PART THREE

EXEGESIS AND CONTEXT
To Solve or not to Solve, is that the Question?

The complexity of biblical texts, both in their composition and in the process of their transmission, is a well known challenge for biblical scholarship. The question is, however: Is textual complexity just an interesting riddle for the European scholarly mind, or is it to be read as a signal of something else? Students of theology often get the impression that the dilemma is a simple one. Either you see the complexity of biblical texts as a problem to be solved by historical explanation. In that case you see yourself as an historian, charged with the task of diachronic textual analysis: explaining the bible as a compilation of source texts of ancient religion. Or you see the complexity of biblical texts as something that has no positive meaning for theology at all. In that case you see yourself as a hermeneut, charged with the task of synchronic textual analysis: reading the bible as literature for a modern audience.

Our impression is that this symposium is really needed, simply because much debate between European and African or Latin-American readers of the bible seems to be based on the same dilemma: historian versus hermeneut. A general assumption seems to be that Western biblical is only interested in the work of the historian avoiding the task of actualisation, whereas African or Latin-American scholars are predominantly interested in the work of the hermeneut who is mainly engaged in the task of actualisation. With this essay we intend to leave this dilemma and rather defend a different position. We want to make clear that by the very act of reading the biblical texts both from the Hebrew and the Greek traditions, the modern historian can actually see the ancient hermeneuts at work and in so doing will be able to observe the analogy with his or her own position as an actual hermeneut. The complexity of the biblical texts is a witness to the