

# CONTOURS OF BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY AS A DISCIPLINE

## ABSTRACT

Three approaches are used for coming towards a definition of Biblical spirituality. The first approach is from lived spirituality. We see always a bipolarity of text and reader. The reader attributes meaning to the text guided by the data of the text. The second approach is the analysis of literature discussing Biblical spirituality. There are many spiritualities both in the Bible and in its readers, influenced by their contexts. The third approach is the discussion of the composing terms. A definition is given: Biblical spirituality is about the divine human relational process in the Bible and about the Bible in the divine human relational process. A dialogue of spirituality and exegesis is needed. For doing research a threefold competence is needed: in exegesis, in spirituality and in the integration of these two. The final section is about intertextuality. Intertextuality may help to understand the spiritual process in reading biblical texts.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Biblical spirituality belongs to the field of biblical scholarship. Christo Lombaard calls Old Testament spirituality a minor genre of Old Testament scholarship (Lombaard 2008). Biblical spirituality also belongs to the field of Christian spirituality. In accordance to the three basic forms of reflection in antiquity, mythos, praxis and logos, Kees Waaijman develops a model for the discipline of spirituality consisting in three basic forms, fundamental spirituality, biblical spirituality and practical spirituality (Waaijman 2010). For the way spirituality is studied the distinction between lived spirituality and the study of spirituality and the relations between lived spirituality and the study of spirituality are important. The study of spirituality has the intention to be subservient to lived spirituality. But otherwise, the questions studied in the research of spirituality, are derived from lived spirituality. Therefore the study of spirituality asks for a

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phenomenological approach. The study of spirituality is a description of and reflection on lived spirituality. For this sketch of the contours of the field of Biblical spirituality I will use the same approach. I will start with the way how the Bible is read in lived spirituality and with some reflections on it.

## 2. APPROACH FROM LIVED SPIRITUALITY

### 2.1 History of spiritual reading of the Bible

Already from the times of the exile people read biblical texts in view of their spiritual life (Welzen 2001). The exile meant the destruction of Judah as a nation. The dynasty of David and the temple did not exist anymore as symbols of national identity. In the exile traditions come down from earlier times were brought together. In institutions like the synagogue and the house of instruction the texts handed down were read, reflected and studied in view of its relevance for the problems and questions of the reader's situation. We can recognize this bipolarity of the texts and the situation of the readers in the total history of spiritual reading in the Jewish – Christian tradition. H. de Lubac gave a very impressive description of the history of spiritual reading in Christian antiquity (Lubac 1950) and the middle-ages (Lubac 1959-1964). There is almost always a system of plural meaning of biblical texts. This system is developed because of the relevance of the biblical texts for the spiritual life of the readers. In our planned book on biblical spirituality we will give the examples of Origen<sup>1</sup>, Didymus the Blind (Tighele 1977a 1977b), Collatio XIV of John Cassian (Reedijk 2003), Augustine<sup>2</sup>, Guigo II the carthusian (Bianchi 1991; Guigo II

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1 In the fourth book of *De principiis* Origenes explains his exegetical principles. They are related strongly to a middle-platonic anthropology. With reference to the threefold system *σαρξ* (flesh), *ψυχή*, (soul) and *πνεῦμα* (spirit) he speaks about a threefold system of meaning of Scripture. Each meaning addresses the believer in its own way. "The simple one is built up by the 'flesh' (*σαρξ*) of Scripture, the more advanced one by the 'soul' (*ψυχή*) and the perfect one by the 'spirit' (*πνεῦμα*)." The literal-historical meaning, the typological meaning and the spiritual meaning clarify that Scripture not only aim at the salvation of each human being, but also at the salvation of human being in its totality. See Reedijk (2003:125).

2 In *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine has contributed enormously to the theory of spiritual reading with the aim of the enjoyment of the divine. In the eyes of Augustine the impact of Scripture in faith, hope and love is more important than the correct interpretation of the text. He stresses the impact in love especially. Not information, but transformation is the most important goal of reading Scripture. Nevertheless incorrect interpretations have to be corrected. By drawing up rules for the interpretation of Biblical texts the interpretation becomes verifiable. But it is clear that the verifiability of the interpretation is not Augustine's first aim. The first thing is the impact of the texts on the reader. In book III Augustine discusses the

1970; Guigo II 1981; Mesters 1999; Rouse; Sieben; Boland 1976), Thomas Aquinas (Valkenberg 1990) and the Modern Devotion (Welzen 2006a, Welzen 2006b).

In antiquity and middle ages we see that there is a bipolar structure in reading Scripture. Text and reader are related to each other and influence each other. The truth of the text is the way the reading process has changed and transformed the reader. In the reader one can see that a text is true. To illustrate this we give three quotations from the study of *Collatio XIV* of John Cassian by Wim Reedijk.

The truth of a meaning is recognized in the impact of this meaning in somebody... For Cassian ethics are always included in the truth of the meaning... The success of the truth the reader finds in the text is dependent on the veracity of the life of the reader (Reedijk 2003:252).

From the start of modern times and especially in the Enlightenment we see the development of the historical critical approach to the Bible. In understanding biblical texts the role of reason was underscored. The research had to be objective. One of the consequences of the requirement of objectivity was the separation of the text and the readers. The truth became a matter of the text. For instance in matters of historical questions: a text is true if the events in the text correlate to the events in reality. The reader and the scholar were supposed to have no relationship with the truth of the text, because they had to be objective towards the truth. Despite this development in academic exegesis the common reading of the bible went on. People kept on reading biblical texts in view of their spiritual life.

## 2.2 Phenomenology of reading

In the seventies and eighties of the last century we saw a new phenomenon in academic exegesis. In pragmatics, rhetorical analysis and reader oriented exegesis the role of the reader in the process of meaning was stressed. Authors like U. Eco (1983<sup>3</sup>), W. Iser (1976, 1979<sup>2</sup>), and P. Ricoeur (1991) studied what happened in the process of reading. Their conclusions became important for those exegetes who were interested in the relationship of text and reader. The process of reading is considered as a circular model of interaction. The reader attributes meaning to the text by the activity of reading, but at the

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problem of the polysemic meaning of the signs in Scripture. Among other things he discusses the question of how to decide if a text has to be interpreted in a literal way or in a figurative way. After that he inquires in which cases a text has to be applied in one's own life. He points out the choice of words which is based on analogy or affinity with the literal meaning. It seems that also Augustine is known with a system of meanings, consisting in more layers.

same time he is guided by the data in the text. The often used metaphor of the musical score is illuminating in this respect. The score is the music written on paper. But it is the musician who interprets the notes on the paper and adapts them to sweet-sounding music. In the same way the text has found a material expression in the written product, a series of instructions for the reader to construct a meaningful whole. Here again we see a bipolarity of text and reader. Text and reader interact and the result of this interaction is the construction of meaning.

## 2.3 Clarification of the reading process from spiritual hermeneutics

In his book on spirituality Kees Waaijman (2002:689-773) develops a model for hermeneutical research in biblical and spiritual texts. His design consists in six steps: the pre-understanding, the act of reading, critical analysis, theological pragmatics, the revelation of the mystery, and the ongoing impact. At this moment it is important to see that his model is based on the praxis of spiritual reading. From the description of the reading praxis in Jewish tradition, in the Christian tradition, the reading of the Koran, and the reading praxis in Buddhist tradition, he makes visible a basic structure in the reading process. There is always an initial attitude in which the transition is made from daily life to reading praxis, there is always the reading process itself, and there is always the continuing impact of the reading process on the identity and life praxis of the reader. The reading process itself is phased. It starts with the reading in which the obvious meaning is observed. The reflective attention deepens this obvious meaning. The third phase orients the passion of the praying soul. In the fourth phase of the reading process the mystical Secret is received and contemplated. Together with the initial attitude and the ongoing impact these phases form the basics for the design of a spiritual hermeneutic in the six steps I mentioned.

In this reflection on the spiritual reading praxis in lived spirituality we see again the bipolarity of the spiritual reading process and the interaction of text and reader. We see also this bipolarity reflected in the scholarly design of spiritual hermeneutics.

## 2.4 The importance of the (pious) pre-understanding in the process of reading the Bible

Reader oriented exegesis has made clear that meaning is the result of a circular interactive process of text and reader. In this process the initial attitude and the pre-understanding of the reader are decisive. I will illustrate this with the help of the example of the Dutch writer Maarten 't Hart. Maarten

't Hart was born in 1944. He published more than thirty novels. Many of them have been translated in many countries. In the Netherlands and in Germany he is an author of bestsellers who is practically idolized. Most of his novels have to do with the orthodox Calvinist religious atmosphere in which he grew up. When he was a student he broke with his belief. Many of his novels are characterised by polemics against religion and the Calvinist atmosphere of his youth. In *De Schrift betwist* many of his reflections on Scripture are collected ('t Hart 2003). There is always the same pattern in these essays. Maarten 't Hart tries to show how foolish it is to believe, because the texts in Bible contradict each other. That is one reason the Bible cannot be true. The other reason is that the text of the Bible contradicts reality. Reading and reflecting the way Maarten 't Hart is operating one can see it is a kind of reversed fundamentalism.<sup>3</sup> James Barr (1981, 1984) names three characteristics of Christian fundamentalism: 1. Fundamentalists think that there is no error or contradiction in the Bible whatever the field in which the biblical utterance is done; 2. Fundamentalists have a hostile attitude toward modern theology and critical approaches towards the Bible; 3. Fundamentalists consider people who don't think in the same way as they do as not real Christians. In his essays Maarten 't Hart is using the first principle for an opposite purpose. He wants to show that the Bible is not true because there are errors in it. Because of this it is foolish to believe. One can see the pre-understanding. Believe has to do with the question of what is true. True means that there are no errors or contradictions in what is written. True means also the conformity of what is written to the things in reality. For Maarten 't Hart it is obvious that there are errors and contradictions in the Bible and that there is no conformity between what is written in the Bible and reality. Therefore it is obvious that the Bible is not true. It is clear that this pre-understanding prohibits a reading of the Bible that leads to belief.

This example makes clear that in the bipolarity of text and reader the pre-understanding of the reader (and the researcher) is one of the determining elements for the way one attributes meaning to biblical texts.

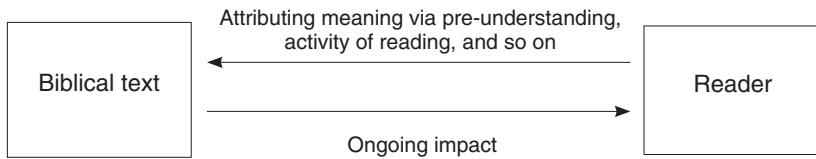
## 2.5 Conclusion

As a conclusion of this first section we can formulate that in lived spirituality there is always a bipolarity in the reading of biblical text. We can circumscribe this bipolarity as a circular interactive process. In attributing meaning to biblical texts the pre-understanding and initial attitude plays an important role.

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3 Also Christo Lombaard sees that fundamentalist readers and some fundamentalist a- or antireligious commentators share the same expectations of how a Holy Scripture should be detected. He speaks of fundamentalisms (plural), both religious and anti-religious (Lombaard 2008:150-151).

Attributing meaning is the direction from the reader towards the text. The other direction is from the text to the reader. The first fact is that the data of the text guide the reader in attributing meaning. The other fact is that the reading process has an ongoing impact in the life of the reader. Reading transforms the reader. There is a kind of a basic structure which we can visualize as follows:



### 3. APPROACH FROM LITERATURE

There are only a few studies in which the question “What is Biblical spirituality?” is discussed explicitly.

#### 3.1 Sandra M. Schneiders

A first important publication is the article of Sandra M. Schneiders (Schneiders 2002). In the introduction of this article she indicates that Christian spirituality is biblical in some sense, and all salvific engagement with the Bible shapes and nourishes spirituality. Christian spirituality is the lived experience of Christian faith. The term Biblical spirituality has three meanings. The first and most fundamental meaning refers to the spiritualities that come to expression in the Bible. Schneiders uses the plural explicitly. In the Bible we find a variety of spiritualities. This variety legitimates the variety of spiritualities among Christians throughout the ages and in various settings. A second meaning of the term biblical spirituality is a pattern of Christian life imbued with the spirituality(ies) of the Bible. This meaning refers to an integrated contemporary spirituality that is markedly biblical in character. The third meaning is: a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the biblical text. Schneiders stresses that people can approach the text not merely as a historical record or even as a literary mediation of religious meaning but as the Word of God. At this point we recognize the importance of the pre-understanding as we indicated in the previous section. This pre-understanding cannot bypass academic exegesis, but academic exegesis does not automatically lead to the kind of transformative hermeneutics

Schneiders aims at. Rather, the subjectivity of the reader is transformed by the influence of the Word of God, which is mediated by the words of the text.

Schneiders discusses five ways of engaging in a transformative reading of Scripture: hearing the preaching of the Word, liturgy, faith sharing in small groups, the actual practice of transformative action in the world and *lectio divina*. Here Schneiders presents the model of Guigo II the Carthusian. In discussing the faith sharing in small groups Schneiders shows how the historical, social and cultural situation of the reader influences the interpretation of the text. Here the inspiration of liberation theology and feminist exegesis is recognizable clearly. The conclusion of the article is a plea for serious study, also in the case of biblical spirituality. Too often biblical spirituality suffers under the suspicion that slackminded “piety” is being substituted for serious study.

In the article of Schneiders we recognize the bipolarity present in the practise of spiritual reading; the bipolarity of the text and the reader and the interactive process that is visible in the pre-understanding of the reader and in the impact in the reader. At the same time Schneiders moves to the study of these three moments. She speaks clearly of spiritualities in the Bible and of spiritualities in readers, influenced by the Bible. The way Schneiders discusses the meaning of the term “Biblical Spirituality” seems very important for setting the outlines of the field of research indicated by this term.

### 3.2 John R. Donahue

In his article “The Quest for Biblical Spirituality” John R. Donahue (2006) elucidates the ideas of Sandra Schneiders. First Donahue discusses the question what spirituality is and the commitment of Sandra Schneiders for spirituality as an independent academic discipline. After that he presents the development of biblical spirituality against the background of the developments initiated by the second Vatican Council. Not only attention for the critical study of biblical sources grew, but also the attention for the religious experience of the believers as participating in the process of meaning. The third section of the article handles the definition of biblical spirituality. Donahue mentions the three meanings of biblical spirituality Schneiders has given. After that he discusses how Schneiders guards biblical spirituality against the reproach of reading one’s own ideas into the text and eisegesis. Guidelines that counter such a charge are: respect for the text as it stands; an interpretation that explains anomalies; an interpretation that uses proper methods; and one that is compatible with what is known from other sources (see also Schneiders 1999). Another important guideline is that an interpretation must be fruitful. A laborious interpretation that comes up with an obvious meaning, or interpretations that are destructive of the divine human encounter and human relationships are fruitless (Donahue 2006:83). The most important part of the contribution of

Donahue is that he shows how the ideas of Sandra Schneiders are rooted in the hermeneutical theories of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer (Donahue 2006:83-86, see also Schneiders 1999:169-179). According to Ricoeur there are two steps in the process of interpretation. The first one is the reading of the text. In this first step reading is “a naive grasping of the text as a whole”. The next step is the explanation of the text. The reader steps back and engages in the kind of research necessary for a deeper comprehension at a number of levels. Important is Ricoeur’s concept of the semantic autonomy of the text: its meaning is not limited to the “intention” of an original author. The semantic autonomy of texts opens them to interpretations beyond their original context. Traditions of interpretations quite different from the originating discourse may come into being. Ricoeur means by interpretation the actualization of the meaning of the text for the present reader. Appropriation is the concept which is suitable for the actualization of meaning as addressed to someone. Ricoeur understands appropriation in the same sense as the German *Aneignen*, which conveys the sense of “making one’s own” what was initially “alien”. Sandra Schneiders describes the process of appropriation primarily in terms of Gadamer’s theory of “fusion of horizons”, whereby the world horizon of the reader fuses with the horizon of the world projected by the text. Appropriation, as described by Sandra Schneiders, is the prerequisite to her goal of biblical spirituality, transformation. As already mentioned, this transformation takes place through the preached word, liturgy, faith sharing groups, and communal commitment to transformative action.

It is clear that in this article Donahue elucidates explicitly the transformative character of biblical spirituality and the process between text and reader as it is present in the work of Sandra Schneiders.

### 3.3 De Bijbel Spiritueel

In 2004 *De Bijbel Spiritueel* (Maas, Maas & Spronk 2004) was published. This book contains about one hundred contributions in each of which the question is posed concerning the spiritual layer or the spiritual themes in a bible book, or parts of it, in relation to the spiritual questions of our time. In the introduction spirituality is defined as a dynamic process of four factors. Spirituality is enacted between 1. the human person and 2. the basic inspiration that moves someone. This process is influenced by 3. the spirit of the time in its own way. Kees Waaijman, following M. de Certeau, explains this influence as a dialectic one. Continuity and discontinuity between spirituality are extremes in a field of tension. On the one hand, spirituality expresses itself in the language of a certain period, a reality by which its search for God gains form and expression. On the other hand, that same spirituality eludes the cultural language in which it expresses itself. It cannot find the words needed; it is “unsayable”. Lived



spirituality cannot express itself in the language of the time. The language of the culture falls short. The spiritual fundamental attitude is appropriated by 4. exercise and practicing. In this definition we recognize the idea of spirituality given by Steggink and Waaijman (1985). An advantage of this idea of spirituality is that from the beginning it is clear that in spirituality it is never about abstract timeless processes. By describing the spirit of the time as a factor of its own it becomes clear that spirituality is a concrete phenomenon and a historical manifestation.

The introduction continues that there is spirituality in the writings of the Bible. One can describe this spirituality with a certain kind of objectivity. If readers of our times contact this spirituality, the process starts again. The text becomes the ground inspiration for our spiritual fundamental attitude. The text transforms us. The aim of the book is to discover the spiritual movement going out from the text, because in this movement the meaning of the text is actualized.

Here we recognize clearly biblical spirituality as spirituality present in the biblical text and spirituality as a transformational process between text and reader. We may consider the factor exercising and practicing as a part of this transformational process. The bipolarity of the process and in relation to this the interactive process of text and reader is presupposed. It is a benefit that it becomes clear that spirituality is always about processes in a concrete context and that this context influences the process.

### 3.4 Christo Lombaard

In his study Christo Lombaard (2008) wants to negotiate a route to what he proposes may be a future working model for the discipline of biblical spirituality. The first part of his study is a critical evaluation of four publications. Three of them are explicitly titled or subtitled "Old Testament Spirituality" (Croix 1961-1963; Craghan 1983; Sheriffs 1996). The fourth publication is titled in general "Biblical Spirituality" (Southern Baptist Journal 2006). For our goal the second part of the article is more important. Here Christo Lombaard gives the outlines of a proposal that consists of four delineations. The first one is that the Bible itself is a focal point of spirituality. The reading of biblical texts had become part of the spirituality of ancient Israel. But this had never been a singular spirituality. The second point regards the relationship of history and faith. As Christianity is an inherently historical faith, its relationship with history is significant. The relationship of history and faith must remain an important feature on the agenda of biblical spirituality. But it is not enough to stop at the point of coming to an understanding of a given text in its ancient context. Christo Lombaard warns us also at this point against reducing historiography

to simply “telling it how it was”.<sup>4</sup> The third delineation is that *the* message of the Bible does not exist. The diversity, complexity and concurrent nature of the messages we find in the Bible must be acknowledged. The Bible contains different, overtly competing spiritualities. The fourth point relates the way in which latter-day spiritualities draw on the Bible. This means that there is no simple correlation between faith in the Bible and modern faith, nor even a one-to-one match between some of the diversity of spiritualities we encounter in the Bible and some the diversity of spiritualities we encounter among believers.

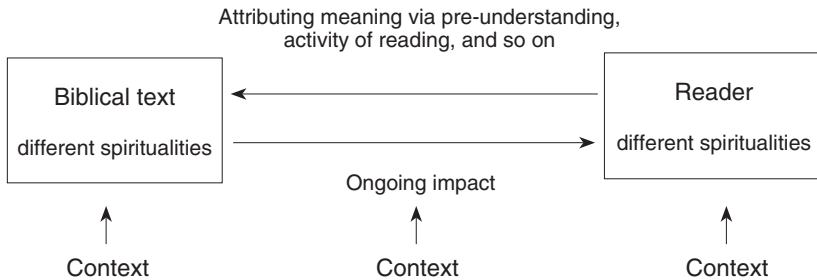
The four points of Christo Lombaard are very relevant for a deeper understanding of the bipolarity of biblical spirituality and the circular interactive process of text and reader. When we are talking about spiritualities in the Bible, we are talking about a very complex phenomenon of different interacting spiritualities. The same is true when we are talking about the different spiritualities in the reader, which are rooted in the Bible or in parts of the Bible. And eventually the process between text and reader is complex, because it is not a one to one match.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In the first section of this paper we gave a description and reflections of the way the bible is read by believers (and nonbelievers). At the end of that section we gave a simple picture of the bipolarity of the reading process and the interactive process of text and reader. After having analyzed some studies about the question “What is biblical spirituality?” the picture becomes more complex. It is clear that there is not one spirituality in the Bible. There are different spiritualities; sometimes in dialogue, sometimes competing and sometimes even in conflict with each other. On the side of the reader we see a similar situation. There are different spiritualities in the readers, sometimes communicating with each other, sometimes in harmony, but also sometimes in dispute and conflict. The way spiritualities are rooted in the Bible is complex too. There will be not often a one to one relationship. Very often the process will be influenced by the historical, social and cultural environments. The socio-historical context has not only influenced the process between text and reader, but also the spiritualities in the Bible and the spiritualities in the readers. But despite all these complexities a basic structure stands:

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4 Very instructive are the hermeneutical insights of Jens Schröter regarding the possibilities of (re)constructing the past. The distinction between past and history is constitutive for the insight that all we say about the past is interpretation. Reconstruction of the past (in the sense of how it was) is impossible. Even the sources the historian uses are interpretation of the past. History is interpretation of interpretations. (Schröter 2007, especially 1-77).



#### 4. APPROACH FROM THE TERMS: *SPIRITUALITY* AND *BIBLE*

Not only what happens in biblical spirituality is complex. Also the terms “spirituality” and “Bible” are complex. They need further discussion.

##### 4.1 Spirituality

Even in the few studies we analyzed one can see different ideas about spirituality. Sandra Schneiders (2002:134) speaks about Christian spirituality. She means by Christian spirituality the lived experience of Christian faith. It casts the process and project of life-integration in terms of the ultimate horizon and basic coordinates of Christian faith. Christian spirituality is a self transcending faith in which union with God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit expresses itself in service of the neighbor and participation in the realization of the reign of God in this world. For her Christian spirituality is necessarily biblical and is adequate only to the degree that it is rooted in and informed by the Word of God. In *De Bijbel Spiritueel* (Maas, Maas & Spronk 2004:13-14) spirituality is seen as the process in which four factors play a role: the human person, a basic inspiration, the spirit of time and the process of interiorisation. Kees Waaijman (2010:5-7) starts his valedictory lecture with the description of three problem areas in the study of spirituality. The first one is that the study of spirituality takes place in many academic disciplines. His conclusion about this situation is that “Up to now the study of spirituality is a multi-disciplinary enterprise, the challenge is that it will become an interdisciplinary network.” (Waaijman 2007:103). The second problem area is that of the basic concepts. The third one is the relation to the Jewish-Christian tradition. From the sixties in the discussion about spirituality “experience” and “giving meaning” are main categories in defining spirituality. Kees Waaijman complains that “experience”

is used often in a naïve, vague and extremely ambiguous way. The same is true for the idea of “giving meaning”.

The central part of the book of Kees Waaijman about spirituality (2002:305-591) gives a definition of spirituality as the divine human relational process as transformation. This definition is based on the study of keywords which describe the domain of lived spirituality. Studied are basic words in Scripture such as fear of God, holiness, mercy, perfection; hellenistic terms such as gnosis, asceticism, contemplation, devotion and piety; and modern designations such as kabbala, mysticism, inner life and spirituality. But also on the way spirituality as viewed in the light of its science is discussed. A distinction is made from two perspectives: the “inside” perspective of the study of spirituality (intradisciplinary) and the “outside” perspective of the other sciences (interdisciplinary). From the intradisciplinary perspective the following items are discussed: treatises on perfection, mystical theologies, ascetic theologies, spiritual theologies and the perspective of experience. From the interdisciplinary perspective the following academic disciplines are involved: theology, philosophy, science(s) of religion, history, literary sciences, psychology and sociology.

Each of the four elements of the definition of Waaijman needs further explanation. So Kees Waaijman discusses the divine reality, the human reality, the relational moment and the transformational process. Based on a study of discernment he gives a design for the discipline. Phenomenology and dialogic thinking provide the best cognitive forms for the scholarly study of spirituality. The research in spirituality unfolds in four directions: 1. Descriptive research in which the forms of spirituality are described and analyzed; 2. Hermeneutic research which interprets spiritual texts; 3. Systematic research which reflects on the thematic of spirituality; 4. Mystagogic research in which the mainlines of the spiritual journey are elucidated. I will follow this idea of spirituality as the divine human relationship as transformational process. Important for us are the bipolar character, the relational character and the transformational character of the definition.

## 4.2 Bible

The term “Bible” is not unambiguous. “Bible” does not mean the same thing in the different traditions. Tenach is not the same as Christian Scripture. The Christian churches have different canons. In the different canons there is a different number of books, the names of the main parts are different and the order of the books is different. I will illustrate the importance of this with the example of Luke 11:49-51: “For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the

foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.” Probably Luke aims at Zechariah, son of Jojada, who is mentioned in 2 Chr 24:17-22 and not at Zechariah, son of Berekja, son of Iddo, mentioned in the book with the same name (Ze 1:1). For the interpretation it is important to know that in the Hebrew Bible Genesis (with the story of Abel) is the first book and 2 Chronicles (with the story of Zechariah) is the last one. So Luke is saying that during the whole history prophets have been killed. This interpretation is only true for Tenach and those Bibles in which 2 Chr is the last book of the Old Testament. It is not true for instance for the Catholic Bible in which 2 Chr is part of the section of the historical books.

In the scholarly world the word “Bible” is taken in several senses. In the historical critical approach “Bible” is taken as a historically layered phenomenon. In the synchronic methods the text is taken as “it lies before us”. In the new attention for the canon the ways the texts and the books are ordered in the whole of the Bible is one of the items of attention. In the “Wirkungsgeschichte” the impact of the Bible is studied. In all these approaches the Bible is studied after different aspects.

An example of the different ways the Bible is taken in the scholarly approaches is the question about the position of the book of Acts in the Bible. Since the studies of H.J. Cadbury (1927) it is generally accepted by the scholars of Luke-Acts that the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts belong together as the two parts of one work. The question that remains is the way they belong to each other. One may ask why Acts does not follow the gospel of Luke in our Bible, so that it is clear the books are two parts of one work. Jens Schröter (2007) deals with this question from a canonical point of view. He shows that in the present position after the four gospels Acts has the function to bridge the gap between the writings dealing with the life of Jesus and the epistles of Paul and the other Apostles.

The adjective “biblical” means “of or relating to the Bible” (Webster’s Dictionary 1990). Despite all the difficulties with the terms “Spirituality” and “Bible”, we may conclude “biblical spirituality” has two meanings: 1. Spirituality of the Bible; 2. Spirituality related to the Bible. One may recognize the two poles in biblical spirituality we already described.

## 5. A DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

After discussing three approaches (description of and reflection on the reality of reading Bible in lived spirituality, what has been said in the scholarly literature about the question “What is biblical spirituality?”, the meaning of

the terms “spirituality” and “Bible”), we now come to formulate what is biblical spirituality. The study of biblical spirituality relates all that happens between two poles: 1. The divine human relational process in the Bible; 2. The Bible in the divine human relational process. We have to put in here again that the two poles are complex. There is not one divine human relational process in the Bible; there are several. And at the other side the Bible or parts of it function in several ways in several divine human relational processes of its readers.

What happens between the two poles belongs to the area of the study of Biblical spirituality too. The activity of the reader in attributing meaning, the influence of the pre-understanding and the social, historical and cultural context belong to the field of biblical spirituality, but also the impact the text and the reading process have on the reader. We are talking here about the way the text appears to the reader (a text from the past, the Word of God, and so on), but also about the way the reader is transformed by reading the text.

In all the moments that belong to the field of biblical spirituality there is the influence of the socio-historical context and the spirit of the time. One must not neglect this. Spirituality is always concrete. The divine human relational process in the text and the way the Bible or parts of it function in the divine relational process of its readers, and all the things that happen in between, are never abstract ideas. These processes always happen in a concrete context to concrete persons. In this sense these processes are intrinsically personal. This does not mean that they are intrinsically individual.

Our definition of Biblical spirituality is meant as a definition that opens the field, not as a definition that limits and determines. It is a descriptive definition, not a prescriptive one.

## 6. BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY: A DIALOGUE OF EXEGESIS AND SPIRITUALITY

For the development of biblical spirituality as a discipline the dialogue of exegesis and spirituality is needed. Two questions are important in this dialogue: 1. What is the dialogue about? 2. How is the dialogue arranged? In fact these are the question of the object of the research of biblical spirituality and the question of the method.

### 6.1 The object of research

Spirituality and exegesis have completely different objects of research. But this does not mean that there are no possibilities for a dialogue. The object of exegesis is formed by the canonized source texts of the Jewish-Christian

tradition. The object of the study of spirituality is the divine human relational process.

It is important to see that the two objects of research have a different kind of materiality. The object of exegesis is the text of the Bible. The object of spirituality is processes. In my view there are two moments for a dialogue: namely the process in the text, and the text in the process. Here we find another formulation for the answer of the question "What is biblical spirituality?"

At the moment that the question of spirituality is brought into exegesis, research into the ways in which the divine human relational process is spoken in the text comes up. Not always studies in this field of exegesis are recognized as inquiries of spirituality. Sometimes one can find in the titles of such studies words like "theology" or "ethics". I think that questions of spirituality may be brought into in the exegetical research more explicitly.

But also the study of biblical texts can be brought in in the study of the spiritual process. How does the Bible function in the divine human relational process? How does the Bible function in the wording of the processes of the divine human relationship? Have the Bible or parts of the Bible a mystagogical function in the transformational processes of in the divine human relationship?

## 6.2 The methods

As biblical spirituality belongs to the field of biblical scholarship and to the field of the study of spirituality as well, one can understand biblical spirituality as a dialogue of exegesis and spirituality. The question how the dialogue between exegesis and spirituality will progress, the question of the methods, is also a matter of a two-way traffic. One can ask how the methods of the study of spirituality can be applied fruitfully to the explanation of Scripture. But one can ask also how the methods of exegetical research can be committed fruitfully to the study of spirituality.

### 6.2.1 The methods of spirituality

First we discuss the question of the fruitfulness of the methods used in the study of spirituality. In the third part of his book about spirituality Kees Waaijman (2002:593-945) describes four methods for the study of spirituality: form-descriptive research, hermeneutic research, systematic research and mystagogic research. It is obvious that hermeneutic research offers the most points of contact. In the book itself a number of exegetical questions are fitted in in the model of spiritual hermeneutic: composition, depth structure, intertextual relations, contextual reconstructions, the pragmatics of the text and the religious field of meaning (Waaijman 2002:746-755). I consider this

enumeration not as exhaustive. They are only examples how exegetical methods are fruitful for spiritual hermeneutic. They illustrate how hermeneutic research and exegetical methods can be integrated.

Not only the hermeneutic research is fruitful for the dialogue between exegesis and spirituality. Form-descriptive research may also do good turns to the description of the divine human relational process as it appears in the texts. Mystagogic research offers good points of contact for the research of the impact of biblical texts in the spiritual journey of the readers. Eventually systematic research will do good turns when the question of truth in the dialogue of exegesis and spirituality arise. These questions are not only about the truth of the inquired affairs, but also about the truth of the argumentations used in the dialogue, and the truth of the pre-understanding of the readers and the researches themselves.

### 6.2.2 The methods of exegesis

The other way in the two-way traffic of the dialogue is the question how exegetical methods can contribute. Textual criticism is important for it constitutes the object of research. I know that text criticism is a matter for specialists even among biblical scholars. But it is also a matter of fact that there is no autograph of any of the biblical writings. So textual criticism is a necessary first step. We have to realise that there is no single fixed Biblical text. In the case of the New Testament we made text critical editions. That means that we made reconstructions of what we consider as the original text. In the case of the Old Testament we use manuscripts for diplomatic editions.

In the diachronic approach several methods are used: source criticism and research of the genesis of the text, historical criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism. As far I can see the word "historical" in the historical critical approach has at least three meanings:

- "Historical" is used in a referential sense. Historical research in the way texts refer to events in history make us clear that sometimes the narration is different from the things that happened in what we think reality is. This opens possibilities for several meanings: for instance the historical meaning in the sense of equivalence or not of the events in the text and the events in history, and a spiritual meaning in the sense of the function of an event in the divine human relational process.
- "Historical" is an indication that the biblical text is a historically layered phenomenon. For spirituality it is important to see the texts are part of a tradition process. In fact a text is a fixed moment in this process.



- “Historical” is used in a contextual sense. Form criticism and redaction criticism use the term “Sitz im Leben”. This kind of research could be very useful in spirituality. It may elucidate how a text functions in a specific divine human relational process in a specific socio-historical setting. But also vice versa it can enlighten how a specific “Sitz im Leben” has influenced the wording of the divine human relational process in a text. Especially redaction criticism may help us to clarify the spirituality of a biblical writing as a whole.

In the synchronic approaches we make a distinction between text oriented methods and reader oriented methods. In methods such as structural analysis and semiotics the meaning of a text is sought in the text itself or in its depth structure. It is clear that things like depth structure can help in articulating the spirituality of a text. In reader-response criticism, pragmatics and rhetorical analysis the meaning is sought in the interactive process of text and reader. Perhaps this kind of research offers the greatest possibilities for spirituality, because meaning is understood as a process. It may help to bridge the historical gap of text and reader. It takes the gap seriously by articulating the pre-understanding of the reader and the researcher, and by giving attention to the impact of the text to its readers. This type of inquiry can help to elucidate the transformational aspects of reading texts. John R. Donahue (2006:87) writes:

Amid the various specializations within biblical studies, certain approaches are more promising than others for those in spirituality, who wish also to engage Bible as a constitutive partner. Approaches that respect the final form of texts, such as narrative criticism, canonical criticism, and intertextual readings, as well as those that assess the effect of a text on readers are most helpful. When joined to critical readings of those texts that have been oppressive throughout history, these methods become a vital part of spirituality.

Most of the methods used in exegesis may be helpful in the description of the spiritual meaning process of text and reader. I give some examples. One of the reasons the historical critical approach came into being was the opposition to unbridled allegorical explanation. But it is really a question if allegorising is objectionable. (Reiser 2004, Decock 2008; Waaijman 2010:22). Allegorical interpretation is present in the Bible itself. Examples are the parable of Jotham (Judg 9:7-15), the parable of Nathan (2 Sam 12:1-4), the parable of the seed (Mt 13:3-8,18-23 a.p.), the parable of weeds among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30,36-43). In the research of the parables of Luke, done in the eighties of the last century in the university of Nijmegen (Welzen 1986; van Iersel 1987) we used the concepts of isomorphism and isomorphic structure to indicate the equivalencies of the realities in the parable and the realities in the communicative situation in which the parable is told. The same concepts may render good services for articulating the processes of the allegorical way

of attributing meaning. Another example is the way meaning is attributed to biblical texts in bibliodrama. Bibliodrama is a specific kind of biblical formation and education. The participants take the role of one of the characters of the biblical story, filling it with their own experience. In this way meaning as a fusion of two horizons comes into being: the horizon of the spirituality of the biblical text and the horizon of the spiritual experience of the participants. Concepts derived from narrative criticism and semiotic analysis may clarify the processes of meaning in this spiritual praxis (for an effort see Welzen 1997).

Because of the literary and historical dimension of Scripture methods derived from literary criticism and history are important to describe the spirituality in the biblical texts. Form-criticism and redaction criticism could be helpful in this kind of research. Of a special interest are those approaches which study the text "as it lies before us". Narrative criticism and canon criticism give us insights in the transformations in the biblical narration and the spiritual meaning of the place of this narration in the canon as a whole. Intertextuality, pragmatics, rhetoric criticism, reader oriented approaches and reception criticism give us insights in the spiritual impact of biblical texts in other texts and in the spirituality of the readers (see also Waaijman 2010:20-21).

Biblical spirituality as discipline is the dialogue of exegesis and spirituality. For doing research in this field a threefold competence is needed: an exegetical competence, a competence in the study of spirituality and a competence to integrate exegesis and spirituality.

## 7. THE SPECIAL INTEREST OF INTERTEXTUALITY

I want to dedicate a special section of this paper to the interest of intertextuality for biblical spirituality. There are quotations, references and allusions to Biblical texts in many spiritual and mystical texts. Sometimes the spiritual text looks like a re-writing of the biblical text. The study of the intertextual relations of the biblical text and the spiritual text may help us to understand the spiritual process between the reading of the biblical text and the re-writing that results in the spiritual text (for a more detailed discussion see Welzen 2005). I will show this by discussing the following topics: 1. mysticism and language; 2. Bible reading as a contact with the Mystery; 3. intertextuality as linguistic re-creation.

### 7.1 Mysticism and language

The complexity of the relation between mysticism and language stems from the very character of mystical experience, which is primarily an experience of breakthrough (Steggink & Waaijman 1985:100-108; Waaijman 2003). The word "breakthrough" cannot be taken literally enough. A radically new experience of reality breaks through so fundamentally that no existing frameworks are

adequate to contain it. They collapse. Names and words fail. The reality that presents itself is ultimate and is experienced by the mystic as absolute. It eludes every humanly designed order. Yet this ultimate reality directly and profoundly affects the person, often so profoundly as to amount to an identity change. The impact has two facets. First there is direct contact, indicated by such terms as union, merging, fusion, oneness, communion. Secondly, there is the breakdown and bankruptcy of existing frameworks, indicated by such terms as “absence”, “night”, “wilderness”, “solitude”, “annihilation”.

Mystical experience demands “expression” and seeks to express itself. The mystic’s aporia, however, is that there are no longer any adequate means of expression, because mystical experience has broken them down. Neither are there any new means of expression as yet. The new experience of ultimate reality has put an end to existing means of expression, but new possibilities have yet to dawn.

But the aporia of mystical experience in regard to linguistic expression goes beyond the mere inadequacy of existing language. Ineffability applies to all language. No language is capable of articulating the mystic’s experience, yet it insists on articulation. Mystical language expresses an essential contradiction: compulsion, yet inability. Not only is existing language inadequate; the new language born of the aporia is equally so. The Ineffable continually demands to be spoken, and so language is continually being generated, only to prove inadequate yet again.

## 7.2 Bible reading contacts us with the Mystery

But there is more to mystical language than just its essential aporia. For while this language cannot encompass the Mystery, it conducts us into it. For centuries reading and meditating on biblical and mystical texts have put people into contact with the ineffable and inconceivable Mystery that is God. These texts need to be read with a spiritual attitude that is sensitive to the situation in which they originated.

Reading Scripture means entering into a relational event between God and human beings. This intuition is found in the Bible itself. On every page of the New Testament one reads that the new religious experience – deriving from the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah – is deepened by relating it to what Scripture offers, while it also imbues old texts with new meaning. Until the advent of modern academic exegesis the methods and techniques of Bible reading always served the purposes of spiritual life. *Lectio divina* and other ways of reading Bible aims at the contact with the Mystery the text speaks about.

### 7.3 Intertextuality as linguistic re-creation

The experience resulting from intensive reading of biblical texts seeks expression. Often the experience affects people's behaviour. Their dealings with people and society change, they become alert to the plight of the socially marginalised, conscience cannot disregard perceived and experienced injustice. People rearrange the hierarchy of values by which they live and become critical of the generally accepted hierarchy of values in their environment.

Sometimes the experience seeks expression in artistic creation. Artworks like sculptures, paintings, icons and pictures can be products of intensive reading that culminated in experience of the Mystery. The experience can also express itself in language, in the creation of biblically inspired stories, poems and the like. These are texts inspired by the reading of biblical texts, which in their turn may cause others to engage in mystical reading.

This is where the processes described above touch, or rather could touch, on intertextuality. Our insistence on the modality, "could touch" is deliberate. We don't want to reduce all intertextuality to mystical reading. We can readily imagine forms of intertextuality that have nothing to do with mystical experience but merely seek to clarify, substantiate, impart authority or simply indicate a relation between two texts. But we can also imagine that the reading of biblical texts evokes experiences that want to be expressed in terms of the text that gave rise to them. Readers express their experience in terms of the text they have read and meditated upon. They express what they experience while reading the text in the language in which Scripture addresses them. The Bible offers the language to verbalise the new experience. But the new texts are rarely identical to the architexts. They are re-creations, recomposed poems and re-narrations with a distinctive texture. The late-Judaic anthological style of psalm writing produced texts with an exceptionally high intertextual quality, which can nonetheless be read and interpreted as independent entities. We also do the Lukan psalms (e.g. Mary's hymn of praise in Lk 1:46-55 and that of Zechariah in Lk 1:68-79) an injustice if we regard them merely as biblical anthologies. In the context of Luke's Gospel they are hymnal commentaries on the story of liberation that Luke is telling, with an expressive power and poetic structure of their own, as a result of which they have had a profound impact outside the Lucan context as well.

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Welzen

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