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## Understanding Oral Hermeneutics and Relational Hermeneutics

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### ABSTRACT

In 2011, Tom Steffen and William Bjoeraker proposed “oral hermeneutics” (*The Return of Oral Hermeneutics* which is quite different from conventional “textual hermeneutics.” In this paper, the author proposes “relational hermeneutics” which is based on the paradigm of “relational interactionism” that can integrate “textual hermeneutics” and “oral hermeneutics.” A simple comparison of the three hermeneutical approaches to Scriptures (i.e. comparison of textual/oral/relational hermeneutics) will be included before the proposed integration.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of this Study

Past efforts leading to the formulation of “relational hermeneutics” are as follows:

1. Decade-long experience of “narrative preaching” with the use of “who” (i.e. personal beings/ Beings) to develop the main frame of sermon in “inductive Bible study,”<sup>1</sup> focusing on the pattern and process of interaction between personal beings/Beings). See Appendix 1 for selected samples of sermon outline.
2. Research leading to the publication of related articles in past years:
  - Wan, Enoch. “Relational Theology and Relational Missiology,” *Occasional Bulletin*, Evangelical Missiological Society. (Winter 2007), 21:1, p.1-7.
  - Wan, Enoch with Mark Hedinger. “Understanding ‘relationality’ from a Trinitarian Perspective,” *Global Missiology*, Trinitarian Studies, (January 2006a). [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org)

1. It is very common to use the 5Ws for inductive Bible study: who, when, where, why and how.

- Wan, Enoch. “A Missio-relational Reading of Romans.” Published in [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org) “Relational Study” April 1, 2010. Originally published as “A Missio -Relational Reading of Romans” in *Occasional Bulletin*, EMS, Vol. 23 No. 1, Winter 2010:1-8.
- Enoch Wan and Paul Hiebert, “Missional Narrative and Missional Hermeneutic for the 21st Century.” Published in “Featured Article” of [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org) January 2009.
- Enoch Wan, “Ethno-hermeneutics: it’s [sic] necessity and difficulty for all Christians of all

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times.” (A paper presented at the 47th National Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, PA, November 16-18, 1995. Published in *Global Missiology*, January 2004, [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org))

### 3. Formulation and application of “relational interaction” as the theoretical framework for two recent publications:

- Wan, Enoch and Raibley, Jon. *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*. (Second Edition). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2022.
- Enoch Wan, Mark Hedinger, Jon Raibley. *Transformational Growth: Intercultural Leadership/Discipleship/Mentorship*. Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2023.

## Purpose and Organization

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the “what” and “how of “relational hermeneutics.” We begin with the definition and explanation of “relational hermeneutics,” followed by illustrations from studying the Bible relationally in two examples: relational study on Romans in NT and Bible education of poetical books of OT within the Tjik oral cultural context.

## Definition of Key-Terms

**Dynamic Trinity** – the Three Persons internally within the Trinity interacting in mutuality (fellowship, love, glory) and reciprocity (sending and witnessing) and externally in creation, salvation, and glorification.<sup>2</sup>

**Favored Humanity** – human beings receiving special/unmerited favor (grace) from the Triune God such as imago Dei in creation, Incarnation of the Son as Jesus Christ and Emmanuel, salvation (as God’s children and co-heirs with Christ), as “temple of the Spirit” individually and collectively (1Cor 3:16-17; 6:19), glorious status of judging angels and eternal bliss with the Lamb in the future, etc.<sup>3</sup>

**Oral Hermeneutics (OH)** – the theory (principles) and methodology (practice) of interpreting oral materials such as story, poetry, proverb, etc. And can be defined as “A preferred way to hear, process, remember, and communicate with the human voice as the primary medium. Orality includes multiple media, such as storytelling, poetry, music, visual arts, drama, and dance.”<sup>4</sup>

**Relational Hermeneutics (RH)** – the theory (principles) and methodology (practice) of interpreting selected items (such as biblical text, oral materials) focusing on the patterned revelatory and interpretative interactions of personal being/Beings at multi-level

2. See chapter 2 of *Diaspora Missions to International Students*. By Enoch Wan. Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2019

3. For details, see Enoch Wan, *En-Qing Theology* (Theology of Unmerited Grace - in Chinese 恩情神學). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers, 2024). 恩情

4. Steffen, Tom A. and William Bioraker, *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics: As Good Today as It Was for the Hebrew Bible and First-Century Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2020), 317.

(e.g. micro-/macro-), multi-contextual (i.e. realms of existence within the Trinity or the created order) and various circumstances (i.e. synchronically or diachronically).

**Relational Interactionism** – An interdisciplinary narrative framework that develops from practical considerations of dynamic interaction of personal Beings/beings, forming realistic relational networks in multiple contexts (i.e. theo-culture, angel-culture, and human culture) and with various consequences.

**Textual Hermeneutics (TH)** – the theory (principles) and methodology (practice) of interpreting biblical text.<sup>5</sup>

**Transformational Change:** The dynamism and process of positive change, originating vertically from the Triune-God and ushered in the relational reality horizontally, through the process of interaction between personal Beings (the Triune God) and human beings, at micro and macro (personal and institutional) levels and multiple dimensions (i.e., spiritual, moral, social, and behavioral).<sup>6</sup> The nature of such change is aligned with the attribute of God and His will/revelation in Christ and Scripture, the opposite of “transgressional change.”<sup>7</sup>

**Transgressional Change** – Change caused by the dynamism from the enemy of the Triune God<sup>8</sup> and by nature that is contrary to the attribute of God and His will, His revelation in Jesus Christ and the Scripture – the opposite is “transformational change.”<sup>9</sup>

## FOUNDATIONAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

The following foundational presuppositions should guide RH – the proposed approach in “Relational Interpretation of Scripture” –

1. Theologically, RH necessitates that we Christians view Scriptures as the Word of God (i.e. personal revelation of the Triune God - **Beings**) as authoritative and inerrant (Is 8:20; Matt. 5:17-18; 1Cor. 2:13; 14:37). God the Father revealed in the OT orally, visually, and phenomenologically. God the Son reveals the Father incarnationally, God the Holy Spirit inspires and illuminates.

2. Epistemologically, RH presupposes that

5. Wan, Enoch, “Rethinking Urban Mission in Terms of Spiritual and Social Transformational Change,” in *Missiological Society of Ghana/WAMS Biennial International Conference* (Virtual, 2021).

6. Wan, Enoch, “Relational Transformational Leadership: An Asian Christian Perspective.” *Asian Missions Advance*, April 2021: 2-7.

7. Wan, Enoch and Raibley, Jon. *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*. (Second Edition). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2022:7.

8. The enemy of God includes spirit beings of Satan and disobedient angels, worldly system externally and the flesh (fallen nature) internally, as in the literature on spiritual warfare as illustrated in the following publications:

• Wan, “Spiritual Warfare: What Chinese Christians Should Know and Do.” *First Evangelical Church Association Bulletin*. Dec. 1999:6-9

• Wan, “Spiritual Warfare: Understanding Demonization,” *Global Missiology*, Oct. 2003 @ [www.globalmissiology.net](http://www.globalmissiology.net)  
Transgression (Parabasis = pará, “contrary” + bainō, “go”). See: Rom 2:23; 4:15; 5:14; Gal 3:19; 1Tim 2:14; Heb 2:2; 9:15

9. Wan and Raibley 2022:7.

Scriptures as truth and knowable – relational epistemology (**beings** and **belonging**) as proposed by Wan & Gimple.<sup>10</sup>

3. Holistically, integrative approach of RH requires the complementary use of related disciplines, such as theology, anthropology, history, etc.
4. Exegetically, there is advantage in employing related disciplines (such as biblical languages, linguistics, communication science, etc.) in RH.
5. Practically, the result of RH should lead to Godliness in understanding and practice (i.e. Christian maturity and sanctification - **becoming**); neither mere informational nor cognitive (2Tim. 3:16–17).

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

Textual hermeneutics are crucial, as Grant Osborne says, because “it enables one to move from text to context, to allow the God-inspired meaning of the Word to speak today with as fresh and dynamic relevance as it had in its original setting.”<sup>11</sup> Textual hermeneutics attempt to observe and interpret the biblical text through various lenses to accomplish various ends.

The **Grammatical-Historical** hermeneutic was first coined by Johann August Ernesti in the 18th century. Its methods changed over the centuries, but American Evangelicals in the 19th and 20th centuries claimed this method as their counter to the arising *historical-critical* method.<sup>12</sup> This hermeneutic seeks to analyze the culture behind a text to gain a deeper understanding of the human author’s intent. It does this by analyzing word choices and sentence structures (grammar and syntax). This model relies on *textual criticism* to determine the content of the original biblical manuscripts based on currently available copies. *Historical criticism* in this view is not the same as the *historical-critical method* in that it does not presuppose an anti-supernatural worldview. It does, however, analyze the history and cultural contexts behind the text. This hermeneutic includes the subdisciplines of *form criticism*, *source criticism*, *redaction criticism*, and *tradition criticism*. This hermeneutic is popular amongst American Evangelicals and is convincingly articulated by Craig L. Blomberg.<sup>13</sup>

The **Redemptive-Historical** hermeneutic seeks to discern in each text how God was advancing his redemptive plan for human history. It seeks to find Christ in every text, since “salvation resides ultimately not in who God is or even in *what he has said* but in

what he has *done* in history, once for all, in Christ.”<sup>14</sup> This hermeneutic is similar to the TIS (see below) in that it relies upon a cyclical relationship between exegesis and theological precommitments. Divine revelation is an interpretation of God’s redemptive acts, so biblical *interpretation* is derivative.<sup>15</sup> Geerhardus Vos and many Reformed theologians champion this hermeneutic.

Brevard Childs popularized the Canonical hermeneutic in the 20th century and John H. Sailhamer carried it into the 21st century. This approach is interested in analyzing the final form of the biblical text and how its authors’ arrangement of the texts (both portions of the text and entire books) contributes to the way God intends readers to experience and understand it. This hermeneutic presumes the Bible is both *human and sacred, unified and shaped*; these qualities reflect God’s intention to edify and nourish his Church.<sup>16</sup>

**Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS)**, a relatively new term, emerged as a distinct hermeneutic in the late 20th century. This hermeneutic reads the biblical text with theological precommitments; in a repetitive, cyclical fashion, the text directs and informs theological commitments, while those commitments direct and inform a reader’s understanding of the text. Kevin Vanhoozer is a notable proponent of this view. Within the TIS umbrella, Vanhoozer nests a new textual hermeneutic that judges critical methods by their fruit.<sup>17</sup> Operating with the orthodox presupposition that Scripture is God’s self-revelation intended to teach and train people for godliness, Vanhoozer concludes that an interpretive method is good if it reads the biblical text as God’s direct speech through human authors meant to transform human readers. This theological reading will create a culture of readers who become answerable to God rather than authorities *over* the text (contra postmodern narrative theory). Vanhoozer’s hermeneutic provides a filter to distinguish between God-honoring and worldly interpretive models based on their presuppositions and effects.

In recent decades there has been an emphasis on establishing the rigor of Pentecostal theology. One recent addition to the hermeneutic discussion is Craig S. Keener’s *Spirit Hermeneutics*, where he emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s role in biblical interpretation. The **Spirit Hermeneutic** thus recognizes that the Christian relies entirely on the Holy Spirit in interpretation because only by the Holy Spirit can a person embrace God’s intended message *with faith*.<sup>18</sup> This is not to minimize any use of the other methods mentioned

10. Gimple, Ryan and Enoch Wan, *Covenant Transformative Learning: Theory and Practice for Mission* (Western Press, 2021).

11. Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 18.

12. Sailhamer, John H. “Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 194.

13. See his contribution in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

14. See Robert Hall’s contribution in Porter and Stovell, 109.

15. See Richard Gaffin Jr.’s contribution in Porter and Stovell, 93.

16. Porter and Stovell, 112–21.

17. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024).

18. Keener, Craig S. *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 11.

above, but a refocus on the necessity of the Holy Spirit, how global Christianity can inform the Church's interpretation of its own experiences, and viewing the biblical text through one's experience with the Dynamic Trinity.

Along with these hermeneutics, there are simpler attempts to view the biblical text through various lenses, or themes. Moltmann, in his book *Theology of Hope*, combs through Scripture attempting to find the convergence of God's revelation and his eschatological promise for the sake of exciting the believer into righteous action in the present.<sup>19</sup> Other non-Evangelical theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, use a *liberation* lens. He explains that this lens is grounded upon viewing the daily lives of ordinary people as a source of theological interpretation. This interpretation focuses on "social liberation from unjust structures, personal liberation from prejudices, and spiritual liberation from sin—because in a theological analysis, the root of injustice is sin."<sup>20</sup>

Vern Poythress admits that these lenses are helpful and often contain a bit of the truth, yet he offers an Evangelical approach to glean the best of these insights without distorting the entire theologies. He suggests that we can imitate the above lenses while maintaining Evangelical presuppositions. Using *liberation* as a lens, he argues that one could learn that "God's liberation of His people does include a corporate social and political dimension, not merely the salvation of individual souls," while maintaining a critique on Marxist underpinnings.<sup>21</sup>

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TEXTUAL, ORAL AND RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS

In traditional textual hermeneutics (i.e. interpretation and application of biblical text), the use of OT in the NT (e.g. citing of OT texts in the teaching of Jesus Christ in four Gospel books and a dozen epistles by the apostles) is a well-researched subject, as illustrated in the publications below:

- D. A. Carson, G. K. Beale. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Bake 2007.
- G. K. Beale (Editor). *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. 2023
- D. A. Carson (Editor), Benjamin L. Gladd (Editor), G.K. Beale. *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation*. 2012.

The figure below is a snapshot comparing three kinds of hermeneutics in terms of "Primary Element(s)," "Particular/Participant" and "Process." Traditionally Christians employ "textual

hermeneutics" to study and interpret OT and NT text. Similarly, Muslim believers use "textual hermeneutics" to study the Koran and Mormon members interpreting the *Book of Mormon*.

#		TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS	ORAL HERMENEUTICS	RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS
A. Primary Element(s)	OTHER: Muslim/ Mormon	BIBLICAL	Non-literary revelation such as dream, vision, memorized proverb/ poem & verbally told story & parable	Participants interacting in context with resulting relationships & networks
	Koran/ Book of Mormon	Biblical text -OT & NT		
B. Particular/ Participant		Use of texts by authors & recipients & interpreters	Speaker, story & participants	Personal Beings/ beings: Trinity, angels/humans
C. P r o c e s s	sequence	(1) observing the text (2) understand text literarily (3) understand contextually (4) draw application	Listening, dialoguing & sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interaction (vertical + horizontal dimensions)</li> <li>• relationship resulted</li> <li>• network emerged</li> </ul>
	focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• biblical text</li> <li>• text in context (historical and socio-cultural)</li> </ul>	spoken word, stories, proverbs, poems, parables... verbally communicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal Being/beings: attribute/identity</li> <li>• interactive pattern</li> <li>• relational network</li> </ul>
	dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretative process</li> <li>• leading to understand</li> <li>• application for edification and growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• narrative: beings/Beings</li> <li>• relationally interactive &amp; ontologically concrete: <b>doing &amp; belonging</b></li> <li>• dynamic &amp; fluid: <b>becoming</b> (positive &amp;/or negative change)</li> </ul>	

Figure 1 - Comparison of Textual/Oral/Relational Hermeneutics

The theoretical framework of this paper is "relational interactionism" which is a framework that helps understand how socio-cultural reality is formed, preserved, and changed through dynamic, repeated, and meaningful interactions between personal Beings/beings. The process of relational interaction between personal beings/Being forms relational networks, produces perceived meaning, leads to performance of functions.

In contrast to functionalism and conflict theory, symbolic interactionism<sup>22</sup> emphasizes the micro-processes through which people construct meanings while relational interactionism emphasizes the micro- and macro-processes through which relational reality of complex networks are dynamically formed, maintained, and changed.

"Relational interactionism" comes from an interdisciplinary perspective of theology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, missiology, linguistic and communication sciences. It is a study of the way that cultures are formed, and the social world of relational networks are created through interaction between personal Being/beings at micro- (individual) and macro-

19. Moltmann, Jürgen *Theology of Hope : On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 21–22, 42.

20. Gutiérrez, Gustavo "A Hermeneutic of Hope," *The Center for Latin American Studies, Occasional Paper*, no. No. 13 (September 2012): 6–7.

21. Poythress, Vern S. *Science and Hermeneutics: Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 6, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 146–47.

22. The definition of "Symbolic interactionism" is "a micro-level theory that focuses on meanings attached to human interaction, both verbal and non-verbal, and to symbols." Lumen Learning. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com> (Retrieved Sept. 21, 2024). The key text for "symbolic interactionism" is: BN Meltzer, JW Petras, LT Reynolds, *Symbolic interactionism: Genesis, varieties and criticism*. London: Routledge 2015.

(institutional) levels as shown in the figure below.<sup>23</sup>

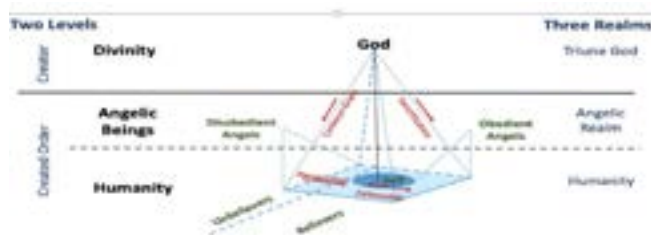


Figure 2 - Macro Perspective of "Relational Interactionism"

Dynamic Trinity describes the "*Missio Dei* of sending and being sent to bear witness"<sup>24</sup> by three persons (distinct but united in love, fellowship and glory): the Father sent the Son in Incarnation and redemption and together sent the HS to empower those being sent by the Lord Jesus (John 5:36-37; 14:16-26; 20:21).

## TRADITIONAL TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

### Textual Hermeneutics in Christianity

In general, Christians traditionally practice textual hermeneutics to study the OT and NT to discover the truths and values expressed in the Bible by following four steps:<sup>25</sup>

1. understanding the historical and cultural context<sup>26</sup>
2. understanding the literary context
3. making observations
4. drawing application

## FROM TRADITIONAL TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS TO ORAL HERMENEUTICS

Two factors for the shift to "oral hermeneutics" from time-honored "textual hermeneutics" -

1. Benefited from the work of Walter Ong, Steffen and Bjoraker which proposed the definition of "oral hermeneutics" as "A preferred way to hear, process, remember, and communicate with the human voice as the primary medium. Orality includes multiple media, such as storytelling, poetry, music, visual arts, drama, and dance."<sup>27</sup> Another helpful reference on oral hermeneutics is *Exegeting Orality: Interpreting the Inspired Words of Scripture in Light of Their Oral Traditional Origins* by Nick Acker and Paul R. Eddy. Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers. 2024.
2. Strong preference to orality (i.e. stories and symbols, visuals, and rituals by two kinds of people: (a) oral culture (i.e. approximate "70-80% of people in the world")<sup>28</sup> and (b) new generation:

"millennial and gen Z" with inclination to be more digital and experiential. Daniel Shaw in the following statement shows us how "relational interactionism" is helpful linking up oral hermeneutics with the understanding of God's revelation to man and the "inscripturation"<sup>29</sup> of inerrant biblical text of the OT and NT as divine revelation:

*"...orality is not only relevant in today's world, but was the hallmark of biblical approaches to understanding human interaction with God, and God's manifestations in and through those who honored him. Orality came before textuality and was never buried deep in biblical text...By introducing biblical characters through time and space, they demonstrate the value of establishing identity through genealogies, names, and patterns of behavior, all to help those who hear the stories see the face of God in the human context."* (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:xiv) (emphasis added)

Relational Interactionism is also helpful in the development of oral hermeneutics because "most people today are looking for relational truth or hear truth more than cognitive academic truth. Stories speak to the heart, and discussion of them created relationships." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:xxii)

The following quotations show the differences between textual hermeneutics and oral hermeneutics:

- "When textual hermeneutics interprets a story it usually talks about the story instead of telling the story to hearers, bringing it to life, and digging out the truths through questions...Oral hermeneutics, on the other hand, tends to focus on the communal oral telling, demonstration, discussion, interpretation, repetition, and application of the biblical grant narrative and all the smaller stories that compose her..." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:16)
- "In oral hermeneutics, the listeners/viewers focus strongly on characters (human and spiritual, individuals, groups, animals, [e.g. cattle, 1Sam 6:12]), considering the historical context, circumstances, conflicts, conversations, inconsistencies, choices and the consequences of said choices. Oral hermeneutics telegraphs values, morals, and theology character clarification from a context where relationships reign...Oral hermeneutics champions collectivism, volunteerism, the big picture, comprehensiveness, fulsomeness, and the progressive repetition of repeated themes." (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:17)
- "Relationally based orality takes us back in time, in this book to the beginning of the oral traditions

23. Wan & Raibley, 2022:43.

24. Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missions to International Students*. Oregon, Western Seminary Press. 2019:chapter 2.

25. Ethnos360 Bible Institute - <https://e360bible.org/blog/what-is-biblical-hermeneutics/> (Retrieved Sept. 21, 2024)

26. Onwuekwe, Agatha Ijeoma. "The Socio-Cultural Implications of African Music and Dance." *A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 171-184.

27. Steffen and Bjoraker, *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics*, 317..

28. Sills, David, *Changing World, Unchanging Mission*:

*Responding to Global Challenges*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 87.

29. "Inscripturation" is the process and product of God's revelation through inspired writers who penned the inerrant biblical text of the OT and NT. See Enoch Wan, "A Critique of Charles Kraft's Use/Misuse of Communication and Social Sciences in Biblical Interpretation and Missiological Formulation." *Global Missiology*, October 2004, [www.globalmissiology.net](http://www.globalmissiology.net)

of the Israelites ...orally through communal relationships...from the inspired, spoken word of the prophets, including Jesus (pretext)...to the entire process is acutely visible to those having the oral-aural-influenced eyes and ears of the Mediterranean ancients.” (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:294)

- “OH (Oral Hemeneutics) begins the cycle from concrete to concepts through audience analysis; it critiques characters in search of God-pleasing beliefs and behaviors for individuals, families, communities, and nations. Rather than diagrammed grammatical analysis and word studies, OH relies on the characters in the story to embody and demonstrate codes for lifestyles that evidence distinctions between godly wisdom and foolishness; Bible characters give life to cold abstract ideas. OH lays the foundation for the possibility of absorbed godly choices through character analysis (ch. 6). (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:296-297)
- “In summation, the head hermeneutic, TH, unseated the heart hermeneutic, OH, to determine all biblical meaning for all times in all genres, cultures, and countries; OH became obsolete.” (Steffen and Bjoraker 2024:300)

However, the three kinds of hermeneutics can be viewed forming a continuum from TH (Traditional Hermeneutics) to OH (Oral Hermeneutics) then RH (Relational Hermeneutics) as shown in the figure below.

TH ➡	OH ➡	RH
Bible is a code book	Bible is a case book	Bible is a guide for interacting correctly
Bible studies	Bible discussions	Bible-based interaction
Propositional logic	Narrative Logic	Relational logic
Words are central	Meaning is central	
Fragments	Whole	Process of interaction
Head Hermeneutics	Heart Hermeneutics	
Evidential apologetics	Experiential apologetics	
Critical thinking	Character thinking	
Content-centric questions	Character-centric questions	
Textual analysis	Character analysis	
Grammatical-Historical	Character-Historical	
Text-centric meaning	Character-centric meaning	Person-centric meaning (personal Beings of the Trinity and angelic/human beings)
Definitions	Demonstrations	Pattern of interaction
Rational	Relational	

Figure 3 - Continuum of Textual, Oral, and Relational Hermeneutic

As shown in the figure above, RH focuses on process and pattern of interaction between personal beings/Beings within the framework of “relational interactionism” can include TH (revelation and interpretation of sacred text) and OH (revelation and interpretation of oral-aural material such as discourse, prophetic utterance, apostolic teaching, vision and dream).

## THE “WHAT” AND “HOW” OF “RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS”

The term and concept of “relational hermeneutics” (RH) is not the author’s invention for it is pre-dated by several published works:

- Van Buskirk, Gregory P. “The ‘Relational Hermeneutics’ of Contemporary Wesleyan Moral Theology.” Academia.edu <https://www.academia.edu> > (Retrieved Sept. 15, 2024)
- Vaai, Luma Upolu. *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. University of the South Pacific & the Pacific Theological College. 2017. file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian\_Relational\_Hermeneuticss\_the\_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024)
- Smit, Guillaume Hermanus. “Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a contextual Practical Theological Approach towards a Missional Ecclesiology.” Scriptura 114 (2015:1), pp. 1-15<http://scriptura.journals.ac.za> (Retrieved Sept. 15, 2024)

The author’s proposed RH is inspired by Thiselton’s theory of biblical hermeneutics as stated below:

- “The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to bring about an active and meaningful engagement between the interpreter and text, in such a way that the interpreter’s own horizon is reshaped and enlarged. In one sense it is possible to speak, with Gadamer, of the goal of hermeneutics as a “fusion” of two horizons...The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter’s own horizons.” (Thiselton 1980:xix)
- “We first identified the underlying problem of hermeneutics as a two-sided one, involving the historical conditionedness both of the ancient text and of the modern interpreter.” (Thiselton 1980:22)

From the quotations above, we understand that Thiselton recognized two horizons in Bible interpretation: the “ancient text” of the Bible and contemporary “modern interpreter.” To him, “the goal of hermeneutics is a fusion of the two horizons.

Given the presuppositions articulated previously and with the aid of “relational interactionist paradigm,” we then can articulate the key concepts in RH as follows:

- The Holy Spirit is actively involved personally (Being) in “inspiration” and “inscripturation” of the Bible (i.e. revelatory interaction with OT prophets and NT apostles - beings).
- With the use of “relational interactionist paradigm,” we can benefit from Thiselton’s statement – “The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter’s own horizons.” God spoke in canonical books of OT and NT in His revelatory

interactions with them historically in multiple forms (e.g. vision, dream, theophany, inspiration, etc. - 2 Tim 3:16). God the HS speaks today (illumination) to contemporary interpreter of the Bible (i.e. interpretative interaction in historic way - John 15:26).

- Thiselton's statement below limited the impact of biblical texts on contemporary interpreter's horizon - "The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter's own horizons." Based on several Bible verses (such as John 17:17; Acts 21:32; 1Tim 3:16), God's Word can usher in transformational change (i.e. growth and sanctification - becoming) in contemporary interpreters relationally.

RH is developed by the integration of multiple disciplines as illustrated by two researchers introduced below. The South African theologian Guillaume Hermanus Smit made an attempt to integrate three paradigms to formulate his Missiological ecclesiology: pre-modern, modern & post-modern paradigms in his article "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a Contextual Practical Theological Approaches Towards a Missional Ecclesiology."<sup>30</sup> There are similarities and dissimilarities between his efforts of integration and this article as shown in the table below:

COMPARISON	G. H. SMIT	ENOCH WAN
Similarity	Missio Dei: "God's self-revelation as the one who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God in which the church is privileged to participate in God's Mission" <sup>31</sup> relational hermeneutics	
Difference	Integration of 3 diachronic paradigms: pre-modern, modern & post-modern Towards a missional ecclesiology	Integration of 3 types of hermeneutics: textual, oral and relational Towards a relational hermeneutics

Figure 4 – Comparison of two approaches: Guillaume Hermanus Smit and Enoch Wan

Regarding an evangelical theological perspective on Scriptures, I agree with Smit's statement below:

*"The manner in which Christians engage the world with their testimony about God's work depends greatly on the paradigm from which they read Scripture, or the way they 'let Scripture be Scripture' (Wright 2009:40) and apply these insights to their specific cultural interpretation (McKnight 2008:13). It affects ecclesiological practices, and it dictates Missional approaches. It also stems from the paradigmatic lens through which they engage in*

*Scripture reading."* (Smit 2015:2)<sup>32</sup>

While we agree on "Scripture interprets Scripture," we can interpret Scripture by using the "relational interactionist" paradigm emphasizing the pattern and process of personal beings/Beings in revelatory interaction and hermeneutical interpretation, as shown in the figure below.

	KEY	TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS		ORAL HERMENEUTICS	RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS
		OTHER	BIBLICAL		
REVELATION	Personal Beings/ beings	- Allah of Islam revealed to Mohamad the Koran in Arabic	- the Bible is <b>inspired</b> ("God breathed") <sup>33</sup> - human writers of OT & NT books "penned" His inerrant word of the Bible	non-literary revelation such as dream, vision, memorized proverb/ poem & verbally told story by Triune God, prophets, apostles & angels ( <b>inspiration</b> )	Participants (Triune God, angelic & human beings) of revelatory interaction within specific historical & socio-cultural context <sup>34</sup> with resulting relationships & emerging network
	Process	- Moroni to Joseph Smith			
	Product/ Consequence				
INTERPRETATION	Personal Beings/ beings	- Interpreting the Koran (Qur'an) <sup>35</sup> - Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. -Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are to read for personal understanding & can have spiritual experience	" <b>Inscriptured</b> " biblical text within specific historical & socio-cultural contexts	By the <b>illumination</b> of the HS, teacher/ trainer verbally communicates biblical truth through non-literary forms (i.e. spoken word, storing, proverbs, parables, story/ discourse) to recipients when talk & listen, dialogue & share with one and other at personal and/ or communal levels	Interpreting selected items (such as biblical text, oral materials) focusing on the patterned interaction of personal being/Beings of multi-level (e.g. micro-/ macro-) in multi-contextual (i.e. realms of existence within the Trinity or within the created order) and various circumstances (i.e. synchronically or diachronically) to ascertain understanding & narrating the process & pattern of interaction between Beings / beings, focusing on pattern of interaction in terms of <b>doing &amp; belonging</b>
	Process		Aided by <b>illumination</b> of HS in interpretive process in 4 steps: 1. observing the text 2. understand text literally 3 understand in contexts: historical & socio-cultural 4. draw application for edification /growth		
	Product/ Consequence			Interpretation led to understand and application for edification & growth	Dynamic interaction leading to positive &/ or negative change ( <b>becoming</b> )

Figure 5–Revelation & Interpretation: Textual/Oral/Relational Hermeneutics

30. Smit, Guillaume Hermanus. "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a Contextual Practical Theological Approach towards a Missional Ecclesiology." *Scriptura* 114 (2015:1), pp. 1-15 <http://scriptura.journals.ac.za> (Retrieved Sept. 15, 2024)

31. Smit, Guillaume Hermanus. "Living in Three Worlds: A Relational Hermeneutics for the Development of a Contextual Practical Theological Approaches Towards A Missional Ecclesiology." *Scriptura* 114 (2015:1)

32. Smit 2015:2 <https://scielo.org.za/pdf/scriptur/v114/17.pdf> (retrieved Sept. 17, 2024)

33. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

34. Onwuekwe, Agatha Ijeoma. "The Socio-Cultural Implications of African Music and Dance." *A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 171-184.

35. Interpreting the Koran contextually: Each verse must be understood in light of the Qur'an itself & not in contradiction with the life of Prophet Mohamad and the Companions of the Prophet.

By using the “relational interactionist” paradigm, the figure below shows God’s “revelatory interaction” (inspiration and “**inscripturation**” of the Bible) and interpreter’s “hermeneutical interaction” (i.e. aided by the **illumination** of the HS and achieved by interpreter’s efforts in studying and understanding the Bible relationally). God’s “revelatory interaction” and the interpreter’s “hermeneutical interpretation” are summarized in the figure below which shows the relationship between the two.

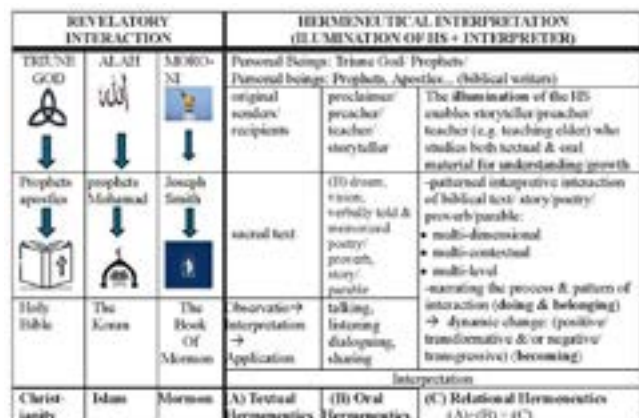


Figure 6 – Revelatory Interaction and Hermeneutical Interpretation

As shown on the left column in the figure above, there is the similar pattern of “revelatory interaction” in the case of the Holy Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon.<sup>36</sup> On the right column there is similar pattern of “hermeneutical interpretation” as found in:

- Textual hermeneutics of the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon in similar interactive pattern.
- Oral hermeneutics involves dream and vision: story and prophecy, proverbs and poetry... verbally told and memorized by people of orality and interpreted and communicated verbally by storyteller/teacher/preacher.
- Relational hermeneutics<sup>37</sup>

In the figure above, the illumination of the HS enables him/her (i.e. storyteller/preacher/teacher) who studies both textual & oral material for understanding/growth, i.e. RH = TH + OH

From the figure above, the emphasis of RH is refocusing towards pattern and process of the social relationship and social networks (belonging) formed by personal interactions between personal Beings/beings in revelatory interaction and interpretive

interaction, leading to “change” (becoming) either positively (“transformative change”) or negatively (transgressive change.” (See Figure 23 below and the discussion on “the temptation of Jesus”)

In summary:

- (C) Relational hermeneutics integrates (A) and (B) in the patterned interpretive interaction
- As a formula: (C) = (A) + (B)  
i.e. relational hermeneutics can integrate textual and oral hermeneutics by interpreting material both in textual form and oral form (story/poetry/proverb/ parable of in conversation, dialogue and discourse):
  - multi-dimensional (vertical &/or horizontal)
  - multi-contextual (the realms of Triune God, angel and man)
  - multi-level (micro-/macro-, personal &/or group)

RH is a narrative of the process and pattern of interaction (**doing & belonging**) with dynamic change (**becoming**): either positive (transformative) or negative (transgressive change)

“**Perichoresis**” (from Greek: περιχώρησις *perikhōrēsis*, “rotation”) is a narrative term referring to the intimate relationship of the three persons of the Triune God internally. Selected verses from the Gospel of John are listed below to show the relational interaction of “dynamic Trinity” with “favored humanity” -

- “Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:19-20)
- “But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.” (John 15:26)
- “That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21)

The divine grace of bringing Christians into “the relationship of *perichoresis* of the Trinity” is God’s gift (from the Father, through the Son’s Incarnation and in the gift of the Holy Spirit of truth) to favored humanity - with pattern and process of relational interactions vertically and horizontally.

## EXAMPLES OF RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS

### Narrative Accounts by Luke in the Gospel and Acts as Practiced by the Resurrected Lord and the Apostle Peter at Pentecost

Luke provided narrative accounts of the practice of relational hermeneutics as precedents:

- “on the road to Emmaus” by Jesus (Luke 24:13-35) and at Pentecost by the apostle Peter (Acts 2: 14-36) at Pentecost. The resurrected Lord met and taught the two disciples by relationally

36. Mormon: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

37. The definition and conception of “relational hermeneutics” are used in two publications are totally different from this article:

• Nelson, Eric S. “Confucian Relational Hermeneutics, the Emotions, and Ethical Life.” From: Paul Fairfield and Saulius Genusas, *Relational Hermeneutics: Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Bloomsbury, 2018) file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian\_Relational\_Hermeneuticss\_the\_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024)

• Luma Upolu Vaai, *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. University of the South Pacific & the Pacific Theological College. 2017. file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian\_Relational\_Hermeneuticss\_the\_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024). University of the South Pacific & the Pacific Theological College. 2017 file:///Users/enochwan/Downloads/Confucian\_Relational\_Hermeneuticss\_the\_Em-1.pdf (retrieved Sept. 12, 2024)

interpreting the OT, applying the Scriptures to Himself (24:25-27) for their understanding (“opened the Scriptures to us” - v.32).

- At Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached to the crowd by interpreting relationally OT passages (from Joel and Psalm) and witnessing for the resurrected Christ (Acts 2:14-36, 40) with impactful effectiveness and fruitful outcomes (Act 2:27-47).

### Examples of Relational Hermeneutics

Relational hermeneutics was demonstrated as useful and fruitful in the previously published works as listed below:

- Enoch Wan, “A Missio-Relational Reading of Romans.” *Occasional Bulletin*, Winter, Vol. 23, No. 1. 2010:1-8.
- Enoch Wan & Timothy Hanuk (pseudonym), “Bible Education Through Tajik Orality.” In **Oral Leadership and Discipleship**. In Enoch Wan and John Ferch. Western Academic Publishers 2024:Chapter 9.

Examples of relational hermeneutics are organized below in two sections: (a) the study of Romans, and (b) ROPE = “Relational Oral Poetic Education” in Tajik orality. Readers are recommended to review sermon outlines for narrative preaching, based on relational hermeneutics, in Appendix 1).

### Missio-relational Reading of the Epistle to the Romans

Unlike previous works on Romans by other commentators, the author in the 2010 article<sup>38</sup> used “relational hermeneutics” approach as illustrated in the figures below.

In contrast to popular way of thematic outline of Romans, the following two figures show an alternative view relationally:

Outline	Relationship	Scope
Ch. 1:11	the gospel-effected relationship (grace: needed & made available to all vertically)	general (1-8) universality of the gospel general (9-11) Jews and Gentiles (grace available to all)
Cs. 12-16	the gospel-transformed individuals in community (grace: received vertically is to be lived out in “relational reality” horizontally)	general (12:1-21; 13:8-14) Specific • towards government (13:1-7) • the weak and the strong (14:1-15:13) - the “gospel messenger” Paul and the church in Rome (15:14-34) for “partnership in the gospel” - greetings to the saints of the church in Rome for “partnership in the gospel” (16)

Figure 7 – Outlining Romans in terms of Vertical and Horizontal Relationships (Wan 2010:2)

text	theme	who
		<b>Jews &amp; Gentiles</b>
1-8	The world needs the gospel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both can be saved by the Gospel (1:16-17)</li> <li>• Both are sinners in need of grace: Gentiles (1:8-32) and the Jews (2:1-3; 8)</li> <li>• Both can be saved through justification by faith (3:21-4:26)</li> </ul>

38. Enoch Wan, “A Missio-Relational Reading of Romans.”

9-11	To Jews first then Gentiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both are parts of God’s plan (9-11)</li> </ul>
		<b>Christians</b>
12	Gospel-effected changes collectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All are to present their bodies as living sacrifice and render reasonable service to God (12:1)</li> <li>• All not to be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of mind and seeking God’s will (12:2)</li> <li>• All are to stay away from sense gratification (13:13)</li> </ul>
13	Gospel-effected relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All are debtors to those have not heard the gospel (1:14)</li> <li>• All humble and empathetic an live peacefully with all (12:14-18)</li> <li>• All good and submissive citizens (13:1-7)</li> </ul>
14-15	Gospel-effected community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love another (12:9-13; 13:8-10)</li> <li>• Be sensitive to one another (14:1-8)</li> <li>• Build up one another (15:1-3)16</li> </ul>
16	Greetings --- 30+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership for the gospel sought by Paul prior to his visit to Rome</li> </ul>

Figure 8 - Outlying the Epistle to Romans: Horizontal Interaction (Wan 2010:1)

In this new way of Missio-relational reading of Romans, the epistle is regarded as an occasional letter by Paul the Missionary who, though he desired to visit the church in Rome, had not been able to do so. His strong desire was to rally the saints in Rome to become Gospel partners in evangelizing the unreached western part of the Roman empire, all the way to Spain. Viewed from this historical background and the Mission passion of Paul, we then can use “Mission” and “Gospel” as the theme to outline Romans in a way different from doctrinal focus of “justification by faith.”

Text	Theme	Elements of Christian Missions
1:1-17	Messenger of the gospel: i.e. Paul and others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul was called “to be and apostle”</li> <li>• Position: “seperated unto the gospel of God” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not out of private wished -- “We have received grace and apostleship</li> <li>- Responsibility: “among all nations, for his name” (1-5), also “ye also called of Jesus Christ” (1:6) in Rime</li> </ul> </li> <li>Called to be :the apostle of the Gentiles” (11:13)</li> <li>Eagerly longing for Israel his kinsmen to be saved (9:1-3, 10:1)</li> </ul>
1:18- Ch. 8	Message of missions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sinful Gentiles (1:18-32) &amp; Jews in need of the gospel (2)</li> <li>- God’s faithfulness &amp; man’s neediness (3:1-20)</li> <li>- God’s righteousness manifested: Justification by faith (3:21-5:21)</li> <li>- God’d righteous manifested, leading to struggle &amp; victory (6:8)</li> </ul>
Ch. 9-11	Missional sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “through the in-gathering of the nations that God is keeing his promise to Israel” (Wright 2006:528)</li> </ul>
Ch. 15	Paul’s mission service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mission principle: “Not where Christ was named” (15:20), “But now having no more place in these parts [Corinth]” (15:23)</li> <li>- Paul’s priestly service: the obedience of the nationals as sacrifice (15:16-18)</li> </ul>
15:14-33	Missionary strategy (Rome the capital)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer before arrival (1:8-10)</li> <li>• Visitation after Arrival (1:11-13)</li> <li>• Taking Rome as a base to reach out westward (Spain) (15: 23-28)</li> </ul>
Ch. 16	Greetings to partners of the gospel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such as Priscilla and Aquila</li> <li>• The house churches (Rom 16:5, 14-15)</li> </ul>

Figure 9 - Outline of Romans: “Mission” as the Theme of “Relational interactionism

Gospel & Grace	Relational Gospel		
	Who	How	Text
Gospel and Grace	Apostle Paul	set apart for the gospel	15
	Christians in Rome	• called of Jesus Christ • beloved of God, called to be saints	1:6 1:7
	From God	• Gospel truth • All mankind are in need of it from God • God's Righteousness manifested • Salvation: God's grace given to all who believe	1:18-3:20 3:21-5:6:8
		United with the Lord	6:1-8:4
	Christians	Led by the Spirit	8
	Jews & Gentiles	Covenant-keeping God bringing mankind to Him and together	9-11
Grace →	Gospel-effected individuals are to live in grace horizontally		12-16

Figure 10 - Outline of Romans: "Gospel" as the theme for Vertical Interaction between God and His People :(Wan 2010:6)

What God does for people	What Persons Experience as a Result
"He was born a descendant of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death" (1:3-4)	"Through him God gave...the privilege of being an apostle" (1:5)
"Christ died for us" (5:8)	"We are now put right with God...who has now made us God's friends" (5:9, 11)
Holy Spirit...God's special gift of new life (5:5) Holy Spirit helps--inner direction of the mind	"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" by the H.S. (5:5) Brought in line with God's will (7:23; 11:34; 1Cor. 2:13)
"Christ was raised from death" (6:4)	"So also we might live a new life" (6:4)
"What the law could not do...God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like man's sinful nature" (8:3)	"The law of the spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2)
"the Spirit of God...Christ from death..." (8:11) <b>Chrismata</b> , gift from God (12:3; 1 Cor. 12:28)	"Lives in you" (8:11) <b>Diakonia</b> , to serve & live in harmony (12:5-18)

Figure 11 - Outline of Romans: Relational Gospel in Romans with Dual-directional Interaction (Wan 2010:4)

Text	Paul the Missionary	The Church in Rome
1:1-17	Repeatedly desired but failed to pay visit; now determined	"beloved of God, called to be saints" (1:7) "that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (1"8) "I long to see you...impart unto you some spiritual gift...comforted together...mutual faith..." (1:11-12)
15:14-33	With "a firm and settled conviction, a confident certainty" (Cranfield 1979:441)	"A mature church of genuine believers in Christ" (Strauss 2003:459) "demonstrated their faith in Christ by their relationships and their firm grasp of the truth of the gospel" (Strausse 2003:459) Anticipated fellowship with them, then being sent by them westward to Spain (15:22-24)
Ch. 16	Greetings & benediction from missionary Paul who desired partnership	Personal greetings of 30+ to individual and house churches; Benediction: "to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and preaching of Jesus Christ" (16:25)

Figure 12 - Outline of Romans: Horizontal Interaction between Apostle Paul and the Church in Rome (Wan 2010:5)

With the help of "relational interaction" paradigm, Romans can be outlined in a new way as shown in the figure below.

Christ	Paul	Text
The Lord	An Apostle	1:1
The Gospel	Because of and for the Gospel	1:1
Source of Grace	Recipient of Grace	1:5
Justifier	Justified	3:26
Righteousness	Made Righteous	3:24
Son of God	Gospel Servant	1:9
Example	Follower	8:29-30

Figure 13 - Outline of Romans: "Gospel" as the theme for Vertical Interaction between Christ and Apostle Paul (Wan 2010:6)

In view of the Trinity, chapter 8 can be outlined in terms of the pattern and process of relational interaction as shown in the figures below.

The Father	The Son	The Holy Spirit
God sending his own Son (3) heirs of God (17) the glorious liberty of the children of God (21) who are the called according to his purpose (28) predestinated...called...justified...glorified (30,33) God be for us, who can be against us (31) separated not his own Son...delivered him up for us...freely give us all things (32) nothing shall separate us from the love of God (39)	No condemnation (1) free from the law of sin and death (2) Christ in you: life & righteousness (10) joint-heirs with Christ (17) be conformed to the image of his Son (29) be the firstborn among many brethren (29) Christ died...risen again...at the right hand of God...intercession for us (34) Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ (35) more than conquerors through him that loved us (37) the love of God...in Christ Jesus our Lord (39)	Mind things after the Spirit (5) the Spirit of God dwell in you (9) quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you (11) through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body (13) Spirit of adoption: cry Abba Father (15) bears witness...children of God (16) have the first fruits of the spirit (23) Spirit helps our infirmities (26) makes intercession for the saints (27)

Figure 14 - The Gospel: Vertical Interaction - God and Christians in Romans 8 (Wan 2010:6)

Triune God	Relation in Action
The Father: giving the Son	"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all..."
The Son giving himself	"...in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6)
The Holy Spirit giving His presence	"...if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you..." (8:9)

Figure 15 - Pattern of the "Self-giving Love" of the Triune God (Wan 2010:7)

The following figures show the pattern and process of relational interaction in terms of the "cross" and "Christ" from macro perspective:

Key	Practice
Providence	God's self-sacrificed love at the cross (3:21-21)
Process	Acceptance of sinners (6-7)
Result	Salvation, reconciliation and glorification (8-11)

Figure 16 - The Cross: God-man Vertical-Interaction (Wan 2010:7)

Key	Practice	Pricilla & Aquila
Motive	Self-giving love	"Who have for my life laid down their own necks" (16:4)
Process	Life-risking	Cf. Acts 18:1-11
Result	The life of the apostle to the Gentiles spared and the Gentile churches ought to be grateful to them	"not only I am thankful but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (16:4)

Figure 17 - The Case of Priscilla and Aquila (Wan 2010:7)

Christ	Christian	Text
The Savior	Saved by Gospel	1:16-17
Source of Grace	Recipient of Grace	1:5
Justifier	Justified	3:26
Righteousness	Made Righteous	3:24
Son of God	Gospel Servant	1:9
Example	Follower	8:29-30
The Word of Christ	Faith	10:17
Sacrificial death	Living sacrifice	5:17; 8 <sup>32</sup> ; 12:1
Died for sin	Dead to sin	6:11
Christ --the head	Members of the body ("in union")	12:5

Figure 18 - Vertical Interaction: Christ and Christians (Wan 2010:7)

The three figures below show the pattern of horizontal relational interaction.

Key	Practice	Reference
Motive	Self-giving love	"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren my kindsmen according to the flesh" 9:3
Process	Acceptance of sinners	"That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" 9:2
Result	Salvation and reconciliation	"and not only (so), but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (5:11)

Figure 19 - Horizontal Interaction Between Paul and His Kinsmen (Wan 2010:7)

	Vertical	Horizontal
↓	be transformed by the renewing of your mind (2)	the grace given unto Paul (3)
	prove what is...good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (2)	measure of faith from God (3)
↑	present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God (1)	(Christ--the head) (4,5)
		grace given & proportion of faith (6)

Figure 20 - Horizontal Relationship of Gospel-affected Individuals

Text	Sub-theme	Target Group
1-8	All are in need of the "gospel"	- Saved by the power of the Gospel (1:16-17) - All are sinners in need of the Gospel: Gentiles (1:18-32) & Jews (2:1-3:8) - All can be justified by God (3:21-4:25) - All are to "love" as debtors (8:12)
9-11	Sequence of the gospel: Jews 1st then gentiles	- Both are in God's plan of salvation (9-11)
12	Gospel-transformed individuals in community	- Apart from the world (12:2) - Governed by "love" (12:9)

13	Gospel-effected individuals are to submit to civil authority	- Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers (13:1) - Wherefore ye must needs be subject (13:4-5)
14-15	Gospel-effected individuals to fellow believers are to love & share	- Be sensitive to one another (14:1-6; 15:1-2) - Accept on another (16:7) - "grace" received are to be shared (15:27)

Figure 21 - The Gospel-transformed Individuals (Faith Community) of Romans 12:1-8

## Relational Interpretation of Poetical Books of Psalms and Proverbs for the Practice of Rope ("Relational Oral Poetic Education") in the Context of Tajik Orality<sup>39</sup>

Ethnographic description of Tajik orality is provided in the article: "Enoch Wan & Timothy Hanuk (pseudonym), "Bible Education Through Tajik Orality." In this section, we follow "andragogical theory" of adult learning and slightly adapt the widely used and respected "Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)" championed by David Kolb.<sup>40</sup> Kolb's four learning modes are Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) on a vertical continuum of perception, while Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE) on a horizontal continuum of processing. (1984:41). He shows learning as the process and pattern of the cycle of these learning modes.

Below is the practice of relational hermeneutics on texts from two poetic books of the OT and the practice of intercultural education of ROPE are explained briefly.

### Selected Texts from Psalms 48 and Proverbs 24:30-34

Psalms 48:1-8 coincides with "concrete experience" (CE). The attention is given to feeling whereby the Poet uses metaphor to enhance the mood. He uses the contrasting emotions of seeing the beauty of Zion with the terror of the enemies.

- Psalm 48:9 brings to light relational orality. Notice the communal response of thinking together on God's lovingkindness as displayed in Him being in the midst of His temple. This promotes the discussing of the experience of seeing God's presence.
- Psalm 48:10-11 prods the listener to think, "abstract conceptualization" (AC). There is an appeal to logic here: as is... so is. Notice also the appeal to God's attributes to help understand the situation of why praise is fitting in considering the presence of God as well as the enemies.
- Psalm 48:12-14 appeals to AE. This encourages a return to the first few verses in the Psalm as one participates again in experiencing the grandeur of God's presence in Zion. However, this time the goal is to apply those experiences through interacting with the next generation.

The "ROPE" encircling the "experiential learning theory" (ELT) model shows as shown in the figure

39. Wan and Hanuk. 2024.

40. vid A Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 41.

below. In doing this we show how ROPE incorporates the four learning modes.

As Tajiks practice poetry for “ta’lim,” for example, they engage in CE. This is both relational and situational. Practicing poems happens in a wide range of situations. Childhood learning lays the foundation of memorized poems. Adult learning often reaches into that memorized database to engage in the social activity of a situational issue or topic being experienced in the moment. Learners, both listeners and speakers, actively engage in concrete experiences through oral art.

When Tajiks practice poetry for “fikri Chikur,” for example, they are thinking and talking about meaning with others in community, RO. The oral poetry enables one to bridge the gap of one’s understanding and experiences, as together listeners and speakers involve themselves in poetry. This also touches on AC as ideas or concepts are brought into the process, often through metaphor, to help understand situational circumstances or problems. Poetry is used situational, bringing a form of logic into the life experience.

For a second example, look at the proposition of ‘Cyclical’ pattern. Proverbs 14:5 with Proverbs 19:5 is an example of the cyclical nature of proverbial teaching. Both passages say the same thing - a false witness is one who is a liar. One proverb says a very similar thing to another. It is repetitive. Psalm 78 tells a condensed story of narrative passages in the Old Testament but does it in poetry. This is a retelling of story showing us a cyclical nature to teaching. ROPE reveals repetitive characteristics. Not only in memorizing, but in the constant quoting of learned poems in a variety of situations. We show these brief examples to show confluence with Bible propositions in learning with Tajik ROPE. The figure below is a summary of the outcome of practicing relational hermeneutics on selected texts of poetical books.

Poem Metrics	Proverbs e.g.	Psalm e.g.	Rope
Poetic	1:5-6	78:1, 2	Uses Poetry
Orientation present to future	2:3-5	78:5, 6	Adult perspective on Child Edu.
Emotive	14:13	78:18-21	<i>Foridan</i>
Metaphorical	6:20-23	78:13, 15, 16..	Nature of poetry
Meditative	24:32	78:8	<i>Fikri chikur</i>
Experiential	23:29-35	78:3	Situational
Traditional	4:3-4	78:2, 4	Historic, <i>Tojik</i>
Relational	2:1-22	78:1, 4	Communal
Onstructive	15:32	78:1, 7	<i>Ta’lim</i>
Cynical	14:5 with 19:5	78:6, 7 78:8-72 poetic stroy	Repetitive
Spiritual	1:6-7	78:4	Faith incorporated

**Figure 22 - Pedagogical Confluence: Psalm/Proverbs learning propositions with ROPE**

The figure below shows the education strategy for Bible education of poetic texts to Tajik oral learners.

Strategy Criteria	Relational Orally Poetic Bible Education Strategy
Theoretical/Theological	Relational Realism
Framework	Relational Interactionism
Goal	Relational Transformational Change (Being, Belonging, Becoming)
Process	Relational Transformational Growth: God's Person→God's Scripture, God's People - Oral use of poetic forms of Scripture
Contextual Relevance	Cultural Patterns -ROPE
Pedagogical Confluence	ROPE, Kolb adapted model, Psalm/Prov. Edu. method
Procedures & Activities	Resource Development, Transformational Gatherings, Situational Oral Bible Poetry, Encouragement & Challenge

**Figure 23 - Relational Oral Poetic Bible Education Strategy for Tajik Learners**

## USING RH CORRECTLY OR INCORRECTLY?

In the narrative of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1: 12-13; Lk 4:1-13), Jesus Christ used RH when citing/interpreting OT passages three times: (1) “it is written” (Mt 4:4); (2) “it is also written” (Mt 4:7); (3) “For it is also written (Mt 4:10). Satan cited/interpreted an OT passage once.

Pattern	Process	Interacting Person		Insight re: RH
		Jesus	Satan	
Narrative dialogue	1. →	Deut. 8:3	• Self-gratifying • Proof of sonship	• Correctly by JC - 3 times
	2. →	Deut. 6:16	Ps. 91:11-2	
	3. →	Deut. 6:13; 10-20	taking shortcuts & deviating from God's plan	• Incorrectly by Satan - once

**Figure 24 - The Temptation of Jesus: Personal Interaction**

In the narrative dialogue, the relational posture of Jesus Christ can be observed:

1. Resisted basic need for food after fasting for 40 days and was dependent on God’s word.
2. Reisted self-serving vanity and submitted to the Father’s will.
3. Resisted the sin of idolatry and kept fidelity serving the Father only.

From the above analysis, we can see that biblical interpretation is not an objective exercise (i.e. scientific and non-personal), there is a strong and important relational dimension that is ignored by those who insisted biblical interpretation to be merely an objective act, a cognitive exercise, and/or scientific endeavor.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper the “what” and “how” of RH are introduced after a brief overview and comparison of TH and OH. Though there are clear differences between TH, OH and RH, methodologically speaking, they form a continuum. While the major concerns of “relational interactionism” are “who” (personal beings/Beings) and “how” (pattern and process of

relational interaction) of personal beings/Beings, the scope of this paper is limited to pattern and process of “revelatory interaction” of God in the Bible and “interpretative interaction” of human beings of the Scriptures.

In this paper, explanation is provided to report the process of shift from the time-honored traditional TH to the recently emerged OH, and the proposed RH. This paper shows the three approaches as a continuum and RH is an approach that can integrate TH and OH with the use of “relational interactionist paradigm.” In revelatory interaction, the Triune God is narratively described as dynamic in “inspiration” of the Scriptures, revealing Himself and His will (see figures 4 and 5) to “favored humanity” (see figures 7 to 17).

In summary format, the WHAT. HOW and SO WHAT of RH are listed in three bullet points below:

- “**What?**” - RH is a lens to understand and interpret Scriptures by paying specific attention to the revelatory interaction between “dynamic Trinity” in “inspiration” (2Tim 3:16) and “favored humanity” relationally interpreting the Scriptures with the divine aid of the HS (“illumination” - Jn 14:16-17, 26; 16:13-15) leading to transformational change of salvation and sanctification.
- “**How?**” - With the use of relational dynamic view of Scriptures and interpretation, RH is an attempt to look for actions and effects within the dynamic Trinity and how they specifically interact with “favored humanity” within the created order through actions and dispositions.” (like Figure 18)

“**So-what?**” - RH synthesizes TH and OH with the work of the Holy Spirit in illumination (understanding) and sanctification (change/**becoming**) through the Word of God. By applying RH, favored humanity is able to **belong** and act (**doing**) in accordance with his relationship with God within the created order. This continual interaction of recalling and retelling God’s truth, in concert with the HS’s work within the person, transforms them. This becoming is influenced by the Christian’s obedience (i.e. they grow more into the image of Christ) or resistance (i.e. they deviant and deterioration).

With the use of the theoretical framework of “relational interactionism,” RH is shown to be able to integrate TH and OH. This paper included examples of using RH to study selected texts from Romans and the practice of ROPE in the cultural context of “Tijik orality.” The analysis of the narrative accounts of temptation of Jesus and the road to Emmaus provided insights into the proper use of RH.

## APPENDIX 1 - SAMPLES OF SERMON OUTLINE ON BIBLICAL TEXTS

1. Outlines showing “how” to practice “relational hermeneutics” Psalm 23: Christian life  
Unmerited/favored relationship with the Shepherd:
  - Beings: Shepherd (theme)/Jehovah (X2:1,6)/

Recipient (“I” - X16)

- Provision by the Shepherd, therefore, “no want” (2-3); drink, food & rest (2); leading and restoration (3)
  - Presence of the Shepherd (4-5): fear no evil, comfort... enemies
  - Promise of the Shepherd (6): time & place
2. The Lord’s priestly prayer in John 17
    - pattern and process of relational interaction between the Father and the Son who interceded for the disciples and those who believed because of the ministry of the apostles.
  3. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission (Mt 22:37-39; Acts 1:8)
    - vertical love from God impacts horizontal love for our neighbor
    - all authority has been given to the Son by the Father, thus He sent them out with the promise of the empowerment and presence of the H.S.
  4. The model group prayer (the Lord’s Prayers, Mt 6:9-15)
    - it begins with prayer to the Father vertically on three counts (the Father’s name, kingdom and will), and end with exhorting Him in terms of three aspects (Kingdom, power and glory).
    - Four “petitions” related to forgiveness vertically and horizontally.
  5. John 3:16 & 1John 3:16
    - Vertical interaction: God the Father sent the Son down, with the promise of “life from above” (vertically downward) to those who believe in Him (vertically upward). (John 3:16)
    - Vertical + horizontal interactions: love from above is evidenced by Christ laying down his life for us, then we are obligated to lay down our lives for the brothers horizontally. (1John 3:16)

### 6. The code for family (Eph 5:21-6:9)<sup>41</sup>

Jesus Christ’s lordship over members of the Christian household is the governing principle (5:21). “Out of reverence” to the lordship of Christ (vertically), sets of horizontal relationships (husband-wife, 5:22-33; parents-children, 6:1-4; master-servant, 6:5-9) are subjugated to Him vertically and submit to one another horizontally.

### Jn 15:1-8: **Being, Doing and Becoming**<sup>42</sup>

- A. Who? (1-2, 5) The Vine — Jesus Christ; Gardener — the Father; the branches — Christians.
- B. How to bear fruit? (doing for Him)
  - by Being in Him (x2 = 4,5) OR Being in Him → **doing** for Him

41. Enoch Wan, *Question and Answer of Christian Marriage*. (in Chinese) CA: Overseas Campus Ministry Publisher. 2000.

42. For the “transformational paradigm” of being, belonging and become, see recent publications:

• Enoch Wan and Jon Raibley. *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*. (Second Edition). Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2022.

• Enoch Wan, Mark Hedinger, et al. *Transformational Growth: Intercultural Leadership/Discipleship/Mentorship*. Oregon: Western Academic Publishers. 2023.

C. How to bear more fruit? (**becoming** by Him-#1)  
be pruned by the Father (1-2)

- Bearing much fruit (8) (doing)→glorifying the Father & proof of being a disciple
- Separated from the vine (6)→withers, thrown away; picked up & thrown into the fire and burned.

D. Abide in Him and His Words abide in us (**being**)  
(7) →whatever you ask, shall be done unto you  
(**becoming**-#2)

## 8. Doxology to our Triune God (Eph 1:1-14)

Theme of book: "blessings" (3) & riches of grace (7),  
that he lavished on us (8)

Outline: Praise to Triune God for blessings (1:1-14)

### A. FATHER (4-6)

- He chose (4) & in love predestined us for sonship...pleasure & will(5)
- He made known the mystery... purposed in Christ (9) (to the praise of his glorious grace - 6)

### B. SON

- Redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins(7)
- Every spiritual blessing in Christ(3)
- He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will(11) (for the praise of his glory - 12)

### C. HOLY SPIRIT

- Heard→believed→saved (13)
- Marked in Him with a seal, the promised HS (13-14)
- Deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption...possession(14) (to the praise of his glory - 14)

## 9. Glory to God & The Gospel of Peace (Luke 2:10-14; Eph 1:3-14; 12:11-22)

A. "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14) / -  
Eph 1:3-14 the doxology to the Trinity

WHO	WHAT & HOW	WHAT THEN
1. Father (4-6)	• He chose (4) & in love predestined us for sonship... pleasure & will (5) • He made known,,, purposed in Christ (9)	(6)
2. Son (7-12)	• Redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins (7) • Every spiritual blessing in Christ (3) • He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will (11)	(12) "to the praise of his glory" x 3 times
3. Holy Spirit (12-14)	• Heard→believed→saved (13) • Marked in Him with a seal, the promised HS (13-14) • Deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption... possession (14)	(14)

Figure 25 - The Doxology to the Trinity

B. "and on earth peace, good will toward men" -  
the Gospel of Peace (Eph 2:11-22)  
What is the Gospel of Peace? Shalom with God,  
& among Jews & gentile (2:15, 18)

WHO	HOW	WHAT THEN
1. God & sinners (13)	• but now in Christ Jesus... by the blood of Christ (13) • have access to the Father by one Spirit (18)	• have been brought near (13) • <i>Shalom</i> with God (16)
2. Jews & gentiles (14)	• by the blood of Christ who is our <i>Shalom</i> (13-14) • destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (14) • built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined • together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (20-21)	• A new "man" (15) fellow citizens with God's people & members of his household (19-20) • new holy temple (20-21) one new humanity out of the two, thus making <i>Shalom</i> (15)

Figure 26 - *Shalom* with God, and among Jews and Gentile

## 10. Intergenerational Widows Enjoyed Blessings from Above (Ruth 4:13-22)

### Outline of Book of Ruth

- In-laws: through thick & thin in Moab (1)
- Ruth being blessed in Bethlehem (2)
- Gentile widow: conformed to Mosaic law (3-4:1-12)
- Blessed widows in sacred history (4:13-22)

### Outline of Ruth 4:13-22

#### Introduction: Ps 103:2

- Naomi - an older widow being blessed
  - Naomi - the complaining widow (1:13, 20-21)
  - Famine & widowhood, with the companion of Ruth who loved Naomi (1:15-18; 2:23; 4:16)
  - No need to starve & experienced provision (2:17-23; 3:17)
  - "Mara" (bitter)→Naomi(sweet): Ruth's new family & grandson Obed (1:20; 3:1; 4:13-22)
- Ruth - the younger widow being blessed
  - Gentile lady from Moab, but being blessed (X7: 1:22; 2:2,6,10,21; 4:5,10)
  - "As it turned out" x2 (2:3; 4:1)
- Blessed widows of two generations in sacred history
  - Lost husband with no descendant (1:1-5)
  - In history of Israel (4:14-22; Mt 1:1) & redemption history of mankind (Mt 1:5-6)
  - The genealogy of Jesus Christ (Mt 1:1,5)

## 11. Relational Blessings from God in 1Peter

Key verse: (5:12); References: 1Peter 1:1-2, 10-13; 4:9-10; 5:5, 12-14

Grace & Gifts	General Blessings	Specific Blessings (SB) from		
		Father	Son	HS
General Blessings (GB)		Unmerited yet given (1:2; 10; 5:5);/ "use whatever gifts he has received to serve others" & "faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (4:9-10)/ "...true grace of God. Stand fast in it" (5:12)		
Specific Blessings (SB)	X	- Chosen: foreknowledge of the Father (1:2) - a chosen people (2:9)	(a) redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1:18); (b) He Himself bore our sins (2:23-24)	Sanctifying work of the Spirit (1:2)
	X	"Father... Lord Jesus... has given us new birth... resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:3)		Preached... Gospel by HS (1:12)

Figure 27 - Blessings from Triune God

- General Blessings (GB): Blessings to God's own collectively (1:2; 5:5, 12)
- Specific Blessings (SB): Blessings from Triune God specifically

#### A. HS and revelation

- B. 1:17 "...the glorious Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (**becoming**)
- C. 3:5-6 "...it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's apostles and prophets (**being**)...through the Gospel the gentiles are heirs together (belonging) with Israel, members together of one body (belonging), and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus."
- D. HS - given by the Father (1:17)
- E. Seal: "with a seal, the promised HS" (1:13) (NT) =/= "take not your HS from me" (Ps 51:11) (OT)
- F. "...a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (being) until the redemption of those who are God's possession (belonging) - to the praise of His glory (becoming)" (1:14)
- G. Do not grieve the HS of God with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption (becoming). (4:30)
- H. Temple of the HS: who & how? (2:20-21)
- I. Revelation: "...the administration of God's grace...it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." (2:2-5)
- J. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (4:30)
- K. "...Be filled with the Spirit" (5:18)

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