TOWARD A HERMENEUTIC OF RESPONSIBILITY
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1.   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Studies in hermeneutics have largely focused on method and the application of such methods; however, the significance of hermeneutical method or methods in the actual exegetical process has received limited or restricted attention, particularly as the issue relates to the preaching event. As much exegesis is carried out by men and women in the context of Christian ministry in general and preaching in particular, it is important to consider how they view the significance of hermeneutical method in the exegetical process. Arising from that is the requirement to reflect on how they may best approach the exegetical task, and to present guidelines for the task.

In primary research carried out by Mijoga (1996), among eighteen African Instituted Churches in Malawi, the respondents (ministers in local Christian communities and churches) were found to regard the actual meaning of the biblical text as relatively unimportant, in comparison with seven other factors and issues, in their preparation for exegesis for the preaching event. In the research, they rated the presented factors and issues in order of importance, by percentage (Mijoga 1996:362):

1	Texts and themes	39%
2	Not to disappoint the audience	33%
3=	Mood of the listeners	17%
3=	People's condition	17%
3=	Prayer	17%
6=	Meaning of the text	6%
6=	Occasion	6%
6=	Polemics	6%

More recent research carried out by De Jongh (2000) amongst Baptist pastors in the Gauteng Province of South Africa (97 persons sampled, 46 responses) revealed that while *methodological factors* are significant in the exegetical process, *spiritual factors* were regarded as more significant. The research revealed that for those who responded to the research, the influences on their approach to the exegetical process could be ranked as follows:

1	Spiritual factors
2	Methodological factors
3	Academic factors
4	Intrapersonal factors
5=	Contextual factors
5=	Community factors
5=	Traditional factors

From this research (albeit limited), it appears that for most exegetes in the practical ministry setting the significance of hermeneutical method does not rank as significant as many hermeneutical theorists may argue. However, it appears to remain more important than many of the *subjective* factors (intrapersonal, contextual and community factors), which is cause for concern when consideration is

given to the reality of the life contexts of the people who make up the *audience* of Christian preaching in particular. In the light of this situation in practise, the question to be asked is, *Where to from here?*

1.1 What Should Not be Done

In a common desire for *oneness* or *unity*, certain people have suggested one or more of the following: develop a *new* method; move toward a *single* method; move toward a *common* interpretation; and/or move toward an *ecumenical* interpretation. Such goals would be the motive, for example, behind those who vigorously contend for the priority of a single hermeneutical method. In such an approach, the implications are generally: 'My method is right, your method is wrong'; therefore, 'My interpretation is right, your interpretation is wrong'. On the other hand, for example, are those who argue that, 'If we all sit down together, we can find a common method and a common interpretation'. The problem with both approaches is that they fail to consider the history of biblical interpretation and the contemporary state of interpretation; including: an ever increasing number of *new* methods; limited progress in various moves toward a *single* method; no period in church history when there has been a *common* interpretation accepted by all; and unsuccessful efforts at an *ecumenical* interpretation of biblical texts and passages.

1.2 What Should be Considered

In the light of the preceding overview, there are arguably four issues that need to be considered in seeking to address the place and significance of hermeneutical method in the exegetical process, namely:

> (1) the importance of spiritual factors;
> (2) acknowledgement of methodological variety;
> (3) the impact of subjective factors; and
> (4) acknowledgement of interpretive variety.

1.2.1 The importance of spiritual factors

Based on the research referred to, it is apparent that spiritual factors do play an important, if not most important, role in the exegetical process. It is further necessary to note that many of the theoretical texts dealing with hermeneutical method place very little or no emphasis on such factors. The reasons for this may be that such factors are assumed, that they are not regarded as sufficiently important and significant, or that they are not regarded as significant factors at all. Whatever the reason or reasons for this state of affairs, it is proposed that any consideration of hermeneutical method and its practical application that fails to address the demands of spiritual factors, has failed to take seriously the understanding and practice of one of the main practitioners of exegesis, namely, the pulpit preacher. As a result, any endeavour to move forward in the area of hermeneutical method, will need to pay greater attention to spiritual factors.

1.2.2   Acknowledgement of methodological variety

No matter how the situation is assessed and evaluated, it is also necessary to acknowledge the varieties of hermeneutical method and methods. While various eras may have been characterized by a dominant method or methods, such were never accepted to the exclusion of all other methods. A simple overview of the history of interpretation quickly reveals the permanence of methodological variety. As a result, it will be necessary to acknowledge this variety; as Deist & Burden (1980:125) have argued '… what we need, therefore, is a multiplicity of methods - methods which will supplement each other so that the exegete will be in a position to process the greatest possible amount of information at one and the same time. Such a comprehensive method does not exist as yet, and would be extremely hard to design.' Such an acknowledgement does not automatically imply that the worldviews or fundamental theses of the variety of methods are accepted without criticism. Addressing this possibility, Thiselton (1998:7) suggests that '… the work of Paul Ricoeur shows that it is possible to appreciate a wide plurality of hermeneutical approaches without subscribing to a pluralism of world views.' In other words, while methodological variety must, of necessity, be acknowledged, such acknowledgement need not be all-accepting, all-embracing and non-critical.

1.2.3   The impact of subjective factors

Of particular concern in the context of in the practical research (especially of De Jongh), was the apparently limited concern for subjective factors in the exegetical process. This may reflect one of the more irresponsible attitudes on the part persons involved in the exegetical process, especially as all human beings exist and live in a world of subjective experiences. Failure to consider these experiences and factors is failure to take seriously one's humanity and the nature of human existence. Larkin (1993:293) emphasizes this when he argues that

> In the end, the communication process must focus on man the interpreter. Human beings stand in their cultural context, receiving God's message by means of a book from an ancient and different cultural context. They are responsible for interpreting, applying, and then communicating the Bible's meaning to their context and even cross-culturally through contextualization.

In other words, any approach to hermeneutical method and to the exegetical task that fails to consider and integrate subjective factors, is an approach that will probably leave both exegete and hearers with an *incomplete* understanding of the biblical text, its relevance, and of themselves as human beings.

1.2.4   Acknowledgement of interpretive variety

The fourth issue to be considered is that interpretive variety. As uncomfortable as it may be for some, it is true of the history of interpretation and the contemporary situation that variety and varieties in interpretation exist. In addressing this state of affairs, Johnson (1983:93) argues that

> Very few in evangelical Christianity consciously and willfully twist the meaning and application of the Bible. A good scholar aims at maximum validity in hermeneutics. The goal is to reflect the true position of the divine and human authors of Scripture. The fact that we have mutually exclusive explanations for some parts of the Bible suggests that we have not heard the last word on the "true" position, however. The differences among biblical interpreters are not just accounted for by inadequate methods of interpretation. The current science of hermeneutics has come a long way in refining these methods. The reason for different interpretations may be found in a place other than adequate technique. It may be due to the fact that we are reluctant to *revise* or *change* our theological models. Personality, society, and culture act as lenses through which the Bible is viewed.

Consequently, the reasons for the variety and varieties in interpretation should not be dealt with by means of a *right-wrong* approach; rather, it demands an acknowledgement of the variety and that reasons for variety lie not only in hermeneutical methods, but in any number of factors and reasons.

2.   A FOURFOLD APPROACH

In the light of the preceding discussion, it is proposed that the demand in hermeneutical method and exegesis lies not in methodology, but in the manner in which the exegete approaches the use of hermeneutical method or methods and the given exegetical task. Conradie (et al 1995:261) has argued that '… in the search for relatively more adequate interpretations, it is important to try to understand the event of interpretation better.' It is in the context of that event that a *hermeneutic of responsibility* is proposed, in which it is suggested that many of the problems and challenges in the exegetical process lie not at the level of methodology, but at the level of the application of method. Of particular concern a rigid application of hermeneutical method in the exegetical process, which can often result in an irresponsible, even incomplete, exegesis of the biblical text.

Therefore, the proposal that follows will seek to emphasize a responsible approach in the use of the chosen hermeneutical method or methods in the exegetical process. This approach will seek to incorporate a challenge to the exegete to be *responsible* in their application of hermeneutical method in the exegetical process to four realms of consideration and significance, namely: (1) the God of Scripture; (2) the community of faith; (3) the world at large; and (4) the historical and universal church.
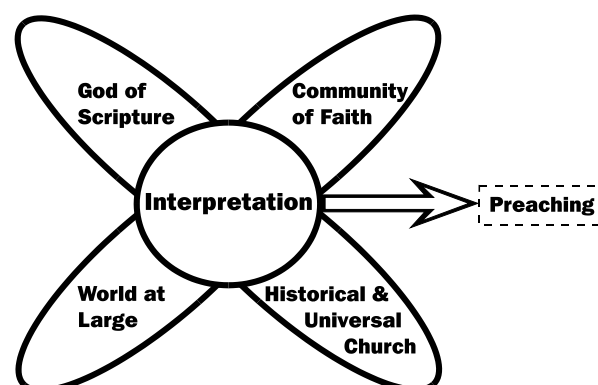
These four realms of consideration and significance endeavour to address the concerns already voiced, both theoretical and practical. However, it is also necessary to challenge the exegete to take all four realms seriously, as many of the *weaknesses* in exegesis tend to lie in an overemphasis on one or two of the realms, at the expense of the others.

2.1   Responsibility to the God of the Scriptures

The first realm of responsibility for the exegete is that of being responsible to the God of Scripture. Such an acknowledgement of the God of Scripture is demanded by the writings of the Scriptures themselves. Of significance are two New Testament passages; namely, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 proposes that, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.' While 2 Peter 1:20-21 argues that '… no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.' It is important to acknowledge the varieties of interpretation of these texts, and therefore not to overstate the argument; however, a basic theme is that of reference to the God who stands behind *all Scripture* and *prophecy of Scripture* as the one who has caused it to come into being.

Accepting that the same is true of the whole Bible, it becomes imperative that the exegete consider their responsibility to the God of the Scriptures who *stands behind* every text or passage under exegetical consideration. In this context it is necessary to

> distinguish between "Bible" and "Scripture," with the first referring to the collection of books called by that name and the second referring to the way that the church receives those books, i.e., as religiously foundational and formative. With this distinction in mind, we may now note that only Christians call the Bible "Scripture". They do this because the Bible for them is, in addition to being a collection of books, an authoritative *collection of books whose authority is ultimately seen as coming from God*. However this "coming from God" is accounted for, for Christians the Bible is God's Word (Trembath 1986:250, italics added).

The implication of a responsibility to the God of Scripture is reflected by Johnson (1983:87) who argues that '… the opinions and issues of the day certainly need to speak to the thinking of the Christian, but our convictions should not be shaped only by our social milieu, but also by the divine revelation of the Word.' Therefore, there is always to be a consideration of and respect for the Bible as divine revelation, which demands a consideration of and respect for the place and role of God in the production of the Bible and the subsequent endeavours to understand its meaning and significance.

In this light, the challenge of a responsibility to the God of Scripture may be defined as follows:

> *The responsibility to the God of Scripture acknowledges that the Christian Bible is a product of divine revelation, and that the God of that revelation is intimately involved in the practical exegetical task.*

Such a definition would demand that the exegete: (1) acknowledge the God of the Bible; (2) consider God during the act of interpretation; and (3) depend on God during the exegetical process. As Johnson (1983:110) suggests, 'Ultimately, however, there is no unbridled freedom of interpretation. The individual artist/scientist is responsible to God and His Word.'

Considering this responsibility, the following implications appear to be of significance:

* The exegete is to recognize that the primary responsibility in the exegetical process is to the God of Scripture, before all and anything else.
* The exegete is to accept the Bible as the divine revelation of the God it refers to and, as such, it is not simply another product of human literary endeavours.
* The exegete is to acknowledge the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian believer in the exegetical process.
* The exegete is to endeavour to submit to the God of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit at all times in the exegetical process.
* The exegete is to be committed to the demands placed on them in the search for a responsible hermeneutic.

2.2 Responsibility to the Community of Faith

The second realm of responsibility for the exegete is that of being responsible to the community of faith with which they identify, are part of, or are contributing to. As such, the exegete is called on to give meaningful consideration to the identity and nature of the given community of faith; in whatever context it is encountered. In critiquing the current state of affairs, two main issues have been addressed: the division between the individual exegete and the community, and the manner in which the exegete has assumed a leading role in the exegetical process. Gorringe (1998:74) suggests that '… twentieth-century biblical exegesis has for the most part involved a split between the reading of the congregation and that of the academy [and the individual exegete].' While Magessa (1997:32) argues that

> the leader of … interpretation is no longer the exegete. Interpretation is a community activity in which all take part, including the exegete, who has a special role. Because of this it is important to keep in mind the faith of the community and look for a common meaning accepted by the community.

These problems tend to be aggravated by a situation in which many exegetes and theologians are not themselves members of a community or communities of faith: 'The problem with theologians [and exegetes] in many cases is that they either do not have a living faith in Jesus Christ or they do not approach life from within "the circle of faith-commitment"' (Gehman 1983:27).

However, there has been and is a significant call for the recognition of the community of faith in the responsibility of the exegete. This is particularly significant when it is acknowledged that not all communities of faith are the same and that they do not all share common needs. Sampson (1991:61, italics added) has proposed that

> The Christian faith is not homogeneous but as diverse as Christian communities and their needs. The influence of the different Christian traditions is an important factor in interpretation of the Bible. … *The Bible must not be divorced from the community of believers.* Its sacredness exists only in its relationship to that community and, if it studied as an object apart from that community, the exercise becomes futile. Meaningful interpretation springs out of commitment to the Bible as a faith document located in the concrete needs of a community.

While the community of faith is to play a significant role in the exegetical process and while the exegete has a responsibility to that community, there are two dangers that need to be guarded against. The first is that the community of faith is not infallible and perfect: 'No interpretive community is infallible. If we let the biblical text inform our thinking about the church as an interpretive community, we should rather say that it is the community of saints *and* sinners' (Vanhoozer 1997:379). The second danger relates to a tendency amongst many individuals to move to the community within which they are most comfortable, with a resultant loss of answerability and responsibility. Critiquing certain postmodern approaches to the Bible, Carroll (1998:62) comments that '… readers of the Bible will … be able to move from community to community as and when they please, choosing the reading community which best suit their current needs.' While aware of such dangers, it is important that the exegete not, therefore, deny or ignore the responsibility that they have to the community or communities of faith within which they are found.

The challenge of a responsibility to the community of faith may be defined as follows:

> *The responsibility to the community of faith recognizes the community or communities of faith as a vital context for the practical exegetical task and the conclusions of that task.*

Such a definition would demand that the exegete: (1) give due recognition to the community of faith; (2) consider the demands of the community of faith; and (3) positively respond to the community of faith.

Having reflected on the responsibility of the exegete to the community of faith, together with potential dangers, the implications of this responsibility include that the exegete:

*   Be a member of a community of faith.
*   Recognize that they are one member of a larger community.
*   Acknowledge their responsibility to the given community.
*   Deliberately *hear* the *voice* and *voices* of the community.

* Positively heed those *voices* of the community.
* Accept an answerability to and responsibility within the community.
* Be willing to adapt or change together with the community.

2.3   Responsibility to the World at Large

The third realm of responsibility for the exegete is that of being responsible to the world at large, the global and universal context within which the exegete as a human being lives. Motyer (1997:223) argues that '… preachers are not just members of the church. They are members of a human society which needs to be reconciled to God.' While significant attention has been given to the impact of various contexts on the exegete in the exegetical task, little attention has been given to any responsibility the exegete may have to the world at large. It is acknowledged that the challenge of the needs of the given community of faith are addressed in certain works; however, it is striking that relatively little meaningful attention has been given to the responsibility of the exegete to the world at large. This is most starkly reflected in the manner in which the preaching and teaching in certain churches may be described as being most concerned about personal spiritual matters in the most narrow of definitions.

Particularly in such contexts, key global issues are not addressed or considered; including environmental affairs, ecological issues, political challenges, human rights, the plight of individuals and groups of people, to name but a few. The challenge that is here presented to the exegete is to recognize that they are not limited to a narrow context, however defined, but that they are ultimately living in the global context of the world at large. In such a context, there are probably three main areas of concentric concern: immediate - national - international. Each one of these contributes to the *world at large* of the exegete at a given time. Windsor (1997:227, italics added) argues that '… while exegesis begins with the text, *it must extend to* the preacher, the listener, and *the world*. All four must be exegeted. While God's story provides the main plot-line, there are three other stories to weave into the narrative.'

There is, however, also the challenge of not only bringing the world at large to the text, but of taking the text to the world at large. There is a call to take the findings of the exegetical process to the world, and to be willing to submit such findings to the scrutiny of those who are regarded as being either on the fringes of a community or communities of faith, and those who are clearly outside of a community or communities of faith. It is not only incumbent on the exegete to consider the world at large, but also to be evaluated and challenged by that same world. Vanhoozer (1997:439, italics added) suggests that '… to witness to the meaning of Scripture is thus to participate in a divinely initiated communicative activity that embraces canon, church, *and world*.' The exegete may not limit their exegetical activity and endeavours to the context of a local community or communities of faith or academia; there is a theological imperative to reach out into the world at large, without which the task of exegesis cannot ever be said to be truly completed.

In this light, the challenge of a responsibility to the world at large may be defined as follows:

> *The responsibility to the world at large undertakes to deliberately consider the challenges presented to the biblical text and to the exegete by those contexts and persons who would be regarded as either on the fringe of the community of faith or outside of the community.*

Such a definition would demand that the exegete: (1) seriously consider the challenges of the world at large; (2) commit themselves to discovering and *hearing* the *voices* of the world at large; and (3) undertake to respond to and interact with the world at large.

The main implications of the responsibility may be outline as follows:

* The exegete is to deliberately familiarize themselves with the character and nature of the world at large.
* The exegete is to seek to interact with that world by means of any and every available avenue.
* The exegete is to commit themselves to faithfully listening to and hearing the *voice* of the world at large.

* The exegete is to be committed to responding to the world at large, while not necessarily being dictated to by that world.

2.4 Responsibility to the Historical and Universal Church

The fourth realm of responsibility for the exegete is that of being responsible to the historical and universal church. The exegete unavoidably stands in the context of the Christian church which finds expression in two critical dimensions, namely, the historical and the universal dimensions. As such, the exegete has a responsibility to that Christian tradition which is both *older* and *greater* than they are. Motyer (1997:223) comments of the *older* historical context that

> when we rise to preach, we join in the company of *all* who, like us, have sought to hear, to absorb and to communicate the word of God. Potentially therefore, we may learn from them in the task, and they from us. This fellowship is signalled by the bookshelves in the preacher's office, where (hopefully!) a great cloud of witnesses from every generation and denomination surround the desk, sharing the fruits of their wisdom and experience, and urging him or her on to even deeper insight, with eyes fixed upon Jesus.

Then there is the *greater* dimension of the contemporary universal church. Gehman (1983:36, italics added) has suggested that

> We have a task to perform by the help of the Holy Spirit, to let the Word speak to people in their context. *Now that the church is universal*, planted among most peoples of the world, we have the responsibility to encourage an immediate

> application, a direct relating of biblical truth to context, so that God's solution meets man in his need.

In addressing the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the exegetical process, Wallace (1997:np) has argued for an understanding of '… *corporate and historical illumination* … [in that] via the whole body of Christ - both in its current manifestation and throughout history - believers have come to understand God's will and God's Word better.'

However, the great danger is that the exegete fails to recognize this *older* and *greater* context and tradition. Koivisto (1993:172) warns that

> part of the problem in seeking the meaning of the biblical text is that we interpret the Scriptures from within a particular ecclesiastical tradition. Even when we are attempting to use fair hermeneutics on the text in order to detect the traditional in our own denominational thinking, we sometimes simply cannot avoid the influence of the very tradition that we are trying so hard to detect. We are not unlike fish trying to notice that they are surrounded by water. The water upholds, infiltrates, and feeds them, but they do not even notice that it is there. So it is with our own interpretive traditions. *Though we may study hermeneutics and use it on the text arduously, as long as we continue to interpret solely from within our own ecclesiastical framework we run the risk of being controlled by traditional presuppositions.*

The challenge facing the exegete is, therefore, to come to a proper appreciation for and responsibility to the historical and universal church.

The challenge of the responsibility to the historical and universal church may be defined as follows:

> *The responsibility to the historical and universal church is that by which the exegete recognizes their context as being part of the older history of the church and the greater setting of the universal church.*

Such a definition would demand that the exegete: (1) give meaningful attention to the reality of the historical church; (2) positively recognize their place in the context of the universal church; and (3) allow both to inform the practical exegetical process.

In the context of this responsibility, it is important that the exegete:

* Recognize that they stand in the historical tradition of the Christian church, together with a history of the interpretation of the Bible.
* Acknowledge their place in the context of the contemporary universal church.
* Accept that they have a responsibility to both the historical and the universal contexts within which they are found.

3. APPLICATION OF THE HERMENEUTIC OF RESPONSIBILITY

In considering the potential application of the *hermeneutic of responsibility*, it is immediately necessary to point out that the *hermeneutic of responsibility* is not being proposed as a new hermeneutical method. However, the suggestion is that the significance of hermeneutical method is both reduced and increased. It is reduced in that the battle for the best or single best method is of lesser importance, particularly if methodological and interpretive variety is to be acknowledged. It is increased in that the choice of hermeneutical method or methods is impacted on by the fourfold approach, which presents a more holistic set of demands on and challenges to the chosen hermeneutical method or methods. Therefore, it allows the exegete the freedom to work with the wealth of options available and to utilise the varieties as may be demanded by the text, however in a context of responsibility beyond personal preference.

Understanding that the exegete makes decisions regarding hermeneutical method or methods, consideration needs to be given to realms of application of the *hermeneutic of responsibility*. By virtue of the nature of the *hermeneutic of responsibility*, the fourfold approach places demands on the exegete in three realms: (1) personal preparation for exegesis; (2) the actual exegetical process; and (3) ongoing demands after exegesis.

3.1 Personal Preparation for Exegesis

In the personal preparation for exegesis, the emphasis moves from mechanical preparation to life preparation; the question is not as much *what the exegete knows*, as it is *how they live*. While the necessity for meaningful mechanical preparation is not being denied, such preparation alone does not guarantee that the exegete is going to approach the exegetical task responsibly. Where some sense of responsibility may be present, it is often limited in two ways: to only one or two of the proposed realms of responsibility, or by narrow concerns and/or interests. In considering how the exegete personally prepares themselves, certain aspects need to be addressed:

The first aspect is that the exegete needs to ensure that they are in a personal relationship with the God of the Scriptures, in the terms as presented in the same Scriptures. As such, it is necessary for the exegete to be in a living relationship with the God of the Scriptures by faith in Jesus Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This requirement is proposed in the light of an understanding that suggests that the exegete who is not in a relationship is less likely to acknowledge their primary responsibility to the God of the Scripture, to accept the Scripture as divine revelation, and to submit to the God of the Scriptures. Furthermore, the biblical teaching is that the Holy Spirit's work, particularly of illumination, is active and actual only in the life and lives of those who are in such a living relationship.

The next aspect relates to the attitude with which the exegete approaches the Scripture, which is determined by their view of the Scriptures. It has been argued

that the exegete is to view the Scriptures as the divine revelation of God, and not simply another product of human literary endeavours. Again, this is shaped by an acknowledgement of the God of the Scriptures and the Scriptures' own self-declaration. Without a recognition of the divine nature of the Bible, the exegete is immediately carrying significant preconceptions into the exegetical task; these preconceptions may include: doubts as to the existence of God, a rejection of the miraculous, and certain theories regarding Christianity in particular and religious experience in general. Inevitably, these preconceptions impact significantly on the exegetical process. Perhaps more important is that the exegete who views the Bible as a human product is unlikely to feel any responsibility to the God of the same writings.

On the basis of the aspect of a relationship with the God of the Scriptures, comes the requirement to be a member of a community or communities of faith. Such membership is a visible and required demonstration of personal faith, and enhances the challenges presented by the given community to which the exegete has a responsibility. The exegete who is not part of a community of faith faces two key problems: firstly, they are unlikely to be nurtured in and mature in their faith relationship with God; and secondly, they will experience difficulties in relating the exegetical task to the demands of the community of faith. The local community of faith serves as a vital context for the nurturing of personal faith, as well as being one of the realms of responsibility to which the exegete needs to respond and answer to.

Moving beyond the local community of faith, the exegete is also to be in a meaningful relationship with the world at large so as to come to a reasonable understanding of the world. The particular concern is that the exegete should be found in an ongoing process of deliberate familiarization with the world at large, and also in some forms of meaningful interaction with that world. Familiarization with the world at large is necessary because it is the only way in which the exegete can even begin to respond to and interact with the demands and needs of that world. However, familiarization alone will not suffice, as it does not contribute to interaction and mutual critique. Therefore, the exegete also needs to place themselves in contexts and situations where they are able to interact with the world at large, and to be critiqued in their view of and challenges to the world.

The final aspect is a concern for the exegete to recognize and acknowledge the broader historical and universal Christian context within which the exegete is located. In addressing this concern it is necessary for the exegete to come to a meaningful understanding of the history of interpretation, and an appreciation of the broader contemporary context of the universal church. It is in this aspect that the exegete and potential exegete needs to be equipped and trained, formally and/or informally, in disciplines and fields including: the history of the church and biblical interpretation; the contemporary state and traditions of the Christian church; biblical languages and translation; methods of interpretation; and the demands of exegesis in the context of the *hermeneutic of responsibility*. Such equipping and training is best affected in the context of broader biblical, ministry and theological equipping and training.

3.2   The Actual Exegetical Process

The realm of the actual exegetical process in the *hermeneutic of responsibility* is not specifically concerned with hermeneutical method; rather, the focus is that of directing the exegete to their fourfold responsibility. In the actual exegetical process, the exegete needs to begin with a willingness to submit to the demands of the *hermeneutic of responsibility*. In other words, the exegete needs to make a deliberate decision to accept and to honour the demands presented by their responsibility to the God of Scripture, the community of faith, the world at large, and the historical and universal church. Without such a prior commitment, the practical exegetical process will be carried out with all the biases and concerns of the exegete. In other words, the actual exegetical process can only begin once the exegete has accepted the challenge presented by all of the realms of responsibility in an all-or-nothing manner; because selective responsibility will simply reinforce previous personal and other inclinations.

Having accepted the demands of the *hermeneutic of responsibility*, the exegete is then to carry out the practical exegetical task with a deliberate willingness to submit to God and to the working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while the exegete is required to be committed to the *hard work* of exegesis, that work is carried out with a deep sense of responsibility to God, before any other commitment. In addition, the exegete has to develop those spiritual disciplines which will assist and nurture them toward openness to the work and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Here the particular concerns would be to the disciplines of meditation, prayer and study, as well as learning. This aspect of the *hermeneutic of responsibility* will demand that the exegete not only rely on their mechanical abilities, but on very significant spiritual disciplines as they seek to develop and nurture a meaningful dependence on the Holy Spirit in the actual exegetical process.

The exegete then also needs to acknowledge the demands of the community of faith of which they are a part. As has already been argued, genuine exegesis cannot be affected outside of the context of the community of faith. It will be necessary for the exegete to establish mechanisms whereby the community is deliberately drawn into the exegetical process, whether in an informal or a formal process. Furthermore, the exegete will need to ensure that at a personal level they have sought to develop a true understanding of the nature of the community of faith of which they are a part. Above all, the exegete needs to acknowledge that they do not serve themselves, but the community and that the community has certain expectations of them as the person entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of exegeting and proclaiming the biblical text on their behalf. This commitment may mean that there will be occasions when the exegete would need to demonstrate a willingness to submit to the demands and understandings of the community, even if they differ from their own.

Beyond the local community of faith, the exegete is also to deliberately endeavour to interact with the world at large around the specific biblical text under consideration. Such specific interaction should be in the context of an ongoing

personal commitment to developing an understanding of the world at large. Within that general commitment will come the need to listen to and respond to the *voice* and *voices* of the world at large in relation to the text under consideration. While there are various ways in which this may be achieved, it is imperative that the exegete not only heed the voice of the world at large, but that they allow themselves to be evaluated and critiqued by that same world.

The final concern in the actual exegetical process, is that which honestly appreciates and deliberately considers the understanding of the biblical text as found in both the historical and the universal church context. This will require that the exegete spend time not only researching the past, but examining the present in the search for a fuller understanding of how the church as a whole has grappled with the biblical text under consideration. It is necessary that this is not simply an exercise in which the exegete searches for support for the understanding toward which they are already inclined toward. Rather it must be an endeavour in which exegetes expose themselves to the critique of the historical church, and the evaluation of the contemporary universal church.

3.3   Ongoing Demands after Exegesis

Having completed the actual exegetical process, the *hermeneutic of responsibility* continues to present certain challenges to the exegete, which are a measure of the exegete's long-term commitment to the *hermeneutic of responsibility*. These challenges may be presented as follows:

(1) *A spiritual challenge*: ongoing submission to the God of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the exegete.
(2) *A communal challenge*: acknowledgement that once the fruits of the exegetical process have been presented, the community of faith may call the exegete to answer for and explain that which is presented.
(3) *A personal challenge*: a willingness and determination to change in the light of that which is gleaned from the Scriptures in the exegetical process.
(4) *A world challenge*: An ongoing commitment to the world at large, reflected in a meaningful concern for the needs of the world and a willingness to continue interacting with the world.
(5) *A church challenge*: to remain committed to the historical and universal church of which the exegete is inevitably a part.

4.   CONCLUSION

Considering the *hermeneutic of responsibility*, the proposal is that the exegete needs to continue to be as well equipped for the *mechanical* exegetical task as possible; however, the greater demand is to equip and train the active and potential exegete to respond to the demands presented by the four realms of consideration and significance. It will be necessary for those involved in the equipping and training of biblical exegetes to ensure that they can respond to the presented challenges. The ultimate goal of equipping and training in biblical hermeneutics will no longer be a

working *mechanical* knowledge and expertise in hermeneutical method and methodology, perhaps including proficiency in the biblical languages and other directly related disciplines. Rather, it will be imperative that those entrusted with the exegetical task will be able to recognize and acknowledge the demands placed on them by the God of Scripture, the community of faith, the world at large, and the historical and universal church. In the light of such recognition and acknowledgement, the exegete will then be equipped and trained to consider and respond to those demands before, during and after the actual exegetical process.

In conclusion, the challenge is that all people involved in the discipline of hermeneutics and the practice of exegesis will move beyond their often limited and even selfish motives and paradigms, recognising that they serve and are responsible to a far greater audience in spiritual, historical, contemporary and future dimension; being the God of Scripture, the community of faith, the world at large, and the historical and universal church.

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