texts are used in the particular article of the confession was described. Some important exegetical issues with regard to the texts were subsequently considered, and some conclusions were drawn from the study with reference to the mode of biblical interpretation encountered in the confession.

Trends

The heuristic keys with which the Confession of Belhar operate, are quite obvious because the different articles of the confession are structured according to these themes. They are: unity, reconciliation and justice. It is also obvious that these keys were the result of this church's interaction with the social-political and ecclesial reality of apartheid-South Africa.

By nature, the confession did not intend to provide a thorough exegetical study of different biblical passages from which certain truths for the South African society could then be deduced. The confession's articles are rather formulations of basic convictions that are then substantiated with reference to biblical texts. The particular theme discussed in each article rather reminded the authors of certain biblical passages, and these texts were then included in the confession in an associative manner.

With the exclusion of perhaps one or two examples (e.g. Deut. 32:4 which occurs as reference in article 4 on justice), the biblical references in the Belhar Confession were used in line with the results of exegetical studies of these passages.

The numerous references to the Gospel of Luke in the article on justice serve as example of the previous point. Belhar does not quote these Lukan texts in a haphazard manner. It became clear from the exegetical study that these texts are representative of a very important theme in the Gospel of Luke, namely the reversal theme. It is obvious that texts with this theme would offer some comfort to oppressed people, and would keep the hope alive that injustice will be changed to justice.

It became clear from this case study that the mode of biblical interpretation present in the Confession of Belhar can be described as a *mode of resistance*. The injustice of the social-political order in which this confession was formulated was rejected, and appeals were made with this confession to the church (the family of Dutch Reformed Churches, in particular) towards reconciliation and unity. The present order was thus criticised and an alternative order was advocated.

2.3 Case study 3: 'Ras, Volk en Nasie'

Summary

This case study concentrated on the document "Ras, volk en nasie en volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif" that was finally accepted by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1974. This document came to be known as the classical attempt at the biblical legitimization of apartheid theology. It should also be noted here that the document was the product of reflection on racial issues within the Dutch Reformed Church that has drawn its constituency from the centre of the apartheid society. The church membership formed part of the privileged part of society who had free access to political and societal power agents.

In this case study a short overview was provided of the socio-historical and political changes that took place among white South Africans since the end of the 19th century (Jonker 2001). Subsequently, the growing awareness among Dutch Reformed members of the need to formulate an opinion on racial segregation was described. The developments within the Dutch Reformed discussion on this issue was described, as well as the acceptance of the document in 1974. It was indicated in this discussion that this report was rather the culmination and formulation of a reflection that was present in the DRC for decades already, than a scriptural study from which certain principles for the future were drawn (Jonker 2001).

The reactions to this report were then analyzed and described (Jonker 2001). The focus was on the criticism of the hermeneutical framework in operation in "Ras, Volk en Nasie", as well as of the exegetical results reached in the document. The further investigation was then limited to Chapter 1 of the report where the hermeneutical and exegetical presuppositions were explicated. Three aspects of this chapter were investigated:

- (i) the hermeneutical principles that are stated explicitly in this chapter of the document;
- (ii) the exegesis of Gen. 10-11 and the functioning of this exegesis in the document's argumentation;
- (iii) the description of Israel's relationship to the nations as described in the document, and the conclusions drawn from that for the relationship between church and nation (Jonker 2001).

It has been indicated that the soundness of the hermeneutical principles stated in the document has been lauded by many - even by critics (Basson 2001 and Jonker 2001).

However, it has also been indicated sufficiently by others, but also in this study, that theory and practice did not correspond in this document. When it came to the practical execution of these principles in the South African society, it often happened that the self-same principles were inverted to justify the ideology of apartheid.

The investigation into the exegesis of Gen. 10-11 in the document produced some surprising results (Jonker 2001). Although this exegesis was (correctly) criticized by many for not being in line with the major exegetical results available at that time, a study of more recent exegetical works (that have appeared since the 1990's) has revealed that the new trend (particularly in exegetical works that take the final form of the text as point of departure) shows remarkable similarities to the exegetical strategies and results that were exercised in "Ras, Volk en Nasie" (without coming to the same social-political conclusions, of course). This interesting and surprising result confirms, however, that biblical interpretation is never exercised free from interaction with the social processes of the context.

In the paragraph of "Ras, Volk en Nasie" in which Israel's relationship to the nations is described, the biblical reference to Deut. 32:8, as well as the Hebrew concepts *ger* and *nokri* (both used to designate "foreigners") played an important role. This text and these concepts have therefore been investigated (Basson 2001). The investigation has shown that the understanding of this biblical data was strongly influenced by the prominence of the concept people ("volk") within Dutch Reformed circles, as well as the view within this church that church and people ("volk") were closely related.

Trends

It became clear from this investigation that "volk" and a very specific understanding of diversity in society were dominant heuristic keys in the interpretation of the Bible by the Dutch Reformed Church in apartheid society. From the outset the report utilizes an inductive approach in which the context of interpretation (the South African society from a white Afrikaner perspective, in this case) is taken as point of departure. Relations between different peoples and races within a diverse society were experienced as problematic, and this experience stands at the beginning of the exegetical scrutiny of the report.

The investigation has shown that two prominent interpretational strategies played an important role in this document. On the one hand, the document attempted to search for the principles and norms that are regarded as being eternal and that should be applied to the South African society. On the other hand, the history of the Dutch Reformed Church was seen as being a sequel to the history of salvation witnessed to in the history of Israel. In the report a close identification of the DRC with biblical Israel was made.

It also became clear from this case study that interpretation was done according to the *mode of legitimisation*. The present order of political apartheid was accepted uncritically, and biblical interpretation served the purpose of reinforcing and strengthening this order. The report consciously or unconsciously wanted to provide biblical "proofs" or "arguments" that could legitimise this policy, as well as the practical implementation of this policy in society.

2.4 Case study 4: Women participation in the Malawian Church

Summary

This case study was done in two parts according to the views of the different synodical regions of the CCAP in Malawi. The synods of Blantyre and Livingstonia have a far more lenient view on the position of women in the church (allowing women to serve as deacons and elders, and having taken the decision to ordain women as ministers although some feet-dragging occurs in practice) than the synod of Nkhoma who still refuses women

participation in the offices, and still forbids women to lead bible study sessions where men are also present (Kawale 2001a, 2001b and Manda 2001).

The following results surfaced from this case study that examined different church policy documents and decisions:

The *history of origin* of the different synodical areas plays a major role in their attitude towards women participation, as well as with regard to their strategy of biblical interpretation (Kawale 2001a and Manda 2001). The synods of Blantyre and Livingstonia were the offsprings of Scottish missionary work in Malawi, while the synod of Nkhoma came into being as a result of the missionary work of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. These respective historical backgrounds contributed to the differences in biblical interpretation that still occur in these synods.

The *indigenous structuring of the tribal society* coupled with the religious significance thereof, also exercises influence in this regard. It was indicated in this case study that the Chewa tribe (that makes up the majority of the Nkhoma synod's constituency) is structured matrilineally (Kawale 2001a). When viewed superficially it therefore seems strange that this community is reluctant to allow women ordination. However, it was also indicated that women who become chiefs in the Chewa tribe, also act as religious mediums, and play prominent roles in many traditional religious practices. The early missionaries rejected and prohibited any form of Chewa traditional religion, and because Chewa women played such a significant role in the cultic practices, they were prohibited from taking part in church leadership positions when they became Christians.

Another cultural issue that was indicated in this case study to be significant is the *views held* in this African society *on purity and holiness* (particularly in relationship with the sacraments) (Manda 2001). From the Malawian cultural perspective, regardless of tribal affiliations, there are taboos associated with menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. This cultural perspective on women participation in religious affairs in general, and in the sacraments in particular, has been a central topic in particularly the Blantyre synod.

Related to the above issue, it was indicated in this case study that certain Old Testament texts, such as Lev. 12 and 15, as well as New Testament texts, such as 1 Cor. 14:34-37 and 1 Tim. 2:11-14, play a major role in the deliberations about the role of women in all the synodical regions of the Malawian church (Kawale 2001b and Manda 2001). It was indicated that *a fairly literal application* of these texts in their contemporary society is made. Their interpretation of these texts takes place within the context of their own cultural and social parameters. They attempt to find eternal values in the Bible in order to apply them unquestioningly to their own circumstances.

Trends

It is difficult to identify one uniform mode of interpretation in the different discourses in the three Malawian synods. The mode of biblical interpretation is here strongly influenced by the struggle of intercultural discourse between biblical culture, indigenous tribal culture, and modern culture in which women are accepted as equals. The interaction among different cultural worlds determines the hermeneutical framework in which the Bible is interpreted in this discourse. This discourse therefore represents an attempt at preserving indigenous culture amidst the trend to modernize, and the Bible is then used as an ally in this cultural struggle. The issue of women participation in the church is one of the central areas where this discourse surfaces in a religious environment.

It could further be argued that the Nkhoma synod, on the one hand, tends to use the *mode of resistance* against modern trends in society, although they simultaneously tend to *legitimize* the present order in their part of the church. The synods of Blantyre and

Livingstonia, on the other hand, tend to use the *mode of accommodation* in their attempts at integrating modern cultural views with traditional views on purity and holiness.

3. A comparative study

Although the different case studies produced diverse research results, the task of the comparative phase in this project has been to determine whether certain patterns could be detected, and whether certain general observations could be deduced. The following remarks can be viewed as the culmination of the research done in this project:

3.1 Theological tradition

It could be stated that all the interpretative communities studied in this research project had an openness towards a renewed understanding of the Bible, or at least presupposed that the Bible has truth-value for contemporary society. This fact can probably best be valued against the background of the theological tradition from which all these interpretative communities stem, namely the Reformed Christian tradition. It has been indicated in this project (cf. particularly the contribution of Smit 2000) that members of this tradition normally regard their confessions as provisional (i.e. “the attitude of freedom that always remembers the relativity of its own attempts and insights”) and that these confessions can be revised, that they are truly human presentations to be read, understood and respected in their historical nature and context, that they are particular and therefore have applicability in specific contexts, and that they are spontaneously and publicly formulated, confessed for the marketplace and for the city hall (Smit 2000:67ff.).

This characterization of the Reformed tradition’s confessions indicates that Reformed Churches will always be sensitive to periods of social transformation in order to confess their faith in those particular circumstances. Although many other factors are involved in times of transformation (see below) that result into different modes and effects of interpretation within specific interpretative communities, it could at least be argued that the shared Reformed tradition of the interpretative communities involved in this project created an openness and willingness towards reinterpretation and reflection during times of social transformation.

3.2 Hermeneutical strategies of appropriation

It became clear during the research that a refinement could be made of the hermeneutical strategies of appropriation that were proposed in the initial methodological reflection (Jonker 2000). There a distinction was made between the following strategies:

- (i) identifying eternal truths and values;
- (ii) identifying the continuity between biblical salvation narratives and contemporary narratives;
- (iii) identifying divine promises in the Bible and their contemporary fulfilment.

These could be supplemented with the following (not necessarily providing new categories, but rather refining the above description):

- (i) The trace paper model: According to this model contemporary society and individual behaviour should be shaped exactly in the same way as the reflections of these that we find in the Bible;
- (ii) The analogy model: Either by means of allegorizing or typologizing the biblical message and characters should be “activated” in contemporary society;

- (iii) The scopus model: Biblical interpretation should provide impetus to the greater theologies (e.g. a theology of liberation) that are already practised in society;
- (iv) The model of terminological parallelism: Because the same terminology as provided by the hermeneutical keys of the interpretative community is used in the biblical text, that particular text has meaning for contemporary society.
- (v) The model of relational parallelism: The relationship between e.g. God and Israel is seen as being parallel to the relation between God and a contemporary nation/group/people;
- (vi) The model of emerging knowledge: According to this model a reinterpretation becomes necessary when new insights in either the biblical texts or social behaviour/relationships emerges.

From this research it became apparent that a combination of these strategies occurred in all four case studies. However, it can also be indicated that the interpretative community in each case study showed greater affinity to a specific strategy. In the case study on the Dutch ecclesial discussions about homophilia the model of emerging knowledge was most prominent. Because critical biblical scholarship has provided new insight in the historical-cultural background of the biblical texts, a re-examination of their present views on homophilia was deemed necessary in their circumstances of social transformation. In the case study on “Ras, Volk en Nasie” in apartheid South Africa, the model of relational parallelism was the most prominent. An identification of the white Afrikaner people with biblical Israel took place, and their relationship with God was defined in parallelism to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. In the Belhar Confession that was also formulated in apartheid South Africa, the model of terminological parallelism seems to be most prominent. The heuristic keys of reconciliation, unity and justice provided the grid according to which biblical texts were chosen to be referred to in the confession. In the fourth case study on women participation in the Malawian church the trace paper model was quite prominent. The biblical particularities (especially laws on purity and holiness) were transposed directly onto contemporary society - probably because the indigenous culture shows strong cultural similarities to the Old Testament.

3.3 Modes of interpretation

Whereas the above category provides a description of the appropriation *strategies* used in the different interpretative communities (i.e. the way in which the gap between text and context is bridged), the present distinction of modes of interpretation rather focuses on the *function* of these interpretations in relation to circumstances of social transformation (i.e. what the interpretation does/attempts in society). These two categories can, of course, not be studied in isolation, and they are certainly related to one another. However, this research has indicated the value of analysing (what could be called) the rhetoric of biblical interpretation during times of social transformation.

The two South African case studies have shown that different, opposing modes of interpretation occurred more or less during the same period in the different interpretative communities involved. Other factors (see below), of course, gave rise to these different modes. The tendency to legitimize the present social order was quite obvious in Dutch Reformed circles and in their formulation of “Ras, Volk en Nasie”. the Dutch Reformed Mission Church clearly used the mode of resistance in the Confession of Belhar to oppose the injustices in the present social order.

The Malawian case study showed some ambiguity in their handling of the issue of women participation in the church. It has become clear that this discourse is embedded in

the broader discourse of interculturality (with regards to matrilineality, indigenous religion, and holiness/purity). However, in some parts of the church (namely the synods of Blantyre and Livingstonia) a tendency towards the mode of accommodation could be detected. At least in some synodical decisions and statements biblical interpretation was used to promote accommodation of modern views on the position of women in society into traditional views. In another part of the church (the synod of Nkhoma, in particular) a mode of resistance was more prevalent. Biblical interpretation was rather used to resist the accommodation of women in leadership positions in the church.

The research has also made clear that the mode of accommodation characterized the Dutch ecclesial discussions on the issue of homophilia. The developments in biblical scholarship, combined with the forces of social transformation since the end of the 1960's in Holland, created an openness to reflect on the position of traditionally marginalized groups in the church. In these circumstances biblical interpretation played an important role to include homosexuals into mainstream society.

3.4 Societal factors influencing biblical interpretation

Although it has become clear from this investigation that no patterns exist in the relationship between social transformation and biblical interpretation, and that any attempts at prediction will be refuted in practice, certain significant factors have emerged in this project. The following could be mentioned:

Broader tensions in society:

It has been indicated that the broader societal forces of globalisation and localisation occur simultaneously in changing societies, and that interpretative communities are exposed to both of these forces (Groenewald 2000). However, it also became clear that interpretative communities often show a stronger tendency towards one of these forces. This tendency was found to be determinative of the relationship between social transformation and biblical interpretation in interpretative communities. A stronger tendency towards localization was, for example, found in the Dutch Reformed Church during apartheid-South Africa, who emphasised the racial identity of the white Afrikaner people during these years. The Nkhoma synod in Malawi also showed a stronger affinity towards localization, emphasizing the religious position of men towards women in society. In the case of the other interpretative communities involved in this project, a prominent tendency towards globalization (as defined by the interdisciplinary contribution of Groenewald 2000) could be detected. In the Dutch Reformed Mission Church during apartheid-South Africa, the Dutch churches during the early 1970's, and the present synods of Livingstonia and Blantyre in the Malawian CCAP a continuous negotiation among different group identities can be detected in order to arrive at a common understanding and tolerance.

Power relations in society:

It has also become clear in this investigation that the power position an interpretative community occupies in society during a period of transformation, is quite significant with regard to biblical interpretation (cf. De Ville 2000 and Du Plessis 2000). Within the abovementioned tensions in society, interpretative communities function closer or further from the centre of power with regard to specific social issues. The constituency and leadership of the DRC occupied, for example, the centre of political and social power during apartheid-South Africa. This position impacted heavily on their mode of interpretation. The same applies to the church leadership in the different synods of the Malawian church. However, this case study has shown that a position of power does not necessarily lead to the same mode of interpretation. Other factors are simultaneously

involved. The leadership and constituency of the DRMC during apartheid-South Africa did not occupy a position of power at all, but rather functioned as an oppressed and marginalized community. This also impacted significantly on their mode of interpretation. To a certain extent it can be stated that the power position and authority of the Dutch churches were eroded since the late 1960's. This position certainly contributed, among other factors, to the mode of accommodation followed in their biblical interpretation.

Degree of cultural identification:

The Malawian case study, in particular, has shown that the degree of similarity between biblical cultural norms and the contemporary culture of the interpretative community also plays a significant role (Kawale 2001a, 2001b and Manda 2001). The Book of Leviticus played an important role in two case studies, namely in the Dutch discussions on homophilia, as well as in the Malawian discussions on women participation in the church. In the case of the Dutch interpretative community there was no cultural identification with the world behind the text at all. In the Malawian interpretative community this identification was, however, the central issue in their interpretation of the texts.

History:

The Malawian case study has also shown that the theological historical background of the interpretative community results in significant differences in interpretation. Although the different synods of this church have been united, their historical roots differ. These historical roots are significant, because they gave rise to different interpretational traditions among the different parts of this church.

3.5 The effect of biblical interpretation in society

From the outset it was stated in this project that the relationship between social transformation and biblical interpretation is a reciprocal one (Jonker 2000:1ff.). Social transformation not only influences the way in which the Bible is interpreted by faith communities - biblical interpretations also tend to influence society. As the interdisciplinary studies have indicated, one could distinguish between transformative and non-transformative (or conservationist) interpretation (cf. De Ville 2000). The interpretational effect of two of the interpretative communities involved in this project, namely the DRC in apartheid-South Africa, as well as the Nkhoma synod in the Malawian CCAP, was characterized as non-transformative (or conservationist). As a matter of fact, both these communities have shown a stronger tendency towards localization, and have used the modes of legitimization (DRC and Nkhoma) and resistance (Nkhoma) in their interpretation. The effect of the interpretation of the other interpretative communities involved was characterized as transformative. They have all shown a stronger tendency towards globalization, and have used the modes of resistance (DRMC) and accommodation (Dutch churches and Malawian synods of Livingstonia/Blantyre).

3.6 Summary

The remarks in the previous sub-sections can now be summarized in the following table:

	Heuristic keys	Modes of interpretation	Strategies of appropriation	Effect of interpretation
Stronger tendency towards <i>localization</i>	“volk”, race, identity holiness, purity, indigenous culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ legitimization ▪ resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ finding eternal values/truths ▪ trace paper ▪ relational parallelism 	on-ransformative
Stronger tendency towards <i>globalization</i>	justice, reconciliation, unity openness, anti-authority holiness, purity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ accommodation ▪ resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ terminological parallelism ▪ emerging knowledge ▪ trace paper 	ransformative

4. Conclusion

I have concluded our methodological reflection (Jonker 2000:12) at the start of this project with the following quotation from Gottwald (1992, 88): “The question of which social structures and behaviours were the ‘right’ ones in biblical times and which are the ‘right’ ones for us all will always remain a matter of dispute. To determine ‘rightness’ in these contexts necessitates critical social ethical judgment. Such judgment is developed within the discourse and practice of the various communities that constitute church and society, and in which many factors such as class, race, gender, and religion are at play. There simply is no ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ biblical social ethic. But the ‘lesson’ derivable from this reality is not sheer ethical relativism and cynicism but informed moral agency by a ‘responding’ self in a ‘responding’ society.”

The results of this research project have proved this statement to be true. The project has, however, also contributed to the discourse mentioned in this quotation. By giving more profile to the interaction between social transformation processes and Biblical interpretation the results of this project have contributed to a better understanding of this interaction.

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