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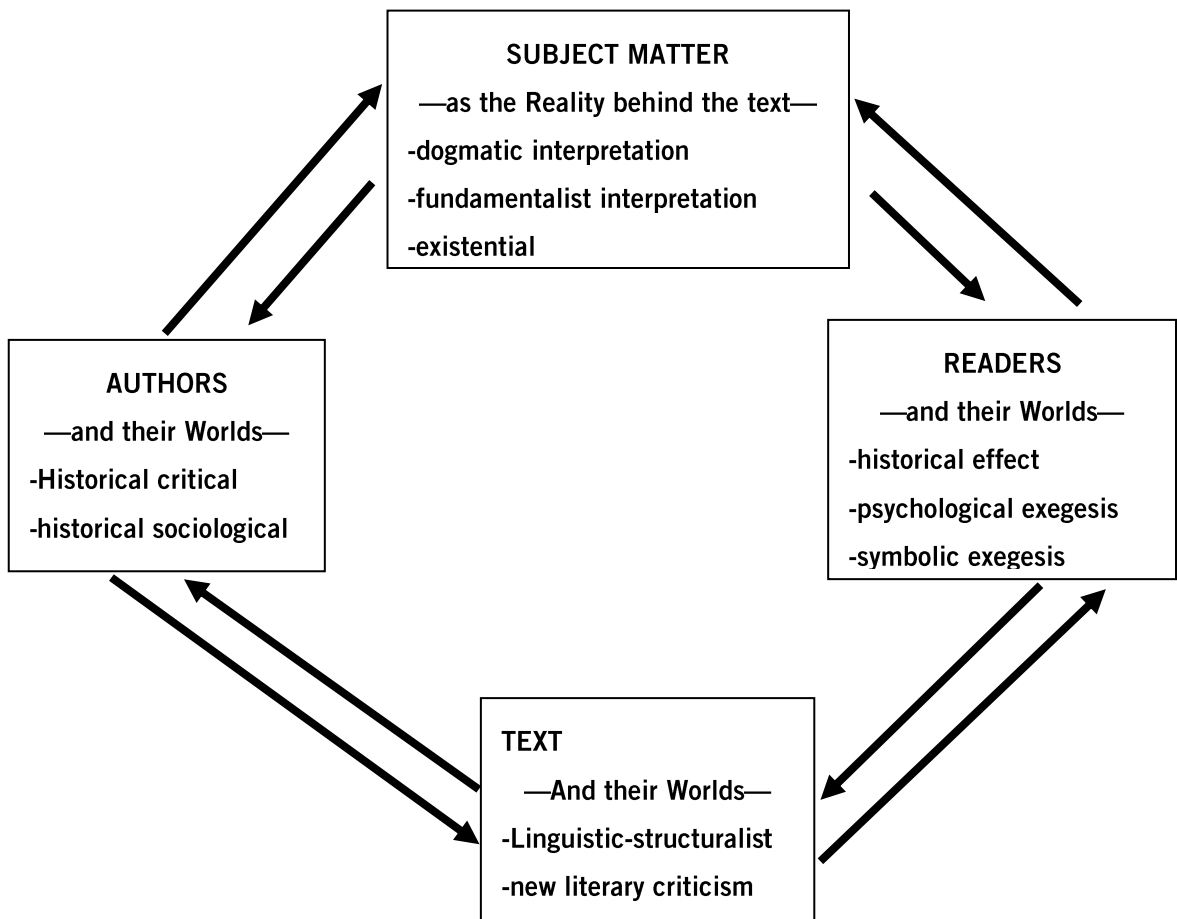
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## MODULE 3

### Transformative Readings of Scripture

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In Zimbabwe, indeed in the sub-Saharan Africa, the Christian faith dominates every aspect of life, and where the bible is taken seriously, it is important that we give a reflection on biblical interpretation so that the bible is both a source or renewal for the church so that the church becomes a source of transformation of society.

There are key elements that must be looked at closely in such a study.

It is the relationship between the

1. Biblical text itself
2. the Readers of such text
3. the Author of such a text and the
4. Subject matter behind the text

## THE TEXT

1. Partially contains what the author intended to communicate and since it is written language it cannot totally represent the whole
2. The gap left is filled by the reader through interpretation

## THE AUTHOR

1. Aims at communicating insights and experiences from their world
2. There is no direct contact between author and contemporary reader
3. Contact is made possible through the process of interpretation

## THE READER

1. Initiates contact with the author and his world
2. He or she does this by dealing with the text
3. The contemporary reader can only partially re-actualise the intention of the author
4. The abyss of time makes total re-actualisation not possible
5. Commonality of human experience makes some re-actualisation possible

## THE SUBJECT MATTER

1. This is what is common between the author, the reader and the text have in common
2. It is that which brings the contemporary reader, the author and text to a common starting point

How does the relationship become renewing and transforming?

1. It must be dynamic
2. There must be respect of the integrity of the text
3. As far as possible, respect must be sought for the intention of the author
4. The context of readers must be taken seriously

5. There must be a deliberate reflection on the appropriate subject matter that serves as reading lens

The dynamic relationship is informed by

1. Trust and criticality: There must be some level of trust or openness to the text. This must be combined by some level of the criticality. This criticality is guided by some values drawn from theological positions or other secular value-generating resources like the human rights.
2. Familiarity and estrangement: There are elements that may appear familiar at face value; these will need to be looked at closely so as to allow their strangeness that may be taken for granted.
3. Affirming and challenging: Sometimes the text may appear to confirm the cultural, political, economic status quo. Reading between the lines and in its context can open up some issues that are challenging and discomfoting as they question one's socio-economic location.
4. Individuality and community

The Integrity of the text is achieved by

1. Reading it as close as possible to its linguistic rules
2. Allowing methodology to be informed by nature of particular text being read
3. Allowing the synchronic and diachronic aspects of the text to inform each other

The world of the Author includes

1. All the existing contexts or systems of society that he sought to confirm or transform it
2. Elements that are assumed or implied in the text or can be substantiated by archaeology

Readers' worlds

1. Tend to be dynamically related to the text since when they come to the text they already have some presuppositions and preunderstanding of the text
2. Take seriously the possible and real situation of subsequent reading communities

Demonstrating this process using 1 Kings 21:

Biblical text itself

- fascinating story of injustice confronted by prophetic response
- A story where God takes the side of the oppressed against the powerful
- A story in which the king's decision is ill-advised by his wife

Demonstrating this process using 1 Kings 21:

The Author in his context

- reflects on the agrarian society in which landownership is contested
- demonstrates how God's prophetic word is active through God's messengers

Demonstrating this process using 1 Kings 21:

Implications for Contemporary Readers in Zimbabwe

- many can identify with losing their land to powerful people
- such displacements can be more than commercial for those who lose their ancestral lands since these lands carry sentimental links with the past generations
- There is always need to build up prophetic witness to defend these people

Demonstrating this process using 1 Kings 21:

Subject matter behind the text

- Injustice and abuse of office: where the powerful confiscate property from the weak
- Misunderstanding of power: where it is construed as 'power-over' and not 'power with'
- Prophetic witness: the boldness that comes from the confidence that one is a messenger of God in the face of adversity—this is God's intervention to proffer justice

### Further reading:

- *In the Beginning was the Word. The Bible in the Life of the Lutheran Communion. A Study Document on Lutheran Hermeneutics*, The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, 2016.
- Hans-Peter Grosshans, "Lutheran Hermeneutics: An Outline", in: "You have the Words of Eternal Life". Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective, K. Mtata (ed.), The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, 2012, pp. 23- 46

### Questions for reflection:

- 1) What role should the texts of Holy Scripture play in the formation and decision making of the church and its governing bodies today? What is the relationship between Holy Scripture to other contextual and scientific insights?
- 2) How should we deal with different interpretations of the same biblical text in different Lutheran churches?