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Andrew Murray Jr and the practice of spiritual reading

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Abstract

In the writing of letters to his children Andrew Murray Jr gives the reader a glimpse in his understanding of reading not only of Scripture but of other books and texts. In his letters he teaches his children "how to read" using terminology that can be traced back to the Desert Fathers and the Benedictine tradition. This way of spiritual reading can be used fruitfully in dialogue with literary studies especially Reader Response theories in an age where reading, especially Bible reading, has become problematic.

Keywords

Andrew Murray; Lectio Divina; spiritual reading; reader response criticism

Introduction

How do we read and why does it matter?

Dirkie Smit (2006:319) wrote at the end of his book *Neem, lees! Hoe ons die Bybel hoor en verstaan:*

> 'n Interessante variant van hierdie soort literatuur [Bible and ethical formation] wat tans weer gewild word, is dié wat sogenaamde spirituele lees of geestelike lees of lees met die oog op die vorming van spiritualiteit weer toeganklik wil maak, uiteraard veral as gereelde geestelike dissipline vir gewone gelowiges.[1]

1 Smit then gives examples of this type of reading referring to the book of Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book* (see bibliography), as well as the work of the South African Pieter GR de Villiers as an author on spirituality.

Responding to this "invitation", this article has a twofold aim. In the first place to investigate the practice of spiritual reading[2] as was found in the life of Andrew Murray Jr (1828–1917), a practice that aimed at spiritual formation. This will be done in dialogue with the broader history of reading traditions in the church through the ages. Secondly, to critically engage with this type of reading from the perspective of literary criticism and the reading crisis in society today. The sources used to enter Murray's world of reading will be extracts from letters he wrote to his children in which he set out to teach them – a next generation – how and what to read.[3]

A web of words

Throughout the ages, the church has had a complex relationship with words and texts. Sacred words, in oral and written form, were part of the faith of Israel and the church from its earliest beginnings. The underlying belief was that these sacred words could change people because they originate in the speech of God. Religious communities were formed around words spoken as law, as narratives, as wisdom, as proclamation.

The reader can use his or her imagination to see a web of words binding generations of believers to each other. This web of words, read and spoken, illustrates that the God beyond the words transforms the hearers and the readers. One such example is the story of Anthony of the Desert, who was led into the desert by hearing the words of Jesus read in his congregation (Matthew 21:19). He took these words of Jesus seriously, sold all his belongings and moved into the desert. His life of obedience and longing were written down in the *Life of Anthony* by Athanasius, and in turn, this

2 In this article, the phrase "spiritual reading" will be used. Spiritual reading opens up more possible reading theories than the translation of "sacred reading" referring to *Lectio Divina*, which originated in a monastic setting.

3 At the time of the writing of this article, the following source used for the letters was not yet published: Murray, Isabel 2022. *Exposé of a vulnerable father: Andrew Murray's letters to his children*. Working manuscript of research done in DRC Archives, Stellenbosch to be published during 2022, the 200-year commemoration of the arrival of Andrew Murray in South Africa 1822.

became a text which inspired others, for example, Augustine. A web was spun[4] as we read in his Confessions:

> When I indicated to him [Ponticianus] that those scriptures were the subject of deep study for me, a conversation began in which he told the story of Anthony the Egyptian monk, a name held in high honour among your servants, though up to that moment Alypius and I had never heard of him (Book VIII:14).

This friend went on to describe how he and his colleagues discovered the *Life of Anthony* and how in reading it: "He was amazed and set on fire …" (Book VIII:15).

Words formed communities and bound people to each other through centuries. Christopher Hall (1998:18) refers to the work of Thomas Oden that recognises this web of community and texts that span over hundreds of years: "As Oden studied patristic thought, he increasingly realized that theology could be, indeed, must be done in the context of the worshiping community of the church, a fellowship that stretched across a vast expanse of years, cultures and languages."

Reading the letters of Andrew Murray Jr, one is immediately aware of how texts, past and present, influenced his life, but especially also of the practices he engaged with to make these texts transformative in his life.

Eating the Word

Chronologically almost at the end of his life, Murray wrote the following letter to his son Charlie, dated 15 March 1916:

> We had here a Students Conference of the leaders of Bible circles, & the thought came home to me of the great need of meditating on the Word; like chewing the food before swallowing it, it is essential to turn the Word over & over again in our hearts to get at the full meaning, & above all at the full power of its life (Murray 2022:390).

4 Other examples would be Ignatius of Loyola and his reading of the *Life of Christ* of Ludolph of Saxony and Martin Luther and Karl Barth, who influenced new generations in their "discovery" of Paul's letter to the Romans.

In these few sentences starting with the metaphor of "chewing the food", Murray opens up the world of "eating the Word" that has been present from the earliest traditions of the Christian Church. Reading, like eating, is a process of chewing and swallowing. In this metaphor, the heart is swopped with the stomach but also swopped with the mouth. Chewing becomes something that happens in the heart. Reading, like eating then, becomes a way of receiving life. In biblical terminology, the heart refers to the mind; the heart/mind is the place from where one looks and acts in this world. It is the seat of thought and will.

This metaphor that Murray uses at the end of his life is not new. From the beginning of the Church, the Word has been associated with food and the longing to be fed (e.g. John 6). As Eugene Peterson (2009:9) wrote: "… the most striking biblical metaphor for reading was St John eating a book" in Revelation 10:9–10. As did Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

The desert fathers and mothers of the first centuries taught each other to "chew the cud" of the Word to portray this dynamic process of never-ending nourishment and growth. Anthony "advised that we should be like camels rather than horses slowly chewing the cud until the food is gradually broken down and absorbed." "You are invited to slow down, taste, chew, swallow, and savour" (Wallace 2002:11).

An important phrase in the desert sayings is: "Give me a word". This was not a solution to anything, rather:

> This tradition of asking for a word was a way of seeking something on which to ponder for many days, weeks, months, sometimes even a whole lifetime. The word was often a short phrase to nourish and challenge the receiver. The word was meant to be wrestled with and slowly grown into (Paintner 2012:3).

This eating can be described as a desert hermeneutic: "… the Scriptures were experienced as authoritative words which pierced the hearts of the monks, illuminated them concerning the central issues of their lives, protected and comforted them during dark times of struggle and anxiety, and provided practical help in their ongoing quest for holiness" (Burton-Christie 1993:4).

Their contemporaries saw these desert dwellers as living "bearers of the word". These texts, oral and written, were not only fixed expressions on the pages of a book "but as words in the minds and hearts of certain persons who on occasion utter those words to others." In these oral traditions, words became events (Burton-Christie 1993:18) and in this spiritual and aesthetic process the role of memory insured that it was visual and oral (Dryness 2011:197).

In Andrew's letter to his son, Charlie, one reads between the lines that he wishes words would become events in the lives of readers. The words are not mere language but entail the potential of an event that gives life. The desert fathers projected a world of meaning into which the monks wanted to enter (Burton-Christie 1993:20). Within this world, there are endless meanings in texts: "The possibilities for entering into the worlds projected by the texts are literally endless. Texts have, in this sense, an endless *surplus of meaning*. The reference reaches its full potential for meaning precisely through being fixed" (Burton-Christie 1993:20).

In a metaphorical sense chewing and eating opens an image of being constantly busy with a text and not reaching its final end of meaning. Inherent in this metaphor is the blurring of object and subject. The God behind the text can transform you. You can become read.

This practice of "chewing the cud" in the desert traditions became a precursor of the tradition of *lectio*, especially in the Benedictine traditions where the traditions of *Lectio Divina* or sacred reading were developed further. Basil Pennington (Pennington 1998:3) imagines a time when reading was mainly hearing, and the spaces between words, sentences, and paragraphs as we know it had not yet become a practice. It was by speaking and forming the words with one's tongue that it became familiar and understandable. Within the monastic setting, lectio happened from where it was assumed that God is present in the action of speaking and forming (Pennington 1998:3).

Benedict set aside three hours a day for *lectio*. The purpose of these three hours, according to the Rule, was *vacare Deo* "to be free for God" (Stewart 1998:37). Meditation would then be a slow, prayerful recitation of biblical texts. In Lent, an extra hour was given, and each member of the community was given a book to read right through (Stewart 1998:37).

The metaphor of food, however, also presupposes hunger and the ideas of longing and need: "We come to lectio not so much seeking ideas, concepts, insight, or even motivating graces; we come to lectio seeking God himself and nothing less than God" (Pennington 1998:5).

The chewing of the Word or the "chewing of the cud" in the desert terminology relates not only to reading or lectio but also to meditation. With time a fourfold event was described, namely *lectio-meditatio-oratio-contemplatio*. Meditation is then seen as surrendering to the text:

> The Fathers spoke of the mind descending into the heart. The word was to be received not only mentally but affectively, expanding the listening that we are, opening us to allow the fullness of Reality to come in, to see things as God sees them, forming us the mind of Christ. Meditation was not so much an active process whereby we worked with what we had received until it fitted into the conceptual framework we already had – rather, it was more a receptive process allowing the Word to break open and reform us. It is not a wholly passive process; a certain assimilation on our part is necessary. The Fathers, inspired by the biblical admonition, "Taste and see how good the Lord is," like to use the image of cattle and other biblically "clean" animals who chew the cud (Pennington 1998:58).

During the Middle Ages, this fourfold structure became important. The monk Guigo II in his discussion on reading, also uses the imagery of food: "Reading (*lectio*), as it were, puts the food whole into the mouth, meditating chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavour, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes" (Matter 2012:152).

Bernard of Clairvaux, in his meditations on the Song of Songs, uses the same type of terminology where he calls on his fellow monks to see the gap between their experience of God's love and their love for God and "to meditate on, chew over, and digest the words of the Song so that they might come more fully to inhabit them" (Hollywood 2012:75).

In the above, we can recognise what is meant by Leclerq (1975:193) in the *Cambridge History of the Bible* that the aim of reading, especially in the monastic setting vs the scholastic setting, was not so much to acquire ideas but "rather to taste and savour the Word of God", to strengthen the

contemplative life of prayer and union with God (Leclerq 1975:193). The Bible then becomes the "Book of Life".

This metaphor is also present in the Pietist movement which originated in Germany.[5] The influence of Pietism on Andrew Murray Jr is a given but is not the main focus of this article. August Francke, one of the main personalities in this movement, wrote the following regarding the reading of the Bible in his foreword to the German Bible of 1708:

> … who treat nothing in Holy Scripture as unimportant and who consider not just the outward account, but rather in everything that they read they direct their mind to finding proper food and nourishment for their soul and to using this in their spiritual life, just as bodily food assists in our natural life and provides the body with new power and strength each day (Shantz 2013:328).

This is the power and life that Murray refers to in his letter to his son in his words "above all at the full power of its life".

Reading other books

Books on Education

Andrew Murray Jr, in his letters[6] and day to day contact, not only introduced his children to Bible reading but also to the reading of other texts which he felt would be to their benefit and advantage. Books on education were important to him and were almost handled with the same reverence and read with the same skills as devotional or religious books. This positive attitude towards education is recognised as he writes to his son Charlie:

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5 Bernard Ramm (1999:no page) writes: "Pietism was the effort to recover the Bible as spiritual food and nourishment to be read for personal edification. It was a distinct reading against dogmatic and fanciful exegesis."

6 The letters written by Andrew Murray to which reference is made in the following discussion, are all taken from the 2022 manuscript by Isabel Murray (*Exposé of a vulnerable father: Andrew Murray's letters to his children*). Although some of these letters were transcribed for and published by Du Plessis (in *The Life of Andrew Murray*, 1919), most of the letters dating between 1905–1916, have been transcribed for inclusion in her book by I Murray. The original letters are in the Andrew Murray Jr Private Collection, DRC Archives, Stellenbosch.

"That education is one of the choicest 'weapons of grace', and one of the mightiest weapons against the Kingdom of darkness" (Murray 2022:360).

In the same letter of 10 October 1901 addressed to his son Charlie, who was asked to take responsibility for the *Normaalschool* in Mvera, we read the following:

> I would advise you to read the 3 chapters 28–30 Vol 2 of the New York Report on Education very carefully and marking all the sentences that contain thoughts you want to make your own. Read them over again from time to time. They will help you to feel that you are a specialist (Murray 2022:360).

Is Murray asking his son to do *lectio* with an education report? Probably. He invites him to mark and identify sentences and repeat them by reading them over and over. Murray saw repetition as an essential element in reading. The advice he gives Charlie is rooted in his understanding of education as a spiritual agency, as captured in the following sentence later in the same letter: "Above all, fight against the thought that preaching must be more spiritual than teaching."

His lifelong passion for education is reflected in a letter a few years later, on 11 June 1907, to his son Haldane: "I have not lost my interest in educational reading. Charles had lent me the biography of a teacher, Almond of Lorretta[7], which is like a fresh breeze on the hill, and gives one food for thought" (Murray 2022 :275).

This specific book he also shared with friends in education through the years. Murray again echoes the metaphor of food and eating also regarding books on education which was dear to his own sense of vocation.

Reading as sifting

Murray was, however, not an uncritical reader. He also taught his children to sift the material and read critically as seen in another letter to his son Charlie on 31 May 1907, where he writes about a specific book.

7 Dr Hely Hutchinson Almond was headmaster of Loretto House in Scotland. A School founded in 1827.

> How are you getting on with Stockmayer's "At God's disposal"? I [am] just going to lend that [and] another of his books to Rev. Marais and want to give him with a few questions on paper suggesting what the points are which he differs from the ordinary statements of Gospel truth. I think it will give you food for thought, & may bring out more clearly what I think, ought to make the book attractive & instructive as a guide to what is really the Xtian life, as the Word of God puts it.

In the following sentence, he asks his son about Quaker books: "How did Philip get his Quaker books? What are they? Let me have the names" (Murray 2022:377).

Again, the food metaphor surfaces. This specific book of Otto Stockmayer[8] has to do with a healing ministry, and he was both an accepted and controversial figure. Murray reads while still identifying elements not part of his understanding of the "Gospel Truth". Johannes du Plessis, in his biography of Murray, also relates that Murray would not necessarily accept everything he wrote. Even William Law,[9] who Murray much admired, as well as other writers on mysticism, was not read without criticism:

> … dat ANDREW MURRAY, terwijl hij klem legde op de eigenlike boodschap van de mystiek, namelik, de noodzakelikheid van een vereniging tussen God en mens, de dwalingen, waartoe zij geneigd is, wist te mijden. Zijn opleiding in evangeliese en gereformeerde theologie was zo degelik geweest, en zijn studie van de Schrift was zo nauwkeurig en aanhoudend, dat hij zich niet liet weglokken naar de zijpaden van de bespiegelende mystiek (Du Plessis 1920:466).

Reading on the Sabbath and sharing writers

In writing to his young daughters overseas, he was also concerned if they have enough to read on the Sabbath:

> I am so anxious that you should have no want of nice Sabbath reading, that I wrote by this mail to Nisbet to send you a parcel at once. I have

8 Otto Stockmayer (1838–1917) was a German pastor known in Europe for his book *Sickness and the Gospel*.

9 William Law (1686–1761) was also a controversial figure in England who was well known for his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.

> ordered some that you know already that you may be able to lend them to others. I have for the same reason written to them to post you twelve of Bateman's little hymnbooks (Murray 2022:114).

On 11 June 1907 he writes to Haldane:

> I hope to send you a little … book in the course of a couple of weeks. I do not know whether you know Brother Lawrence, the cook in a monastery, & his little book, "The Practise of the Presence of God". There is now another booklet of his, Spiritual Maxims, all gathered up into the two thoughts how near God is to us, & how blessed to live in that nearness (Murray 2022:276).

Brother Lawrence (1614–1691) was a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery. The book that Murray refers to, *The Practise of the Presence of God*, is well loved by believers longing to experience God in everyday life. This is another example of how wide Murray read.

On 10 August 1910, he writes a letter to his daughter Kitty, again proposing some reading material:

> I will send you a book *Conquering Prayer*. Very suggestive though there are things in it that one does not agree with. But anything that helps us feel that one needs the whole strength of our personality if we are to walk with God as intercessors, is of value (Murray 2022:202).

He goes on in making sure she is up to date with other events in the missionary movement:

> I hope that you have read the Life of Faith reports of the Edinburgh Conference with interest. Take time to study them and mark with ink the prominent points in the different addresses. We need, and it is of great value to get our heart saturated with the thoughts of the Kingdom [if] we are to interest others (Murray 2022:202).

As was seen earlier in the article, he proposes an interactive interaction with the text. The content of the Conference, as with material on education, is deemed important enough for Murray to spend time on. The metaphor

of saturation is used this time, which like the metaphor of food, reflects an understanding of integration and growth.[10]

The dangers of reading

Regarding the power of words and books, Andrew Murray Jr also felt it his responsibility to warn his children against books, especially literature. This ambivalence towards literature needs to be understood within the broader shifts in the wake of the Protestant tradition, namely the antagonism towards the novel and the stage, especially in some Puritan and Pietist traditions.

His daughter Annie wrote that her father could not and would not read novels. His library was, however, stacked with biographies: "Romans kon hij en wilde hij niet lezen maar levensbeschrijvingen waren hem een genot" (Du Plessis 1920:489). With this wider movement of a certain Protestant hesitancy to the novel and his own personal preferences one can maybe understand (not necessarily agree) with Murray's stance on literature.

In the following letter to Annie (then aged 25) and her brother Haldane (then aged about 22), dated 11 November 1888, we recognise this hesitancy towards literature:

> The great power that contests God's claim is *the world* in its thousand shapes. And the Shape in which you both are tempted to give your interest and delight and power in love to it, more than God, is its literature. Do pray amid your Studies, that you may be kept by God's Spirit and Grace in entire consecration to Him. Study at times, as you meditate, or read God's Word, or pray, to let the central thought of God's revelation in Christ get possession of you … [emphasis that of Andrew Murray] (Murray 2022:233).

10 Isabel Murray also gives a glimpse in the well-stocked library of the Huguenot College where Andrew's daughter Annie handled the "book budget". Books on modern languages, horticulture, chemistry, and history are just a few of the examples (Murray 2022:219).

He goes on to explain that God wants sole possession of a person (God wants to have you for Himself) and writes the following regarding the Annie's studies:

> I see A. studies Shakespeare and other English writers very specially. You know I have always said this may have its use. But it has its dangers too. It depends upon what becomes the most marked feature of our life, as that is made up of what we are interested in and take as food into our Spiritual composition (Murray 2022:234).

His hesitancy towards novels, Shakespeare, and literature, can also be brought into conversation with the metaphor of eating. He understands words as food that feeds the Spiritual being and from that perspective "warns" his children against too much Shakespeare, maybe as "the wrong food"? His letter goes on:

> Do let the thought of God and His Holy Spirit working something holy and of heavenly beauty in us. Something approaching to the life of Christ on earth in His devotion to the Father and to men, in His devotion to the Father and to men [sic], in His power of influencing men [sic] for eternity, be the deepest and most cherished hope of our daily life – this will lead us to give the world and its literature their right place (Murray 2022:234).

Murray then opts for a specific type of literature and "religious reading".

> One thing that will help us in this is a distinct course of religious reading. Let the literature that gathers round God's Word, His Kingdom, and the religious life, have a distinct place in our voluntary studies. The fashion, the conversation and example of others will not help us in this – but just a measure of separation from others is one of the great means of building up a strong individual character. "Go out from thy father's house, to a land I will shew thee – forsake thy friends on earth and come into fellowship with Me" (Murray 2022:234).

As a father, he goes on to make this a practicality by deciding what to send Haldane to read:

> Haldane may get himself as a birthday present from me Luthardt's Moral Truths[11] – it will be some extent in the line of his reading on ethics, filling up what is so entirely wanting in the Philosophical systems. I wish I knew a book that Annie would like in that style; I would send it. But it must now wait till she comes up (Murray 2022:235).

Some reflections

These few abstracts from letters do not nearly give due to the prolific letter and book writing life of Andrew Murray Jr It is only a glimpse in his own way of reading. A way which he found helpful and enriching enough to teach his children. However, this way of reading and "eating" texts can be traced to older traditions in the church through the ages. His reading and passing on of books and insights make him part of this web of words referred to in the beginning of this article. In the words of Murray, we find an intimacy with many texts, not just Scripture, which opens up possibilities for further reflection.

The aim of this article is not in the first place to critically engage Murray, for example, on his understanding of literature, but rather to become more aware of the spirituality of a figure who did play an immense role in mission and education work in South Africa. However, one can ask if, in a time that reading and communication is problematic, Murray can remind us of a long history of spiritual reading in the church? Mass media and the abundance of words, information and opinion created the phenomenon that people believe most things they read. Information is shared uncritically, and unfiltered through various mediums, and information is objectified as truths out there, and time is not taken to sit with words and arguments to taste their worth. As Stewart (1998:41) writes: "Both skimming and speed reading are antithetical to *Lectio Divina*."

In reaction to what serious theologians call fundamentalist readings of Scripture and other texts, efforts are made to teach believers hermeneutical skills. Texts are placed in contexts; genres are recognised, and readers are

11 Christoph Ernst Luthardt (1823–1902) wrote *Apologie des Christentums*.

led into practices of journeying with texts together with other believers. However, even within good hermeneutical practises, Scripture can still be seen as the object of the study and not always seen as a potential source of transformation. As Burton-Christie (1993:299) wrote regarding the desert fathers: "In the solitary acts of memorization, rumination, and meditation of Scripture, words penetrated the deepest recesses of the soul and created new possibilities and challenges".

One aspect worth noting in this tradition of spiritual reading is the blurring of object and subject which is also relevant in some Reader Response theories. The tradition in the church of *Lectio Divina* or sacred reading worked with this blurring of object and subject because, in the end, the subject was not necessarily the word or the reader but the God behind the text, the one that transforms.

The following dictum is attributed to Cyprian of Carthage: "Sit tivi velo ratio assidue vel lectio: nunc cum Deo loquere, nunc Deus tecum" ("You should apply yourself to prayer or to reading: at times you speak with God, at times he speaks with you"). (Robertson 2011:xi).

John Cassian, fifth-century desert father, goes further to say that which "I" read, Scripture also becomes renewed. Robertson (2011:xiii) refers to his words in the beginning of the *Conferences*: "As our mind is increasingly renewed by this study, the face of Scripture will also begin to be renewed, and the beauty of a more sacred understanding will somehow grow with the person making progress." Scripture can change as the person studying it changes. William Dyrness (2011:182), in his advocating of a poetic theology,[12] refers to the work done by Graham Ward on spiritual pedagogy and writes: "Our hunger is satisfied by reading (and re-reading) Scripture as this is embodied in the reading (and living) of our lives. The ancient devotional practice of *Lectio Divina* continues as a central moment of Christian poetics. This makes possible the reorientation of the secular rituals which express, even against our will, the soul's longing for God, who is alone desirable". The reader and the text stand in a different relationship. The text has the accepted possibility of changing the reader. The metaphor

12 Dyrness (2011:xi) calls his work "cultural and apologetic". He experiences that we are "left with a theology without poetry, and a poetry without God."

of food, chewing and eating illustrates this. The text becomes one with the reader.

In the world of literary criticism, especially regarding reader-response theories, reading and the process of reading have received a lot of attention in reaction against an understanding that a text has a specific intent that will be understood by everybody (as was proposed by the New Critical Project). Within such formalist readings, "the reader's experience is guided by formal clues inherent in the text; it is essentially a passive mode of reading …" (Castle 2007:174). Immediately it is recognised that the language of chewing and eating introduced in this article does not fit a theory of passive reading. Theories regarding intent and the role of the reader surfaced and made inroads into the work of biblical scholars who discovered there are more to hermeneutics than Historical-Critical reading.

The work done in reader-response theory can clarify this blurring of subject and object in spiritual reading. Castle (2007:174) refers to the work of Georges Poulet, who sees reading as breaking down the barrier between subject and object "in part by transforming the text-as-object into another subject, one that occupies the reader's consciousness, existing simultaneously within it." According to Poulet, there is then no longer an inside and an outside. The reader is inside the text, and the text is inside the reader (Castle 2007:175). Some Reader-Response theories, therefore, posited a breakdown in the subject-object relationship (Castle 2007:175). Castle (2007:178) also refers to the work of Stanley Fish, who recognises meaning as an event and not an entity, as was discussed in the world of the desert fathers.

The possibility of future dialogue between Reader-Response theories and spiritual reading is picked up by Robertson (2011:233) at the end of his discussion and revisiting of the medieval experience of reading. According to him, reading spiritually would free us at least partially from "dependence upon the wording, as we transform passive text-reception into active dialogue and reciprocity." Robertson (2011:233) feels that a door was opened by new reading criticism into "a fulness of active, affective, intellectual, and creative literary participation."

In the discussions on the role and use of Scripture, much has been written on the changing role of Scripture in the time of Scholasticism and the advent

of Protestantism. The Bible became the instrument of argumentation filled with prooftexts to ensure the validity of arguments. Dyrness (2011:197) postulates that in the Protestant tradition, the "reader tended to see Scripture's truth as an agent of liberation rather than as a stimulus to prayer and meditation – something that is clearly illustrated in the *Pilgrims Progress*." He proposes that Protestant reading "reversed the direction in which the movement of the reading proceeds. For the Medieval believer, the soul's journey moved from external sacraments and practices inward to the soul and the upward to God; the Protestant reader moved outward from within." Seeing became reading and reading became a function of understanding. Scripture came to be used as catechetical and cognitive and not as seeking a deep encounter with Scripture (Dyrness 2011:203). Dyrness, in advocating a poetic theology, invites believers to a reading that transforms affections which help us to "embody the story in the particular setting of our lives" (Dyrness 2011:311).

However, any theoretical discussion on spiritual reading will have to be deconstructed at some point. As Columba Stewart (1998:39) succinctly writes: "*Lectio* is sometimes presented as a method or technique of prayer, but is really a kind of anti-technique, a disposition more than a method".

Weaving the web

In April 1874, Andrew's young niece Mimie Louw wrote to her mother, Jemima Louw, after spending some time in the parsonage:

> Uncle A. is wonderfully happy & holy … I know the secret of Uncle Andrew's life – he is no extraordinary man, but he goes straight to the Bible and eats and digests with his soul the food God had therein provided for *every* hungry soul, as verily as we all do eat our tempore food and thrive on it [emphasis in the original] (Murray 2022:46).

One can say that Andrew himself picked up her words of 1874 in the letter of 1916, as was seen at the beginning of the article.

Murray invited his children to come back to texts again and again. It can be imagined that his children went back to his letters again and again. Maybe they read it in the way that he taught them to read other texts. His letters

became part of their web and maybe nourishment in years to come. What and how we read does matter.

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