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A polyvalent hermeneutic of John 2:13-25: Theoretical and exegetical considerations

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This article proposed a polyvalent hermeneutical paradigm to evolve multiple meanings and divergent voices embedded within and beyond the text. Polyvalent hermeneutic considers multiple aspects, spectrums, consciousnesses and vantage points in the process of interpretation. Its five paradigms are as follows: 'behind' and 'toward', 'within' and 'out of', 'in front' and 'into', 'under' and 'unto' and 'above' and 'beyond.' These paradigms mainly develop in two directions: firstly, a horizontal direction in which 'behind' and 'toward' and 'in front' and 'into' paradigms are mediated through 'within' and 'out of' paradigm and secondly, a vertical direction in which 'under' and 'unto' and 'above' and 'beyond' paradigms are mediated through 'within' and 'out of' paradigm. Through these paradigms and movements, an interpreter conceptualises the overall potential of the text. An analytic and synthetic approach plays a significant role in polyvalent hermeneutic. Within its hermeneutical framework, a reader investigates the text from historical, literary, contextual, sociological and ideological perspectives.

Contribution: This article discussed polyvalent hermeneutics of the New Testament with a focus on John 2:13–25. As *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* gives significance to biblical hermeneutics as one of its emphases, this article fits well within the scope of the journal.

Keywords: polyvalent hermeneutic; New Testament interpretation; Gospel of John; hermeneutical paradigm; horizontal and vertical directions; theory and practice.

Introduction

A polyvalent analysis of the New Testament (or the biblical) writings foregrounds the power dynamics embedded within and beyond the textual framework. The word *poly* [from Greek word *polus*] means 'many' or 'several' and *valence* [from Latin word *valentia*] means 'strength' or 'power', especially with reference to the making of multiple connections. This article attempts to demonstrate the historical, literary, contextual, sociological and ideological connections and integration of the text to unfold its semantic, syntactic and pragmatic domains.[1] Mikhail Bakhtin through his 'dialogism' emphasised 'multiplicity of meaning' and 'divergent voices' within a literary narrative. An exegete can explore the meaning and voices of a text through the means of multiple methods.[2] This inquiry is not an attempt to consider all the aspects of Bakhtin's contributions in the field of dialogism, but only a few aspects related to the current discussion. Polyvalent readings synthesise various approaches and develop multiple voices out of the textual horizon.[3] It can be considered as an overarching approach that facilitates to understand the overall content and thrust of a text (Anderson 2008:94; Croatto 1900; Thomaskutty 2015:94). Although it is identical to some of the eclectic methods, here significance is given to the potential of meaning making. The 'analytic and synthetic' method of reading enables the reader to identify varied layers of a Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000:39).[4]

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1. David B. Gowler calls this method a *heteroglossia*, a term used by Michael Bakhtin to mean 'the dynamic interaction of a number of voices, ideologies, and positions, but none of them in pre-eminent, none rules or controls the others'. See David (2000:443); also see Johnson Thomaskutty (2015:19–26); Arren Bennet Lawrence (2018:428–430); See Anderson (2008:93–120).

2. Anderson comments, 'As *polyphony* presents a diversity of voices, and as *polysemy* leverages a panoply of signified meanings within literature, *polyvalence* in narrative refers to the multiplicity of connections, associations and meanings that accompany – both preceding and following – any theme or its signification in a given text.' See Anderson (2008:94); Bakhtin (1981:324–331); Bakhtin (1984:6–7).

3. Anderson states that '*polyvalence* in narrative refers to the multiplicity of connections, associations, and meanings that accompany'. Anderson (2008:94, 118, 93–120); Bakhtin (1981:324–331).

4. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000:39) defines 'analytic' as 'using a logical method of thinking about something in order to understand it, especially by looking at all the parts separately' and 'using scientific analysis in order to find out about something'. At the same time, 'synthetic' is defined as 'producing a substance' or 'made by combining separate ideas, beliefs, styles and others.'

An exegete of the New Testament (or biblical writings) who uses polyvalent hermeneutics can consider multiple methods, analyse the text in multiple layers and synthesise the interpretative paradigm in horizontal and vertical dimensions (Powell 2001:13–27; also see Gowler 2000:443–466). The task of this article is threefold: investigating the text from multiple angles with the help of several critical tools; understanding the significance of a horizontal and vertical hermeneutics in the study of the New Testament and exploring the significance of a polyvalent analysis of a text. Throughout this article, John 2:13–25 shall be used as a sample text to foreground the hypothetical aspects.

Reading 'behind' and 'toward'

At the first level, an interpreter can focus on the author who stood behind the historical process of the text and the context of the early Christian community. The text is used as a window to understand the author who was involved in constructing the thought patterns in correlation to the affairs of their time. The 'there' (space) and 'then' (time) realities are construed in relation to the historical reader. The tools such as form, source, redaction, textual and other analyses enable the interpreter to capture the world of the historical author.[5] As the majority of the above-mentioned tools are used in dialogue with one another as per the requirements of the text, the interpreter establishes polyvalence at each stage of her or his interpretation.[6] An interpreter can understand that the text is a reflection of the historical realities of the author's time. With that idea in mind, she or he can investigate the historical realities behind the text with a focus on the author and her or his life situation and understand the way the author contributes towards the construction of the text.

John 2:13–25 provides some of the significant historical and chronological indications. As it is a quartet tradition, a reader can realise how the shorter version of the synoptic story was enlarged in John with dramatic details (cf. Mk 11:15–17; Mt 21:12-13; Lk 19:45–46; see Blomberg 2001:87–88). While the Johannine author uses their idiosyncratic style by placing the *event* and the *logion* at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry (2:13–25), the synoptic authors place it towards the close of his ministry (Mk 11:15–17; Mt 21:12–13; Lk 19:45–46; see Coloe 2001:65–66). In John, the event happens when Jesus attends the first Jewish Passover (vv. 13a, 23). One of Blomberg's suggestive questions is as follows: 'Has John thematically relocated this passage as a kind of headline to the meaning of Jesus's ministry?' (Blomberg 2001:88). This relocation in John indicates the redactional and theological agenda of the author. The archaeological setting like the literal temple of the 1st-century CE and the topographical terrain like Jerusalem take the storyline to the original

5.The names associated with source criticism include J. J. Griesbach (1745–1812 CE), William Sanday (1843–1920 CE), B. H. Streeter (1874–1937 CE), W. R. Farmer (1921–2000 CE), to name a few. See S. Kloppenborg (2007:341). Works associated with *formsgeschichte* include: Rudolf Bultmann (1963:6, 11–68); Martin Dibelius (1935:3–7); Edgar McKnight (1969:17–33). Works associated with Redaction Criticism include: Günther Bornkamm (1963); Hans Conzelmann (1960); Willi Marxsen (1969).

6.This is very much in line with Bakhtin's understanding of the connection between dialogue and polyvalence. See Tim Beasley-Murray (2007:131).

historical context (vv. 13–14a, 23). The historical elements such as the temple courts, selling of cattle, sheep and doves and people sitting at the table and exchanging money specify the situation of the temple (v. 14; Vistar 2018:101–103). The response of the Jews that the temple was built in 46 years indicates the period of the historical construction (v. 20; Coloe 2001:65–84). The text can be conceived when a modern reader conglomerates the '*Sitz im Leben Jesu, Sitz im Leben Kirche, Sitz im Leben*' of John, the prehistory of the text, the role and function of the historical author and the final redaction of the text.

A contemporary reader can investigate how the material in her or his hand was historically constructed and what were the historical realities the author confronted in the process of establishing the text (Blomberg 2001:87–91). As John indicates that 'we have seen his glory' (Jn 1:14), today's reader can understand the reliability of the tradition as it includes the historical details as well as the personal references (Blomberg 2001:88–89). The Johannine author indicates the time and space (v. 13), action of Jesus (vv.14–15), *logion* of Jesus (vv. 16, 19), memory of the disciples (vv. 17, 22) and reaction of the Jews (vv. 18, 20, 23) in a detailed manner (Kerr 2002:67–101). The temple at Jerusalem as a socio-religious institution in the 1st century CE context, Jews' improper use of the temple courts, Jesus's 'zeal for the Father's house' and his introduction of a new way forward are communicated as events in human history (Köstenberg 1998:68; Regeb 2019:197–221). A critical investigation of the text in relation to the historical author and the firsthand recipients provides an idea 'behind' and 'toward' the text. An interpreter who investigates the passage from a polyvalent hermeneutic can appreciate the layer of meaning delved out of the connectivity between the author and the recipients established through the medium of the text. For Bakhtin, in the literature, a dialogic open style is carried out in polyvalence (Bruhn & Lundquist 2001:11–52, 48). It is recognisable that the meaning emerged out of this connectivity cannot be construed as the single-most meaning of the text.

Reading 'within' and 'out of'

In the second level, the study analyses the narrative elements within the text and the process of their leading out for meaning making. The semiotic aspects such as content, form and function of the text are analysed to determine the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dynamism and the inward and leading out movements (Hellholm 1986:13–64). New literary tools such as semiotic analysis (see Eskola 2021), narrative exploration (see Chatman 1978), genre criticism (Aune 1986:65), rhetorical analysis (Watson 2010:166) and others are employed to understand the internal narrative connections of the text (Tolmie 1999). By making use of the available literary tools and exploring the narrative elements within the text, the literary and narrative polyvalence is explored to identify the meaning. Bakhtin emphasised polyvalent and polymorphous inclusivity of ideas, insisted the validity of every concretely positioned point of view and

dialogic interaction of narrative elements (Emersen 1997:62). It is a reading process that begins 'within' the narrative framework and leads 'out of' the text to create meaning.

John 2:13–25 reveals features such as Jesus's action, his dialogue with the Jews, anticipation of future events, fulfilment of the Scripture and the disciples' post-resurrection recollection (Chatman 1978:48; Thomaskutty 2015:103–106). The archaeological (i.e. temple of Jerusalem) and religious (i.e. during the Passover feast of the Jews) settings of the narrative dramatically preface the succeeding dialogue section (Resseguie:100–113; Thomaskutty 2015:103–106). The characterisation of Jesus is peculiar in the narrative as he is one who travels to the temple at Jerusalem (v. 13), cleanses the temple (vv. 15–16a), fulfils the prophecy (v. 17b) and becomes the 'new' temple (v. 21) and a sign performer (v. 23; Thomaskutty 2015:103–106; Stibbe 1993:50). The content of the dialogue is explained on the basis of a shift of emphasis from the literal temple at Jerusalem to the 'new' eschatological temple (i.e. Jesus) (Dodd 1960; Thomaskutty 2015:103–106). The content and form of the dialogue help the narrator to reveal the personality of Jesus and to invite the reader to believe in him (vv. 22, 23). The plot of the story is arranged as follows: a claim is established (vv. 13–16), a challenge is placed (v. 18b), a riposte is followed (v. 19b), a counter response is received (v. 20b) and a clarification is provided (vv. 21–22; Barus 2006:134; Brant 2004:205). The *action* followed by a *dialogue* framework of the pericope incorporates a *challenge-and-riposte* format within the narrative (Thomaskutty 2015:93–106). A narrative analysis of the passage foregrounds a dialogue between the implied author and the implied reader. The implied author conceives the duel between the protagonist and the antagonist on the basis of an 'old' and 'new' temple dichotomy. Thus, polyvalent narrative aspects are explored through this analysis (Emersen 1997:62).

The content and form of the story enable the implied reader to understand the function of the text as follows (Aune 1986:35–36; Van Aarde 2009:381–385). The narrator works through the mediation of the characters and their utterances (Elam 1980:138; Thatcher 2001:269). The questioning attitude of the Jews reveals the way their perplexity grows after Jesus begins his public ministry (vv. 18b, 20b; Barrett 1978:194–202; Newman and Nida 1980:64–73, 133). The narrator portrays Jesus's vitality and zeal for the temple, courage to challenge the community, sensitivity to understand the unfavourable condition of the temple and intelligence to speak dialogically with the Jews (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:72–79). The narrator views Jesus as one with zeal for the Father's house, describes how his symbolic action in the temple leads to a dialogue, illustrates his passion and resurrection in a metaphorical way and concludes with a mention of the post-resurrection faith of the disciples (Smith 1999:88–91). The disciples' 'remembrance' deciphers the effect of Jesus's sayings upon the community of believers. With the help of the dialogue, the action of Jesus is conveyed

forcefully to the reader (Maniparampil 2004:202). The polyvalent dynamisms of the text enable the contemporary reader to be persuaded for action in her or his own contextual realities (Emersen 1997:62).

Reading 'in front' and 'into'

At the third level, a reader can focus on the contemporary hermeneutical aspects. Here, a reader is not considered as a 'first time reader' of the text but rather as a 'paradigmatic reader' (Stibbe 1993:16). As a faith-inspired personality, the reader focuses on her or his own current situation in life (Kirk 2000:318). The struggles and pathos of the people and 'in front' of the text realities are considered significant in that process. A contemporary reader believes that the text has power and potential to face the new situations and can suggest a new way forward for liberation and transformation (Rowland & Corner 1989:54–55). The experience of the reader is considered as the starting point of the interpretation (Wilfred 2000:286). The exegetical tools such as liberation hermeneutics,[7] subaltern interpretation (Clarke 2002:247) and others can be some of the methods used at this level. The contemporary ecological (John 2012), postmodern and oppressor-and-subjugated realities are explored with insights from the Bible. A reader can bring her or his own presuppositions and worldviews into the text in the process of reading it. That means, the interpreter foregrounds the 'here' (space) and 'now' (time) contextual realities in alignment with the text. She or he uses polyvalent tools and develops multiple strategies to expose the contemporary realities in closer alignment with the textual world (Anderson 2020:57–82).

In a context in which unrighteousness prevails, justice is denied, rich and poor disparity increases, women suffer dehumanisation, low caste and race people are marginalised and old hierarchies prevail, a reader can foreground the message of John 2:13–25 as a paradigm (Rensberger 1988:107–134). While the men selling and exchanging in the temple, the courts of women and gentiles were occupied by them and the rights of the socially neglected were denied in public (v. 14).[8] The men engaged in their profit-making business at the risk of the rights of the ostracised (v. 16).[9] As a contrast is introduced between the 'old temple' and the 'new temple,' a message of liberation is at the kernel of the discussion (vv. 19–22; Maniparampil 2004:200–203). A hermeneutical bridge can be built between the contextual realities of the poor masses in Latin America (Rowland & Corner 1989:54–55), racially ostracised in the United States of America (Cone 2010), Dalits (untouchables and scheduled castes) (Massey 2014), Tribals (scheduled tribes) (Angami

7. The works of some of the pioneers in the field include: Gustavo Gutierrez (1988); Jon Sobrino (2015); Juan L. Segundo (2002).

8. Lundquist comments that, 'Jewish men were allowed in the Court of Women, and that there were special quarters within that Court for Women to worship separately. The Court of Women was therefore not so named because it was exclusive to and for women, but because it was the only court to which (Jewish) women had access'. John M. Lundquist (2008:112). Also see indications about the gentile court: Philip Francis Esler (1987:154–155).

9. For more details about temple as an institution and as an image, see Sam P. Mathew (1999:264–270)

2013:25–41) and Adivasis (indigenous people) in India,[10] Minjungs (mass of the people movement) in Korea (Byung-Mu 2013:1–26), Burakumins (indigenous people) in Japan (Song 2012:158–175), Apartheid people (racially segregated) in Africa (Farisani 2014:207–225) and other dehumanised sections in different parts of the world with the liberation movement introduced through Jesus's act and logion in 2:13–25 (Mathew 1999:274–279). Thus, polyvalent contextual connectivities are exposed in the process of interpretation (Anderson 2020:57–82).

A contemporary reader can investigate the patriarchal and colonial aspects of the text and re-read it within a gender-inclusive and decolonised hermeneutical framework (see Fiorenza 1985:99; Sugirtharajah 2012:43). In an elite and a non-elite bipolar context, they can take a preferential option for the poor and foreground the suppressed voice of the dehumanised (Guha 1982:1–7). A reader of John 2:13–25 comes to the textual horizon with some of the following understanding from her or his own context. Firstly, when she or he reads the event of Jesus's going to the temple during the Passover (v. 13), they can replace it with today's holy places and the religious festivals and understand everything in new lights. Secondly the concerns of justice and righteousness shall be reiterated when they takes the contemporary socio-religious and politico-cultural realities to the textual horizon (vv. 15–16; Soares-Prabhu 1991:147–171). Thirdly, as Jesus suggests a new paradigm through his own person and work to transform the old system, a contemporary reader, through her or his involvements, can suggest new ways forward to liberate people.[11] In Gowler's words, 'meaning is not "in" the text, it is brought to it and, in fact, imposed on it' (Gowler 2000:450). Through multivalent involvements and connectivities, a reader can demonstrate her or his hermeneutical engagements both 'in front' and 'into' the text (Anderson 2020:57–82).

Reading 'under' and 'unto'

At the fourth level, a reader can explore a deeper level of understanding of the text. The focus is based on the following questions: 'What are the unseen aspects in and under the text?', 'What the text is built upon?', 'How do the undercurrents contribute unto the interpretation of the text?'[12] A reader of the text can go deeper into the Jewish and Greco-Roman thought-world to understand the socio-cultural dynamisms reflected in the textual horizon. They understands the social world that constructed the epistemology of the text (Barclay & White ed. 2020). A reader drowns deep into the social world to exhume the social undercurrents of the world and the social dynamics in the construction of the text. The social-scientific tools can be considered at this level. The primary concern of this approach

is to determine, as Elliot comments, 'the meaning(s) explicit and implicit in the text, meanings made possible and shaped by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and intended audiences' (Elliot 1993:8). A contemporary interpreter can compare and contrast the social values, ethos, systems, codes, symbols, institutions and other categories in the society and those represented in the text to make proper senses of them. They can construe the social world in closer alignment with the textual world through polyvalent connectivities (Bakhtin 1981:314, 320).

The event of temple cleansing in John foregrounds some of the social undercurrents. The social *realia* are obvious through the presentation of social groups such as merchants and money changers (v. 14b), institutions like the temple (v. 14a) and issues such as breaking the functional aspects and purity codes through occupying the temple courts (v. 14).[13] Forty-six years of tradition of the temple establishes its place in social history (v. 20).[14] The social norm of the Jews in treating the temple zealously is emphasised through the tradition (Ps 69:9) and the speech of the disciples (v. 17).[15] Although the temple was an epicentre for Jewish social, political and economic activities, it was controlled by the wealthy and powerful upper-class people. The marginalised communities were denied access to the temple even in the reserved courts.[16] Malina and Rohrbaugh state, 'The social institution represented by the temple was political religion in the form of theocracy' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:77). Socio-religious gatherings and festivities were encouraged in the cultic institutions in Israel. The Passover was one of the festival seasons attended by women, gentiles and the general public for cultic services (Moloney 1998:80). By occupying the outer courts reserved for women, gentiles and the general public, the elite business class disregarded the norm of social relations.[17] Turning the temple into an *oikon emporiou* [house of merchandise] was the end result (v. 16) Moloney (1998:77). The economic and political roles of the temple are significant as the temple was the centre of Israel's political economy (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:78).

The Greco-Roman religious centres were often connected to gatherings, restaurants, merchandises and other social associations and activities. The Corinthian temples were homes for several extra-religious activities such as dining, drinking, merchandises and even temple prostitution (Renner & Shaw 2021:109; also see Silver 2019). As the temple at Jerusalem was functioning within the Greco-Roman

setting, it is easier to imagine how merchandise and money exchange were introduced in the courts of the temple at Jerusalem. The movement initiated by Jesus was intended to set apart the temple as the centre of worship where all the people can come and offer their divine homage irrespective of the human-made social boundaries (Thomaskutty 2015:103–106). In the ancient world, temples were often turned to be *oikon emporiou*, but Jesus introduces a new way forward through his zealous and revolutionary movement (Dunn 2013:244, 243–255). A new temple that transcends all social boundaries was at the heart of his message. According to William and Herzog II (2005),

> The contrast between the temple envisioned by Isaiah and the temple Jesus entered in Jerusalem could hardly have been greater. Whereas Isaiah's temple was dedicated to inclusiveness, the Jerusalem temple was constructed to separate Judeans from Gentiles (Is 56:8). (p. 169)

Jesus envisioned a temple without barriers, exclusive tendencies and other human involvements. In John 4:21–24, this idea is further expressed in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. Flogging with a whip of cords (Gk. *phragellion ek schoniōn*) was a social symbol representing a form of judicial punishment, maintaining discipline and even persecution and torture.[18] Jesus's historical appearance with a whip of cords in the temple at Jerusalem has several socio-religious repercussions and symbolical significances. A reader can understand how the social categories and underpinnings play a significant role in the process of reading the text (Bakhtin 1981:314, 320).

Reading 'above' and 'beyond'

At the final level, a reader builds her or his arguments based on polyvalent semantics and epistemology of the text. In the exegetical analysis, a fusion is emerged out of the 'first space' within the textual horizon and the 'second space' within the horizon of the reader. A 'third space' can be created out of a fusion of the first and the second spaces (Økland, De Vos & Wenell ed. 2016; Sajo 1996:xiii–xxii; Thomaskutty). The third space aspects are placed at a higher level. At this space, a reader demonstrates her or his creativeness and theological articulation. The reader is not placed above the text as an authoritative figure, but rather she or he is allowed to construct integrated meanings and ideologies based on historical facts, textual semiotics, contemporary implications and the social *realia* of the text.[19] The reader creates such a space of meaning based on a multifaceted and comprehensive analysis of the textual realities. As a creative interpreter, the reader makes use of the freedom of expression and deliberates her or his 'above' and 'beyond' musings of the text.

The event of temple cleansing enables a reader to construct upward semantics by fusing the horizon of the text and the sphere of the reader. Jesus went up (*anebē*) during a high time

in Jewish calendar (i.e. Passover festival) and in an elevated space (i.e. the temple at Jerusalem, vv. 13–14).[20] Jesus invites the audience to an atmosphere of proper worship and an experience of divine fellowship (vv. 14–16; 4:21–24) – see Moloney (1998:76–77). While Jesus intends to foreground the 'Father's house' (*ton oikon tou patros mou*) as the apex platform for human interaction with God, people of the world turned it into a 'house of merchandise' (*oikon emporiou, to* (v. 16; Moloney 1998:77). While the Jews are entangled with the 'from below' perspective, Jesus invites their attention to the 'from above' ideology (v. 18). While the disciples and many others reached the elevated position of spirituality through their belief and understanding (vv. 17, 22–23), the Jews remain in their unbelief and entangled in the worldly ideas (Beasley-Murray 1999:39–40). Beasley-Murray states (1999),

> The ultimate significance of the temple cleansing is therefore Christological, not ecclesiological. As throughout this Gospel forgiveness, unity with the Father, and life under the saving sovereignty of God and all that flows from it are the fruit of his redemptive action. (pp. 42–43)

The narrator of the story, through various narrative asides, creates an elevated space to lead the reader toward 'above' and 'beyond' spiritual realities (Beasley-Murray 1999:40–41).

A contrast between the ideology 'from above' and the ideology 'from below' is at the root of John's temple cleansing event (Barton 2008:3–18). John's narrative is framed within its characteristic dualism between light and darkness, truth and untruth, belief and unbelief and God and Satan. The narrator aligns John 2:13–25 within that framework (Bauckham 2015:109–129). But as in Judaism, John develops a modified dualism that affirms God's sovereign rule as an overcomer of evil (Thomaskutty 2021:780; also see Orton 1999:7). The text idealises 'from above' aspects over against 'from below' and makes an appeal to universal humanity. The universality of God's presence, divine virtues such as righteousness and salvation, inclusiveness and emancipation and liberation and transformation are some of the overarching aspects of the event of temple cleansing (Coloe 2001:65–84, 213–222). On the other side, human-made structures are considered insignificant unless they are attuned to the glorious realm of God (Chanikuzhy 2012). The event initiated by Jesus was a global movement to put into death the unrighteous and corrupt global systems and to rise up the righteous and ideal. This upward-looking and paradigmatic message is at the core of John 2:13–25. Through a dialogical imagination between the textual world and the ideological views at the 'third space,' a reader can build polyvalent connectivities (Bakhtin 1981:314, 320).

A polyvalent synthesis

Polyvalent hermeneutic enables a contemporary reader to re-read a text from a dialogic perspective to understand its overarching semiotics (Anderson 2008:94). A 'behind' and

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18. See https://www.britannica.com/topic/flogging, accessed on 09 January 2022.

19. Rather than taking a position of reader over the text, a position of reader with the text is employed here. See Stanley Fish (1972:383–427); Wolfgang Iser (1978); Thomaskutty (2015:23–24). See Gerald A. Press (2007:62).

20. According to Moloney, 'The use of the verb *anabainein*, "go up" (to Jerusalem) reflects the city's location in the Judean hill country. However, the verb came to be used (as here) as a technical term for a pilgrimage to the capital and its Temple'. See Moloney (1998:80); also see C. K. Barrett (1978:197).

'toward' paradigm equips a reader to gather information regarding the immediate historical setting of the text within which it was shaped.[21] John as a historical author communicates the temple event (2:13–25) to address the historical demands of her or his reader(s). A contemporary reader can construe the historical significance of the incident in the life situation of the author and her or his recipients. John uses a material that was widely circulated and re-interprets it in an idiosyncratic way. Placing the pericope as a programmatic event at the outset of Jesus's public ministry, John demonstrates a unique redactional tendency and adds a specific theological agenda. The event is conceived in the historical context and emerges as a document based on the historical *realia*.[22] Through this interactive paradigm, the historical aspects such as the prehistory of the text, the redactional tendencies and historical emphasis of the story are foregrounded to the contemporary reader (Bakhtin 1981:314, 320).

The 'implied author' and 'implied reader' dialogue within the textual horizon enables a contemporary reader to make connections 'within' and 'out of' the textual paradigm.[23] John 2:13–25 details the narrative elements such as topographical and archaeological settings, characterisation of the interlocutors, dichotomy between the overarching themes such as 'old temple' and 'new temple,' action and dialogue interaction within a dramatic structure, *challenge and riposte* format and symbolical and literary development of the text to frame a unique literary master plan. A contemporary reader can imagine the historical setting of the pericope in the process of reading the literary artistry.[24] Bakhtin referred to a dialogical relationship between the historical world and the narrative world more in terms of a polyvalent interaction (Bakhtin 1981:314, 320). The backward, inward and forward movements of the text enable a reader to conceptualise the temple incident and how the historical facts are idealised in literary and narrative terms.

The 'in front (of)' and 'into' the text paradigm emphasises the context of the contemporary reader with significance.[25] In a context in which unrighteousness prevails, justice is denied to people and human rights are disregarded, a contemporary reader can use biblical texts as paradigms for contextual interpretation. While the marginalised communities are ostracised in different contexts and the women are subjugated, Jesus's model of cleansing the courts of the Gentiles and the women enables the interpreter to bridge the gap. The existent 'old temple' and the prevailing unrighteousness are replaced by Jesus's presence as the 'new temple' and his promise about

the establishment of a righteous kingdom. In the process of reading, a contemporary reader aligns her or his situation with the textual horizon and the historical situation in which the text was formed.[26] Identifying multiple voices and polyvalent connectivities is part of this interpretative initiative.

The 'under' and 'unto' textual paradigm provides clues to some of the social *realia* such as social terms, events, institutions and other aspects upon which the text was constructed.[27] The text is rooted in some of the social and heteroglossic aspects such as temple as a socio-religious institution, purity and pollution aspects related to the temple, control of the elites over the downtrodden,[28] socio-religious, cultural and scriptural understanding of proper and improper worship, turning the 'house of God' to a 'house of merchandise,' social history of the temple and social groups and identities, occupation of the people as sellers and exchangers of money and the system of buying things are described through an interlocking of textual and social horizons. The incident showcases how the text is rooted in the social mechanisms of the 1st-century CE *realia*. The social undercurrents are brought unto the textual framework and thus connectivity is established between the social world and the narrative world (Kinnard 2014:59).

An 'above' and 'beyond' paradigm is emerged as a 'third space' that is formed out of an upward fusion between the narrative space and the reader's space (Soja 1996:260). At this stage, an interpreter can investigate the divine aspects and universalistic realities of the text to foreground its ideological framework.[29] While the Jews reduce the significance of worship and turn the temple into a marketplace, the narrator invites reader's attention towards a genuine worship. As 'house of merchandise' is replaced by 'house of God,' 'from below' aspects are replaced by 'from above' aspects. Moreover, 'old temple' is replaced by 'new temple.' The narrator presents the ideological framework of the story by way of introducing Jesus's incarnation as 'new temple' and his relationship with the heavenly and divine. The story idealises the universality of God, divine virtues such as righteousness and justice and divine praxes such as cleansing, liberation and transformation (Robinson 2021). The historical, literary, contextual, social and ideological thought processes are analysed in heteroglossic terms and synthesised in a dialogue to create an open-ended and creative semantics.

Placing the text at the centre, a reader can involve in a horizontal ('analeptic and proleptic') and in a vertical ('upward and downward') interpretative paradigms. Through a horizontal and vertical analysis of the text, a reader can understand how the text is a medium to bridge among the historical, literary, contextual, social and ideological aspects in establishing its epistemology. As this

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21. See Anderson (2008) on 'Reading "behind" and "toward"'.

22. Here, historical *realia* means the *Sitz im Leben* aspects of Jesus and the early Christian communities, the oral and written traditions identified, and the historical evidences provided within the text.

23. While the implied author designs the meaning of the text, the implied reader infers the meaning of the text. See Mark Alan Powell (1990:15); Robert W. Funk (1988:34–36).

24. The *intradiegetic* (dialogue among the characters within the story) and the *metadiegetic* (dialogue between the author/narrator and the reader of the story) connections within and beyond the text are also significant at this level. See R. Alan Culpepper (1987), 'Foreword', *Dialogue in the Book of Signs*, by Thomaskutty (2015), x.

25. See the details explained in the third major sub-section Bakhtin (1981:314, 320).

26. More details about this integration, see Thomaskutty, *The Gospel of John*, 168.

27. For more details, see the fourth sub-section of the article.

28. It is obvious through occupying temple courts assigned to Gentiles and women.

29. Thomaskutty, *The Gospel of John*, 3–14.

approach is broader in its approach, several other tools also can be incorporated in this framework for hermeneutical tapestry. In the process of interpretation, one needs to admit the fact that the five levels of interpretation introduced above may also have possible conflicts on several occasions.

Concluding remarks

Polyvalent hermeneutic re-reads a text using several exegetical tools, analyses its polyphonic aspects, explores it in horizontal and vertical semantic directions and exposits it with an analytical and synthetic approach to explore the overall potential. Traditionally, a text is analysed within the confines of one or a few exegetical tools, but, polyvalent hermeneutic makes use of multiple tools and understands the text from a heteroglossic and polyphonic perspective (Robinson 2021). Analysing John 2:13–25 through a polyvalent hermeneutic enables one to understand the incident in a broader canvas. Firstly, the historical temple at Jerusalem was in a critical position as it was developed as a centre of unrighteousness, injustice, impurity and discrimination. Secondly, the temple motif is narrated with the help of several literary features, a peculiar semiotic framework and narrator's idiosyncratic style. Thirdly, the historical temple described in the Johannine framework persuades a contemporary reader to stand in the place of Jesus and raise her or his voice against the unrighteous systems and protest against the dehumanising and ostracising tendencies in today's context. Fourthly, the narrative directs one's attention towards the social history, institutionalised systems, identity conflicts and group mechanisms and persuades a reader to deepen her or his social understanding to establish patterns of thought at a broader level. Fifthly, the ideology behind the story is that Jesus replaces the temple at Jerusalem to be a universally accessible and eternally existent temple of God. The polyphonic nature and heteroglossic character are obvious as each of these voices has its own perspective, its own validity and its own narrative weight within the narrative. The historical, narrative, contextual, social and ideological framework of the temple incident initiates polyvalent semantic domains to orchestrate a relevant interpretation of the text by incorporating the universal realities of the people. This activity enables a reader to understand a gospel narrative more fully in multidisciplinary perspective.

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