

Summary

The aim of this practical-theological study is to give an account of the transition from understanding to rendering. Those who prepare a sermon or catechetical instruction on a biblical passage enter into a process by which they effectuate a conversation, at once correlative and critical, between 'something' in the world of the text and 'something' in the world of the church members. This preparational process implies that interpreters not only disclose the text in the interaction with its historical situation, but also the doubts, faith, questions, worries and joy of the congregation in its interaction with present-day society. This task does not get easier at the end of the twentieth century. Interpreters who understand and render in name and on behalf of the congregation enter into the continuing process of interpretation of the kingdom of God, hoping for and on their way towards the end of time, when evil will be conquered and God will be all in all. Throughout this study the starting-point is the notion of the kingdom of God in its contest with evil. Another central notion is that the congregation in which the rendering takes place is fundamentally to be viewed as a 'being-saved community in the world' (Buttrick). It is characteristic of the community that, full of expectation and in interaction with its own situation, it is aimed at present and future salvation.

We distinguish three aspects in the process from understanding to rendering: drafting a meaning of the world of the text, drafting a testimony of the world of the text, and making a rendering offer. We regard *understanding* as the activity by which a text from the past can be grasped and interpreted in such a way that a meaning can be drafted. Understanding presupposes appropriation, that is, comprehending the text's world in terms of one's own language and concepts. By *testimony* we mean that the text is regarded by the interpreters as a witness to the speaking, coming and comforting of the triune God. In a testimony draft a specific element in the world of the text is comprehended, explained and appropriated, viz. the testimony regarding the contest of God with evil for the sake of the coming of God's kingdom. This term has the connotations of a lawsuit: at the unique moment of the rendering, which is being prepared for a particular moment in a particular congregation in a particular situation, the testimony concerning the kingdom of God will be at stake. *Rendering** is an activity by which the understood and interpreted world of the text to which meaning has been attributed and which has been viewed as a testimony, obtains a function and an effect in a new situation, so that participants in a worship service or in catechetical instruction receive a meaning and a testimony and can appropriate the world of the text as a possible world and fit it into their own lives. A rendering is not merely a repetition of that which has been discovered in exegesis, but a creative response to the meaning and the testimony of the world of the text. In the aspect of rendering, too, appropriation by the interpreter is involved, but now in the sense that interpreters, in the present time, in response to the world of the text, give a new testimony of and bear witness to God's kingdom in its contest with evil, in a new language, in new images and figurative language. The practical-theological question this study wants to answer

* Note from the translator: throughout this summary the verb 'to render' and the noun 'rendering' are used as technical terms for the third aspect of interpretation, translating the Dutch words 'vertolken' and 'vertolking'.

is: under what circumstances can preachers and catechizers, acting as interpreters, justifiably transform the meaning and testimony of a biblical passage into a rendering for church-goers and catechumens? This question fits within practical theology, seen as an academic enterprise which is directed towards the communication of the kingdom of God in a society and towards the role which the congregation (including its leadership) plays, ought to play, and actually can play in this. The method of practical-theological analysis that we apply in this study is that of participation. The book of Revelation is used to provide illustrations, and steps are taken toward a rendering offer via a meaning draft and a testimony draft. These steps are reflected upon, and part of the reflection is to search for conditions. The meaning and testimony of the text do not only play a role as object but also as subject in the analysis and reflection. The world of the text influences the practical-theological reflection. This participating, heuristic method is chosen because there is little available in terms of practical-theological theories on the question what factors influence the transition from understanding to rendering. By travelling the road of the interpreters, facets and factors, presuppositions and insights can be detected and discussed, while the tentative theoretical insights that are gained can be applied and subjected to an initial assessment.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to specifying and localizing the research question. The locus of the question is sought and found in schemas for the preparation of sermons and catechetical instruction. An important aspect of the question is the emphasis interpreters place on the possible relations between text, author, audience and reality. It is also important whether the concept of an open text is being used (Theissen). Another factor influencing the research question is the way in which the link between the past and the present is established. Is this done via a basic structure in texts of the past and of the present (Bulckens)? Or by means of fundamental motifs and paradigms (Theissen, Dingemans, Berg)? Or via the congregation's faith-consciousness (Buttrick)? Buttrick regards faith-consciousness as a qualified 'being-saved in the world.' This notion is adopted since it brings into view the congregation, the situation, and the tension between revelation and historical mediation. The view one has of rendering in preaching and catechetical instruction plays a role as well in the research question; we adopt Long's image of a witness for the interpreter. The question is regarded in the light of a hermeneutical theory. For this we follow the insights of Gadamer and Ricoeur. According to Gadamer, even at the most elementary level of a historical understanding, appropriation is adding the present understanding to the event in the past, continuing the history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). Then, adding the present history to the present understanding, and finally, adding the present understanding to the future history. This view places rendering in the tension of present and future. Ricoeur, more than Gadamer, takes the resistance and the unruliness of evil into account, and is aware of a possible conflict of interpretations. His distinction between prefiguration (the event and reality have a potential narrative structure, as a result of which they may become text), configuration (the linguistic world of the text), and refiguration (the activity of the readers, incorporating the text into their own world) presents a model which can understand and guarantee the receptive, free, creative and critical act of rendering as refiguration of an open text. Next, we discuss the theological side of the question. The aim of preaching and catechetical instruction is that the congregation hears God speak. In his hermeneutical reflection on the Word of

God, Barth takes into account God's surprising speech and action. Finally, with reference to Ricoeur's view that God's revelation is witnessed to in five different genres (prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, and hymnic discourse), we give account of why we limit ourselves to a prophetic text like the book of Revelation for practising the practical-theological analysis.

In chapter 2 the hermeneutical and practical-theological presuppositions are charted in order to answer the question in what areas interpreters take hermeneutical and theological decisions when preparing a rendering. (1) First, a scheme is presented of understanding a text which came into being in the past, in which, following Gadamer's hermeneutical theory, the meaning draft is regarded as a response to the text. We assume that the interpreter is not a professional exegete, but someone whose intention it is to give a rendering. From his or her own experience of reality, the interpreter enters into a critical-correlative conversation with the world of the text, to which belong the author, the audience and the reality from the past. With Gadamer, we choose a position in between reconstruction of the world of the text and integration through re-collection (*Er-innerung*). Ricoeur draws attention to the problem of the dialectical relationship between 'event' and 'understanding', and between 'sense' and 'reference'. In relation to understanding, we point to the problem of the text's reference to reality, which can be regarded not only as historical events and facts, but also as assertions, convictions, mental intentions, concepts, or ultimate being. With his model of communication with the text, Ricoeur gives room to the freedom of the reader. Interpreters, who are in the process of understanding, will have to survive in the tension between freedom and bondage, between the similar and the dissimilar, between reference and communication, stasis and impetus. Within these tensions a response to the meaning draft becomes possible (for example, the image of God as it emerges from the text creates problems for me as interpreter). (2) Next, with reference to Ricoeur's view, a scheme is given for a testimony draft of the triune God's speech and action. In this connection, the relationship between general and special hermeneutics is discussed. In terms of critical correlation hermeneutics (Dingemans), this relationship is characterized as critical-correlative. Symbols, metaphors, hyperboles and stories appear to be appropriate means to witness to God's speaking, coming and comforting in the face of radical evil. (3) Then, on the basis of the meaning and testimony drafts, a scheme is offered in which the fields of interpretation are placed that the interpreter enters. These fields of interpretation are reflected in the hermeneutical consciousness of the hearers of a sermon or the catechumens. We distinguish the following fields: biblical-theological lines, theological paradigms, cultural and societal aspects, ethical and aesthetic viewpoints, personal experiences, and experiences with the congregation. Interpreters make decisions in each of these fields, when they prepare a rendering in the tension between the draft of the world of the text and the draft of the world of the congregation. Within the congregation, rendering can be regarded as a form of commemoration in the present of an open, not fully elaborated past with a view to the future of God's kingdom. Central is the commemoration of two central and associated events, the exodus from Egypt, and the life, cross and resurrection of Jesus. In a present and in a specific situation, between creation and the end of time, the rendering is a suit for the participation in salvation in a conflict with calamity. At the end of this chapter the question is focussed: under what conditions can preachers and catechizers, acting as interpreters, justifiably transform a meaning and a

testimony of a biblical passage into a rendering for church-goers and catechumens, in biblical-theological, theological and cultural-societal fields of interpretation? This main question can be subdivided into several questions, which are dealt with in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 discusses the question under what conditions the draft of a meaning and testimony of the time of the text can be used justifiably. From a practical-theological perspective, it throws light upon the book of Revelation as a Christian, prophetic-apocalyptic circular letter to seven churches in Asia Minor, probably published in 95 AD, first of all meant to be read out. The view of the book of Revelation as hermeneutic-communicative praxis is emphasized, as an offer of textual interpretation intended to lead the church at that time to test the spirits and to true worship. The epistolary character and the means of composition which the author utilizes to communicate with his audience, are discussed. The book of Revelation speaks with a view to a multiplex situation, characterized by conflicts with the Jews, by the issue to what degree Christians are allowed to adapt to society, by tensions between the poor and the rich, and by painful experiences in the past, like the fall of Jerusalem, the tortures and persecutions under Nero, and emperor worship. This situation was not exclusively very threatening to the church, but can be seen as a 'perceived crisis' (Yabro Collins, Thompson). After the intention of the book of Revelation has thus been presented, the question of how to deal with an original intention of a text is discussed using the notion of anamnesis. The book of Revelation is itself an anamnesis with a view to the future: the recollection of Babylon made the church of that time aware that, on the one hand, they were exiles and, on the other hand, they hoped for the power that would carry them and lead them out. The anamnesis of that time refers to God's founding acts of salvation, but at the same time it freely uses an original intention of texts from e.g. Exodus and the prophets. The anamnesis of the book of Revelation in the present church can be done in three ways: as direct recognition, as historical anamnesis, and as heuristic anamnesis. The last form of anamnesis is a way of remembering which, from the present context, looks for the text's continued influence. Two conditions are formulated: a transition from understanding to rendering can be justified (1) if interpreters can make clear with which model of anamnesis they work; and (2) if interpreters, in using a meaning and a testimony of a biblical text which is to be viewed as an open text, can show that existence's openness, which is given in principle with faith in God's future, is not denied.

Understanding the book of Revelation is not really possible without a view on the function, nature and meaning of images and figurative language. Chapter 4 discusses the question under what conditions the transition from understanding to rendering of images and figurative language is justified. First, an interactive theory of figurative language (Mooij) is considered, according to which figurative language has an ornamental, an emotive and an informative function (Soskice). Next, the images, and the figurative language are discussed as they can be found in the vision of the horses in Revelation 6. The visual character as the basis of the images is emphasized. It is shown what figurative language is used: allegory, personification, irony, repetition, hyperbole, simile, metonymy, metaphor, and symbol. It is pointed out that a whole passage can be viewed as a metaphor or hyperbole. From a theological perspective, the figurative language in the Apocalypse is situated in the history of God with humankind, in God's struggle

against the gods which opens the future, a struggle for freedom and hope, in which man appears to participate, as becomes clear in the text when it is read and heard in the community of faith. It uses figurative language for God's kingdom trusting that God will appear to have a surplus which surpasses all language and all understanding. Four conditions for a justifiable understanding of images and figurative language are mentioned: (1) Has attention been given in the meaning and testimony drafts to the fact that often the visual aspect offers sufficient explanation? (2) What theory of figurative language is presupposed in the meaning and testimony drafts? (3) Can the comparison (differences and similarities) be justified on the basis of the textual analysis? With reference to Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, according to which metaphors have an 'is like' and an 'is not' character, it is essentially clear from a practical-theological point of view that images and figurative language, especially metaphors, are fit to effectively advance significant but hidden realities like God, evil and future. (4) Are interpreters able to show to what degree the new figurative language – which they have developed creatively, deciphering the images and figurative language – is and is not in agreement with the intention of these images and figurative language in the context in which they came into existence?

The question in chapter 5 is: under what conditions can the transition from understanding to rendering be justified in the field of biblical-theological lines? First, a meaning and testimony draft of Revelation 18:17-19:4 are given. This passage on the fall of Babylon serves as an illustration for the following chapters, in which conditions are sought for the transformation of the meaning and testimony drafts of that passage into a rendering. The fields of interpretation from chapter 2 need to be entered for this. The counter-image of Babylon, the new Jerusalem as ideal city and temple (21:9-27) and as eschatological paradise (22:1-5), is also discussed. Then the biblical-theological lines are examined. The models of exile (Dingemans), God's speaking (Berg), fundamental motifs and a secularized consciousness (Theissen), and the interpretation of manifold grace (Schillebeeckx) are discussed in relation to the question to what degree they take account of the plurality of the situation and with the action of the triune God. This investigation leads towards several formal characteristics, on the basis of which both the biblical-theological lines and the theological paradigm can be ordered with a view to a justifiable rendering as well as to a justifiable transition from understanding to rendering. These characteristics are: situation and text; God and salvation for hearers/catechumens over against calamity; Christ and salvation for hearers/catechumens over against calamity; the nature of salvation as personal and cultural-societal salvation; the place and the role of church, future and figurative language. The transition from understanding to rendering can be justified in the field of biblical-theological lines, if these lines are ordered according to these seven formal characteristics.

Chapter 6 investigates the conditions in the field of the theological paradigms. The biblical-theological lines are connected with understanding, the theological paradigms (like misery, deliverance and gratitude; or the kingdom of God in its contest with evil) stem rather from the present-day praxis of faith, but because of the effective history of the Bible they are related to biblical symbols, metaphors and stories. In this study the paradigm of the kingdom of God in its contest with evil has been chosen. It is described after the manner of Schillebeeckx, while, in line with Ricoeur's view, in the description of the symbols of evil human

responsibility has been retained over against the tragic and Orphic myths. The paradigm of evil is given much attention because so many images are used for it in the last book of the Bible. It is shown that the book of Revelation can be assumed into this paradigm and that this writing can be rendered on the basis of this paradigm. Thus, the paradigm has a relatively autonomous position vis-à-vis the text. Despite the objections McFague levels against monarchical symbols, we stick to the central paradigm of the kingdom of God. For not all notions attached to this symbol need to be adopted. Also, based on the paradigm a critical conversation is held with Revelation's images of God and Christ as warriors. Interpreters need to have a view of God's action. Over against the opinion that the Bible speaks of the great deeds of God, and over against the opinion that God reveals himself through symbols, we stick with Miskotte to the model of God's action, in which symbolic language and situation are linked. A model of God's action is pictured, consecutively, as a manifestation from heaven in time (1), as an effect of words (2), and as intervention in history and nature (3). The latter model is reluctantly regarded as hope for eschatological action in time. In the preparation, a theological paradigm plays a role as representation, key, frame of reference, and norm. In the rendition itself the paradigm plays explicitly and implicitly a normative role. In the justification of the followed hermeneutical procedure and in the testing of the end result, the paradigm plays a part, too. For the justification of the transition from understanding to rendering in the field of the theological paradigms, the following conditions should be met. Interpreters should be able to indicate where they have placed the emphasis according to the ordering characteristics which were mentioned when the biblical-theological lines were discussed. Further, interpreters should be able to indicate which part of the theological view of the rendering stems from the meaning and testimony drafts of the text and which part stems from the modern paradigm of the kingdom of God in its contest with evil. They should also be able to say which model of God's action they have used, and how, based on the faith in the future of God's pure positivity, they have transformed the rendering in comparison with the source-text regarding the images of God and Christ as warriors that spill blood. Finally, it should become clear that their rendering fulfils the principles of mutuality, freedom, general validity, and solidarity.

In chapter 7 several fields of interpretation are discussed briefly: the influence of the interpreter's personal experiences and the experiences with the congregation. As an example of an aesthetic interpretation, a hymn by Barnard is analysed. Moral implications of using this passage are also mentioned. For this field of interpretation three conditions are formulated: (1) as for imagery and contents, the rendering may not be determined by a way of acting typical of Babylon; (2) the rendering must do justice to the present legal system; (3) the rendering may not accept the status quo from a victim's perspective, because it should continue to relate in a critical way to the powers that behave like gods. As an example, these conditions are applied to a sermon of Theissen.

Chapter 8 focuses on the implications for the rendering of the context of the church in culture and society. First, four renderings of the passage are analysed: social life and antithesis (Schilder), the cultural crisis during the Second World War (Miskotte), Apartheid (Boesak), and the recognition of idolatrous depth dimensions in society (Dingemans). Then the nature of the relations between the meaning and testimony drafts, on the one hand, and culture and society, on the

other, is given closer attention. Thus, the attitudes towards modern society are considered (traditional, modern-bourgeois, and critical in solidarity). And the possible relations between the text in the situation then and society now are described: antithesis, mutuality, linking and identification. Then also, the relationship between church and society, as seen from within the church: antithesis, assimilation or critical association; and as seen from society: ignoring, persecution or expectation. Culture and society are also a theme and the context in the rendering. The distinction between 'relations' and 'context and theme' is used to formulate conditions. As for the *relations*, interpreters need to be conscious of a critical-correlative conversation, which in Dutch society is usually possible between the biblical testimony and culture and society, although a contrast or even a radical breach between church and society cannot be ruled out. A fundamental bond may exist in virtue of the love of Christ, witnessed to in Revelation, of the liberation through baptism, and of the priesthood of believers. There may be an analogy between the then and the now. It is possible to take the perspective of victims, which is that of heaven. But it is also possible to leave open an unbridgeable contrast. As for *context and theme*, interpreters should be able to state explicitly whether the situation is such that an acute and direct prophetic hermeneutic is needed, or that the situation asks rather for a commemoration of a creative, open past in which a prophetic text spoke. Further, the temptation of the present-day church is discussed: a rendering is justifiable if it does not understand God as a negation or a competitor of human autonomy and freedom, and if it is able to a critical correlation with society's awareness of a better justice. Finally, the chapter leads to guidelines for rendering in society.

The concluding practical-theological reflection in chapter 9 presents the conditions in their coherence. A distinction is made between conditions regarding text and situation (1), figurative language (2), de place and the role of the church (3), the kingdom of God over against evil (4), the future (5), and personal and cultural-societal salvation (6). Then the conditions are ordered with respect to the criterion whether they are valid specifically for the rendering of the book of Revelation, or whether they apply more generally to the rendering of biblical passages. As an illustration, the conditions are applied to two sermon sketches and to two sketches of catechetical instruction. Finally, an answer is given to the research question. For the justification of the transition from understanding to rendering, the conditions regarding the critical-correlative interaction, the anamnesis, the relationship between text and paradigm, the openness, and the autonomy and freedom, are essential.

