

# METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN INTERPRETING THE RELEVANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

*Can the New Testament be applied to the present day? This forms the central consideration of this study. In search of an answer a number of present day approaches are referred to and criticized, such as a prescriptive approach; an ethical perspective of principles or ideals; as well as a relationality-responsibility model. Finally, the insights of Paul Ricoeur and Stanley Hauerwas are shown to have relevance for this issue. From this discussion six basic hermeneutical methodological principles emerge as essential for ascertaining the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa.*

## 1. Problem stated

Over the course of the centuries the Bible and in particular the New Testament have been used and are used to justify and lend support to widely divergent perspectives. Typical examples of this selective use of the New Testament can be seen in the rejection of the *Haustafeln* (household codes of Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:21-6:9 and 1 Pt 2:13-2:7) while texts more appealing to modern ears are accepted, such as 'there is neither Jew nor Greek...' (Gl 3:28) (Hauerwas 1984: 248-249). In the past the New Testament has even been used within South Africa to justify political systems. On what basis does one make such selections and such justifications?

The relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa is above all an ethical perspective. For it is the ethical, whether social or individual, which concerns the values and virtues that the new society is to embody, the way of life of its members, as well as the relationships that they establish among themselves.

In looking forward to the rebirth of a new South Africa, are we simply going to repeat the mistakes of the past and once more mould the New Testament to conform to our own ideology? Is it not possible to obtain some methodological principles which will enable us to avoid the pitfalls of creating our own ideology? My focus of attention in this paper will be to attempt to discover a number of such

hermeneutical principles that are vital for assessing the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa. It is not an attempt to give a blueprint of what the new South Africa will be like from a New Testament perspective: that would be another paper in itself.

## **2. Some present-day approaches to the use of the New Testament for the life of its members**

In a previous article (1987: 35-41) I outlined a number of different approaches used today in applying the New Testament to present day situations. I should like to refer to some of these directions both briefly and critically to see what value they may have in establishing hermeneutical principles in using the New Testament.

### **2.1 Prescriptive approach**

This perspective approaches the Bible from the viewpoint of the revealed will of God. Consequently, the various laws contained within the Bible are considered to contain the *vox Dei*, the will of God. A simple one to one relationship is viewed as existing between the past and the present. The minutest details of the various precepts and laws within the Bible are applied directly to the present. This is a fundamentalist approach to the Bible and it is surprising how popular this approach is in making a direct application of moral laws and codes to the present. Longenecker (1984:2) sums up this approach well when he says:

It argues that God has given prescriptive laws in the form of commandments and ordinances, which can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. If people want to know what they should do, the laws of God stand objectively before them in written form, and they have only to refer to them.

Such an approach fails to do justice to the New Testament message and in fact distorts it. Firstly, this perspective fails to take cognizance of the wealth of studies that have been made in biblical studies which argue for an understanding of the Scriptures first and foremost within the historical and cultural situations of its own time.

Biblical norms are determined by their own cultural world and historical context and cannot simply be applied to a world as divergently different historically and culturally as our own. A very evident illustration of this is Paul's endorsement of the institution of slavery in Philemon. It took the Christian church eighteen centuries before it acknowledged the cultural imprisonment of this particular perspective of Paul.

Secondly, to view the New Testament simply as a law book totally misses the nature of this whole body of literature. It is meant to be a message of salvation, of the good news of humanity's liberation from the forces of enslavement to the powers of evil. The New Testament writers call upon its readers to give a loving and grateful response to the good news. A law-book approach to the New Testament writers presents it as a demand requiring conformity and does not uphold the free and

loving response that should be engendered in the heart of the Christian leading towards action.

## 2.2 An ethics of principles or ideals

This direction argues that while the individual and specific laws within the New Testament are not to be interpreted as having a binding force on the believer (as with the previous perspective), the ideals or principles that lie behind these laws are upheld as binding. The great exponent of this approach was Harnack, as can be seen from his Berlin lectures of 1899-1900 under the theme *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Harnack (1901:50-51) drew a sharp distinction between the Jewish approach and that of Jesus towards religion:

They thought of God as a despot guarding the ceremonial observances in his household; he breathed in the presence of God. They saw him only in his law, which they had converted into a labyrinth of dark defiles, blind alleys and secret passages; he saw and felt him everywhere. They were in possession of a thousand of his commandments, and thought therefore that they knew him; he had one only, and knew him by it. They had made this religion into an earthly trade, and there was nothing more detestable; he proclaimed the living God and soul's nobility.

When such a focus is placed upon the fundamental principles which underlie the New Testament one can immediately see how the biblical norms can be applied to changing situations (whether it be one's own individual personal life, or the very life of society itself). The biblical interpreter must seek behind the laws of the New Testament, which are related to specific, individual problems, in order to ascertain those universal principles which inspired such laws. But, this activity does not end here. Having discovered these universal principles, they are now applied to the present day to the new and changing situations.

Such an approach has a number of important difficulties. It seems to be largely influenced by the world out of which it comes. It corresponds largely to the spirit of an age which tends to react strongly against authority and authoritarian norms and regulations. In denying any form of content to the teaching of the New Testament one is depriving the gospel message of its very essence and centre. It is also extremely questionable as to whether the wealth of the New Testament teaching can be simply and neatly contained in a limited number of principles.

## 2.3 Relationality and responsibility

This approach focuses attention on the Christian's response to the God who has given the gift of faith to the believer. The faith-response includes a specific style of action that one leads. Gustafson (1965:309-316) argues for a relationality and responsibility model as the primary way to understand Christian ethics. In freedom the Christian responds to the action of God working in his life.

The upsurge of the historical-critical method has largely contributed towards this relationality model. For example, the historical-critical method shows that whatever might have been a valid norm in the context of the biblical world does not necessarily mean that it has an equal reference to today.

One cannot without further refinement take biblical norms and automatically see them as always obliging in different contexts of our historical lives. The same reasoning also argues against finding goals and ideals in Scripture which can then be proposed without any modification for our contemporary circumstances.

Curran 1984:183)

In place of acting according to norms or goals, this approach places God in the very centre of the activity. The person responds to what God has done and strives to retain a relationship with this God of salvation. Consequently, a relational-response is the basis upon which this approach is founded. Christianity is distanced from the perspective of being a religion of norms or goals - instead it is a way of life in which the disciple strives to maintain a relationship to the person of Jesus Christ and to remain faithful to the work of the same Jesus Christ (Jansen 1975:498).

To my mind of all the approaches so far discussed, this approach is the most satisfactory. The person of Jesus remains the very centre of the life and action of the Christian. Morality is no longer limited to the narrow legalistic carrying out of stipulated laws. Instead, morality emerges from the very context of the Christian faith as a way of life which is led as a response to the gift of faith which the believer has received. The Scriptures give us a picture of the understanding which God's people had of themselves as they lived their lives under God's covenant and in a relationship to Jesus.

### 3. Towards some hermeneutical principles

#### 3.1 The dynamic of distanciation-appropriation

In his prolific writings Ricoeur has paid close attention to the question of methodological hermeneutics and how one can make application today of the biblical teaching. I intend to use his thoughts to throw light on the issue of the use of the New Testament for a new South Africa. Drawing on the now famous distinction of Dilthey between understanding or comprehension (*Verstehen*) and that of explanation (*Erklären*) Ricoeur argues for a movement from

understanding ---> explanation ---> understanding

The first understanding of the text is seen to be that of a naive appreciation of the text, which is very much a guess at the meaning. The second understanding is a much more complicated state of understanding which is mediated by the process of explanation. This final form of understanding is referred to as 'appropriation' by Ricoeur (1976:75):

The first time, understanding will be a naive grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole. The second time, comprehension will be a sophisticated mode of understanding, supported by explanatory procedures. In the beginning

understanding is a guess. At the end, it satisfies the concept of appropriation, which was described ... as the rejoinder to the kind of distanciation linked to the full objectification of the text. Explanation, then, will appear as the mediation between two stages of understanding. If isolated from this concrete process, it is a mere abstraction, an artifact of methodology.

I should like to pay a little more attention to the development of this thought.

(a) The first act of understanding takes place in the form of a guess simply because the intention of the author is beyond our grasp. Once having guessed at the meaning of the text it needs to be subjected to the procedure of validation by which the various guesses are tested.

If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. The text presents a limited field of possible constructions. The logic of validation allows us to move beyond the two limits of dogmatism and scepticism. It is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our immediate reach.

(Ricoeur 1976:79)

Here, then, one observes the first dialectic that proceeds from the guess (understanding) to validation (explanation).

(b) In the attempt to obtain an explanation of the text a new dialectic emerges between that of distanciation and appropriation. By distanciation is understood the dynamic that there is a distance between the world of the text and the world of the reader. Distanciation involves

... the capacity to suspend our own prejudices, our own convictions, our own point of view, ultimately to put into parentheses our own desires.

(Ricoeur 1981:295).

The various methods that have developed over the course of this century in an attempt to explain the text all contribute to this dynamic of distanciation. The historical-critical method aims at trying to recreate the text within the framework of its own world. The socio-historical method of criticism aims at attaining an understanding of the world itself which gave birth to the text. The various structural analyses to which the text is subjected also provides a valuable contribution towards understanding the very logical relationships within the framework and structure of the text itself.

(c) This distanciation or explanation leads to a deeper understanding of the text itself.

The sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed...To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference: from what it says to what it talks about.

(Ricoeur 1976:87-88).

(d) In the process of this final understanding one is led to an appropriation of the text. The dialectic from distanciation to appropriation is ultimately worked out. 'To appropriate is to make "one's own" what was "alien"' (Ricoeur 1976:43). This remains the final aim of all hermeneutics.

Interpretation in its last stage wants to equalize, to render contemporaneous, to assimilate in the sense of making similar. This goal is achieved insofar as interpretation actualizes the meaning of the text for the present reader.

(Ricoeur 1976: 91-92).

From this process of 'distanciation' an *Erklärung* of the text takes place which is ultimately beyond the actual horizon of the text. From this world of disclosure one moves to the world of 'appropriation' whereby one makes one's own, not the intention of the original author or even his understanding of himself or his own world. What actually is to be appropriated?

What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text.

(Ricoeur 1976:93)

For Ricoeur this 'appropriation' in fact coincides with Gadamer's understanding of the 'fusion of horizons.' The text remains the bridge by which the horizon of the author is fused with the horizon of the reader (Ricoeur 1976:93).

As a modern day exponent of such an approach, I would consider that Nolan in his book *God in South Africa* is operating subconsciously within this particular mode. He makes a distinction between the letter and the spirit of the gospel:

I want to try to show that it is the content (letter) of the gospel that varies from time to time and place to place while the shape or characteristics or form or spirit of the gospel remains the same. There is a definite shape, certain definite characteristics, that any message would have to have in order to qualify as a true gospel, as the gospel of Jesus Christ for a particular people at a particular time.

(Nolan 1988:8)

For Nolan one has to discover the spirit behind the contents of the New Testament. It is not the content of the New Testament, or its specific laws, which are eternally valid, but the spirit, which must be applied to different situations and different ages producing as a consequence new content, new laws.

The previously discussed approaches towards the application of the Bible to today (namely, consideration of the New Testament as presenting norms and goals which are immediately applicable to today) have failed to perceive this dialectic to which Ricoeur has drawn attention: interpretation has to pass from distanciation to appropriation. There is no appreciation given to the notion of distanciation, namely that the world of the text of the New Testament is different from that of our own world and cannot simply be neatly united on a one to one basis.

A relationality-responsibility model of interpretation, on the other hand, can certainly be harmonized with this viewpoint of Ricoeur. Importance is given to the

principle of distanciation whereby the world of the New Testament differs from and is strange to our own twentieth century world. When Ricoeur (1976:92) states that what is to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself which is conceived as the 'direction of thought opened up by the text,' this is in fact what the relational-responsibility model points towards: namely, that the Christian faith produces a way of life which is meant to be lived as a response to the gift of faith that has been received. This life incorporates a relation to the God of faith and to one's fellow believers. While the specific norms, goals and content of this relational-response way of life of the New Testament is distanced from the present world, nevertheless it is the response itself which is to be appropriated into a relational encounter.

### 3.2 Morality as remembering: the New Testament as narrative

A number of further principles need to be added to what has already been argued, if one wants to speak about the use of the New Testament for a new South Africa. These principles can be gleaned from the writings of Hauerwas who has provided some valuable insights into the use of the Scriptures from an ethical perspective.

#### 3.2.1 The purpose of the Scriptures

The Scriptures aim not to describe the world and reality, but to change the world in which we live. As Auerbach (1968:48) argues, Scripture is not meant

... merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours; it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history ... Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world ... must be filled as an ingredient of the divine plan.

When reflecting upon the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa, this aspect must indeed be uppermost. The New Testament does not aim at describing what the new South Africa will be like - instead it is meant to be a means of change, a leaven that constantly changes the world in which we are.

#### 3.2.2 The authority of Scripture shows how the Scriptures should be used within the church

The very notion of authority presupposes at the same time the existence of a community. A community is defined as 'a group of persons who share a history and whose common set of interpretations about that history provides the basis for common actions' (Hauerwas 1984:251). This community of believers requires tradition as a means by which the authority of Scripture continues to function from generation to generation within the community.

By its very nature tradition requires change as the community attempts to adjust the present with the past. This corresponds to Ricoeur's concept of the constant appropriation of the text to the new and changing situation. This appropriation should always act as a challenge and not as a blueprint. To claim authority for the

Bible means that it is the community of the church which gives testimony that this body of literature contains the necessary resources 'for the church to be a community sufficiently truthful so that our conversation with one another and God can continue across generations' (Hauerwas 1984:255-256). What tradition in fact amounts to is the community's remembering and preserving the judgments that it has made on the Scriptures which have been tested throughout the centuries.

For Christians the authority of Scripture resides not in the fact that it provides a standard for orthodoxy, but rather because the various traditions within the Scriptures provide the means for our community to find life. "Scripture" is used to name, not something the church is, but something she must use, according to some concept of "church" to preserve her self-identity.' The claim Christians make for the authority of the Bible relies upon the firm conviction that this body of literature provides the resources necessary for the church to be a true community in its relationship with God and with one another.

Here lies the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa. The New Testament does not provide a blueprint of norms or goals or principles that are to be implemented. Instead, Christians are challenged to form that community which receives its life from this relationship and conversation with God and with one another - a community that remains true to the traditions of the New Testament and the way these traditions have been appropriated over the centuries. The New Testament is to be appropriated once again in this community of believers endeavouring to build a new South Africa.

### 3.2.3 What kind of community are we called to become?

It must create a community which is capable of remembering the stories of Israel and Jesus and the early church. This remembrance gives guidance to the community and to one's individual lives. The very life of the community is a life that is led by remembering the past. In this light Scripture is to be viewed above all from the perspective of being a narrative. In remembering and appropriating this narrative for today the process described by Ricoeur is still seen to be vital. One realizes that the world in which we live is different from the world of the first century: there is a distance that separates us from that world. But, the first step is to appreciate and become aware of that alien world. Then, in the very act of remembering the narratives of that world we are able to pass from the alien world to the present world in that one appropriates the very meaning of the narrative.

Through Scripture we see that at crucial periods in the life of Israel and the church, questions about how to remember the stories were not just questions about 'fact' or accuracy, but about what kind of community we must be to be faithful to Yahweh and his purposes for us.

(Hauerwas 1984:260)



### 3.2.3.1 A community in a relationship-response

The biblical narrative witnesses to a community in relationship to a God who has given them the gift of faith and has poured out his forgiveness upon them. Through this forgiveness they enter into relationship with God and with one another. This relationship of the forgiven among themselves and to God leads the Christian community to see itself as different from the world because the world does not see the need of forgiveness (Hauerwas 1984:262). The implications of this are indeed disastrous. For the world believes it can bring about its own destiny with its own power, force and violence. The witness that the Christian community needs to bring to the world is that of the community of the forgiven who respond to God's forgiveness by learning themselves to forgive or be instruments of forgiveness.

From the communities of Israel and the early church we are asked to remember God's forgiveness towards them, a forgiveness which is total and eternal. The response called forth from the community is to learn to be a forgiving community in a similar vein. From remembering the narrative of Scripture,

... we learn how to be a people morally capable of forgiveness and thus worthy of continuing to carry the story of God we find authorized by Scripture.

(Hauerwas 1984:262).

Surely, here the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa remains crucial. The very mark of the community of Christians is that of a people who are forgiven and have the task of bringing that forgiveness into their world. They are to show the world that a reliance on power, violence and hatred is not the route along which a new world can be built. To be a people capable of forgiveness, capable of forgetting or overcoming those stories from their past where evils have been perpetrated, will certainly testify to a new beginning. A new world founded upon the power of forgiveness, rather than the power of force and violence, lays the foundation for a new society in which peace and harmony can flourish. In this sense the Christian community will be continuing the narrative of God's relationship with his people, Israel and the church, and the response which that relationship has called forth.

A further consequence of this community's relationship with a forgiving God demands the response of trust in that God. How then is it possible for such a community to rely on the power of force and violence to attain its goals? This community through trust in God is called to witness to the way in which God rules creation. God as the Lord of life and of creation calls forth the response of trust in Himself and in one another if His plans are to be realized. A new South Africa in which trust, not fear and anxiety, rules the relationship among all the people will truly conform to the witness that the biblical narrative calls upon the Christian community today to appropriate.

### 3.2.3.2 To be faithful to the way of life inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth

By responding to God's action in one's life one has in fact accepted to follow the way of life which Jesus mapped out. For those who are not Christians the way of life of the Christian presents the challenge of what God's call entails for all. In a new South Africa if Christians truly follow out the way of life mapped out by Jesus, they will bear witness to the plan that God has for all people.

But, what actually is that way of life mapped out by Jesus? The life of Jesus in fact is the recapitulation of the life of Israel and demonstrates God's way with the world itself. The early Christians showed their belief that following the path of Jesus they in fact were learning how to be perfect, how to be like God and to be citizens of his kingdom. The narratives of the temptations of Jesus illustrate very beautifully 'how the early church understood Jesus' life as recapitulating the way of God with Israel' (Hauerwas 1983:79).

The way of life of Jesus is essentially a life of service. But, the notion of service that Jesus demonstrates is not a question of doing what others want him to do. Jesus is selective in the way in which he responds to the requests of others. He perceives clearly what his mission entails and nothing can dislodge him from acting according to that mission, whether it be laws or the pressure or fear of others. His service of those in authority is seen to rest upon the challenge that his life and teachings address to them:

Jesus confronts the authorities with the nature of God's rule and with the seriousness of their offenses against it, but he does not impose his authority on them. After each confrontation, he moves on, leaving the authorities to choose their response. He is not a military messiah who uses a sword or manipulates the crowds to impose his authority. He does not even fight to defend himself, and he endures the consequences of his opponents's scorn.

(Mackie & Rhoads 1982:111)

In following the way of Jesus the Christian community today responds to his way by continuing to challenge the authorities of the secular world for what they do and say. In the context of a new South Africa this role must continue, the Christian community must continue to challenge the authorities to take seriously their positions and their failings. But, in no way are they to resort to violence in order to impose their perspectives, for this way is not the way of Jesus.

Ultimately it is the Resurrection which gives sense to this imitation of the way of Jesus. If it were not for the Resurrection our imitation of the way of Jesus would simply be idolatry.

The Christian proclamation of the resurrection of the crucified just man ... is a paradigm of the 'saving' process, yet not only a paradigm. It is a story which is itself an indispensable agent in the completion of this process, because it witnesses to the one personal agent in whose presence we may have full courage to 'own' ourselves as sinners and full hope for a humanity whose identity is grounded in a recognition and affirmation by nothing less than God. It is a story which makes possible the comprehensive act of trust without

which growth is impossible.

(Williams 1982:49)

The Resurrection of Jesus renders the living Lord ever present to us empowering us to live out the way of life that was his. We become his agents in spreading forgiving love within our world. The new South Africa will indeed be a reality of newness and new birth insofar as its citizens allow the risen Lord to empower them to live as people who have experienced God's forgiving love and they in their turn share this loving forgiveness with others.

### 3.2.3.3 A community of peace

The narrative of Jesus shows that Jesus has come to show the way to peace between humanity and God, and amongst humanity itself. As the Messiah he chose the path away from violence and force to bring about God's rule of peace within the world. The Christian has entered into this community of peace which eschews all violence. In fact violence is the mark of the one who wishes to be in control and hence usurps and denies the authority and power of God.

Violence derives from the self-deceptive story that we are in control - that we are our own creators - and that only we can bestow meaning on our lives, since there is no one else to do so.

(Hauerwas 1983:94)

What the Christian community aims to do is to show to the world what it in fact can and should become. In this sense the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa lies chiefly in being a witness to what the new South Africa should be like. If the Christian community took the narrative of the New Testament seriously, it would firstly transform itself so that it, in its turn, could bear witness to what the new South Africa should incorporate. For it is the task of the community not to make the world according to its own image, but rather to witness to the world what in fact a community of peace entails.

This has challenging repercussions. The emphasis that has been given in the past to the notion of individual salvation needs to be radically corrected by seeing the salvation which is offered as the message of the creation of a new community of peace and justice. God's salvation is not simply an individual affair. The narrative of God's dealings with humanity clearly indicates the communitarian dimension that this salvation does and must include.

## 4. Concluding reflections

At this moment in the history of South Africa the hope that a new order is to be born has never been more promising. This hope in a new South Africa is a hope that is shared for the very first time in the almost three hundred and fifty year history of the country by all the inhabitants of the land. Obviously, the expectations and hopes of different individuals and groups differ and with the hopes are mixed feelings of

anxiety and fear for what will ultimately emerge from the process leading to this new creation.

From the above considerations a number of methodological principles have emerged. When one speaks about the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa it has been above all the ethical perspective which I consider to be the most urgent, whether it be the individual ethical or the social ethical relevance of the New Testament. The following methodological principles are essential in order to appropriate the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa.

#### Principle One:

To uphold and respect the gap between the world of the New Testament and the world of today.

It is not possible to pass merely from the guidelines in the New Testament to an application of these guidelines for today. Neither is it possible to search for principles or ideals behind these guidelines which are now made applicable to today.

#### Principle Two:

To view the Christian faith as the context out of which the very ethical perspectives emerge.

Within the context of the Christian faith the relationality-response model captures the essence of all Christian action. The person responds to what God has done and strives to maintain this relationship with the God of salvation.

#### Principle Three:

To remain true to all the principles of hermeneutics.

All the relevant hermeneutical principles must be utilized in coming to an appreciation of the significance of the biblical teaching. Foremost among these are the insights of Ricoeur through which one moves from the dialectic of distanciation to that of appropriation. In order to make one's own what was alien in the text one needs to pass through the process of explanation whereby the various procedures, such as among others the historical-critical method, the socio-historical method, as well as the various approaches of structural analysis, help one to come to a deeper explanation of the text.

#### Principle Four:

To be faithful to the purpose of the New Testament.

The purpose of the New Testament does not consist in describing a blueprint for society, let alone for what a new South Africa should look like. The purpose, however, is to create a community which will be a leaven giving impetus to change.

#### Principle Five:

To view the New Testament from the context of the community of believers.

The Christian is challenged to form that community which receives life from the relationship with God and with one another. Within this context the New Testament receives life and meaning for it speaks from this context and to this context.

## Principle Six:

To view the New Testament from the perspective of a narrative.

The community is capable of remembering the stories of Jesus and the early church, and appropriating this narrative for today which remains faithful to all the above principles. This narrative shows that the existence of this community emerges from the forgiveness they have experienced. It is to remain faithful to the way of life inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus challenged the authorities of his day with the very nature of God's rule. The task of the Christian community remains the same: to challenge the authorities of the present in their construction of a new South Africa. This role of challenge is one which must continue into that period when a new South Africa has been established. In challenging the authorities the Christian community can never resort to violence for this was not the way of Jesus of Nazareth.

Ultimately, the relevance of the New Testament for a new South Africa lies in the mediating role that the community of Christians exercises. It is the community which appropriates the New Testament message of the call to experience the forgiveness of God and to live a life in a relationship of forgiveness whereby they respond by bringing forgiveness to others. The virtues of peace, justice, equality and freedom are all witnessed to within the community in that they receive their foundation and direction from the person of Jesus Christ.

Very often in referring to the establishment of a new social order, reference is made to 'the values of the kingdom' such as justice, freedom, equality, etc. which this new order must incorporate. While I do not wish to dispute the importance of these values, it is vital that one see from where they originate. The kingdom is found in the person of Jesus Christ, consequently 'the kingdom values' that one speaks about are to be seen as located in him and as originating from him. We do not know and experience these values independently of him. Equality originates from our creation by God and as such we are all equal in his eyes. Our freedom is a value which gives us the ability to serve others out of love (Hauerwas 1983:113). Justice stems from the very experience that as God's community we have received what in fact we have not earned.

The ultimate and most profound reason to consider Christ - rather than democracy or justice or equality or liberty - as the hope of the world, is not the negative observation, clear enough already, that hopes of this kind generally remain incomplete and disappointing, or that they can lead those who trust them to pride or brutality. The fundamental limitation of these hopes is found in the fact that in their search for power and in the urgency with which they seek to guarantee justice they are still not powerful enough. They locate the greatest need of man in the wrong place ... Those for whom Jesus Christ is the hope of the world will for this reason not measure their contemporary social involvement by its efficacy for tomorrow not by its success in providing work, or freedom, or food or in building new social structures, but by identifying with the Lord in whom they have placed their

trust.

(Yoder 1971:165-166)

Realizing that 'the kingdom values' are found in the hope of Christ, the implementation of these values is that for which the Christian community always strives. It must show a community which imitates the path of Jesus where all are equal as brothers and sisters of Christ, where the true freedom of the children of God illustrates itself in service of others, where justice is seen to be done to all as it stems from the realization that each one has received from the Lord more than is due to her or him. And, finally, where peace is a firm reality the relationships among all the members results not as the outcome of force and violence, but from the dynamism of a relationship with the God of forgiveness.

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