

## BIBLICAL STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA? THE CASE FOR MORAL VALUES

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### Abstract

*At a recent funeral at Dimbaza Methodist Church (26 August 1995) for a student in Biblical Studies at the University of Fort Hare, one of the speakers said with reference to societal concerns: 'If we silence the church, who will speak?'. Perhaps one should go one step further: if we silence the Bible, how will the Church, an important community of believers, speak? Can the people of South Africa still speak, without the Bible? This question was asked against the background of the common perception that religion and what goes along with it, is being devalued in the new South Africa. Especially Christianity is perceived to be under threat after years of privilege, even or rather, especially under Apartheid government. The uneasiness which was experienced by some with the years long privileged position of Christianity in South Africa was ultimately addressed by the recent (1995) proclamation of South Africa as a secular state.<sup>1</sup> This formal legal position accompanied by the less well expressed uncomfortableness among some South Africans with the domination of the specific Christian religious outlook on life, was extended to all levels of the South African society. In this regard educational courses with religious content or orientation and especially those within the Christian tradition which are offered at primary, secondary and tertiary levels at state institutions also came under scrutiny. In South Africa this implies that the role and place of Religious Education as well as Biblical Studies in the non-ministerial/theological educational curriculum was placed in the spotlight.<sup>2</sup> This is an attempt to make some comments within the debate regarding the desirability, and possible role and place of Biblical Studies courses at school and tertiary level.<sup>3</sup> This contribution is limited: it is not from an educationist perspective, neither from a systematic or dogmatic theological perspective. However, from a biblical sciences*

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- 1 The effect of constitutional separation between religion and state is clearly seen in the American situation where the separation is supported by the legal system: the First Amendment. (Cf. Lategan 1993: 29, who calls the separateness of the American situation 'dramatic'.) Cf. De Gruchy (1995: 70-72) for some views on South Africa as 'secular state'; and Prozesky (1995: 11-21) for the implications of this for 'religious justice' in South Africa.
  - 2 An important distinction should be noted between Biblical Studies and Religious Education (Instruction) at school level: the former is an optional, examinable course (like other subjects, e.g. History or Science), whereas the latter is (at this stage still) a compulsory, non-examinable subject as e.g. Physical Education. At tertiary level, however, Biblical Studies are often accompanied or (according to the current trend) replaced by Religious Studies (or 'Biblical and Religious/Religion Studies') or Religious Education which makes the distinctions less clear. This is probably also due to the lack of a prescribed syllabus as at school level, except for a proposed older 'core syllabus'. (1983: 44-55) The co-existence of Biblical Studies with Religious Studies at some Universities further complicates distinctions. Cf. Müller (1995: 126) for some views on the issue of the current validity of the name Biblical Studies.)
  - 3 'Biblical Studies' refers to the academic course, at school and tertiary level. The lack of capitalisation of 'biblical studies' when used in a broader sense is intentional.

*perspective and within the broad perimeters of theology and education, the possible role of Biblical Studies in and for a new South Africa is considered.<sup>4</sup>*

## 1. Recent discussion and confusion

The perceived role of Biblical Studies in the new dispensation in South Africa varies between opposition against the subject to maintaining the status quo, both at times vehemently defended. Regarding the devaluing of Biblical Studies, several factors can arguably be suggested to have played a role in the current attempt to formulate a position on the place and role of Biblical Studies in South Africa's educational curricula.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1 'Political correctness'

A corollary of the racist Apartheid structure of South Africa was the way in which Christianity, regardless of its status as 'majority religion',<sup>6</sup> was advantaged: particularly as Christianity was also the religion of the ruling Nationalist Party.<sup>7</sup> Christianity was privileged, for example, by having the 1986 (final Apartheid-) Constitution refer in no uncertain terms to the Christian or biblical God; an educational policy existing within the framework of Christian National Education;<sup>8</sup> by having national media coverage by the SABC as public broadcaster biased towards Christianity (and only particular manifestations thereof) in the content of the programmes broadcasted<sup>9</sup>; legislation regulating sport and recreation, and economic activities on Sundays was done at the request of certain Christian denominations.<sup>10</sup> In some, although hardly in all, sections of society there were for a variety of reasons unhappiness and dissatisfaction with this preferred status of one religion in South Africa: Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

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- 4 The scientific nature of Biblical Studies will not be attended to here. Cf. Van Huyssteen (1984: 8-20). Van Huyssteen's debatable argument that Biblical Studies as applied theology is to be approached from 'a systematic-theological perspective' will also not be attended to here.
- 5 Cf. also a valuable analysis of the Namibian situation provided by Lombard (1995: 97-124; esp. 98-110); and the earlier analysis by Hunter (1992: 46-58) regarding Religious Education. Ter Haar (1990) and later (1992) in conjunction with others, provided surveys of religious education in some African countries, the latter concentrating on African Traditional Religions within the curriculum. An earlier 'quantitative and qualitative' survey of the South African situation regarding Biblical Studies was done by Malan (1988: 41-61).
- 6 Christianity is an umbrella term, incorporating many and diverse Christian denominations. Cf. Krüger (1994: 3, 4): '... Christianity itself is a pluralistic phenomenon'.  
On the dividedness and antagonism within the various South African Christian groups, cf. Prozesky (1992: 13; 1995: 11). He argues, however, that in South Africa  
'... Christians remain an obviously important factor...'
- 7 It was thoroughly 'politicised' as 'Christian Nationalism', and prominently so in the sphere of education. Cf. e.g. Pillay (1989: 157-161); Lategan (1990: 2, 5); Lategan (1993: 31). For the particular reciprocal relationship between the NGK (DRC) and the National Party government, cf. the comprehensive work edited by Kinghorn (1986).
- 8 For a brief historical overview of South African education, especially CNE, cf. Cosser (1991: 44-61). Cf. De Gruchy (1980: 31-33) on Christian National Education, referring to Hexham (1979): the aim was the protection of Calvinism in as far as it served Afrikaner (political) interests. On CNE and Biblical Studies particularly, cf. also Rousseau (1988: 27-33).
- 9 Coverage of religious services, events, etc. for other religious groups was only since fairly recently provided and then outside of the normal program schedule on Sunday mornings; this was also limited to 'Eastern religions' (e.g. Islam).
- 10 Cf. e.g. Prozesky (1992: 13).
- 11 However, this uneasiness with the preferred status of Christianity was (is?) probably more a reflection of the anti-Apartheid upperclass and leaders: a mixture of 'political correctness' and an adverse personal attitude toward religion in general and Christian religion in particular.

The South African community through its chosen representatives in government is hard-pressed to visibly remove the vestiges of Apartheid South Africa. This is a complicated matter because the pervasiveness of Apartheid is clear for all to see - in vastly different ways - both in the white and in black and other disenfranchised societies. However, because of the nationally but especially internationally acclaimed 'smooth transfer of power',<sup>12</sup> the full extent and nature<sup>13</sup> of abuse is still to be acknowledged by the former Nationalist government and grassroots reforms still to be implemented and effected. It is understandable then that the post-April 1994 government is reluctant to retain educational curricula which might create the impression of perpetuating Apartheid or Apartheid-supportive sentiments.<sup>14</sup>

Many so-called institutionalised Christian churches are also yet to own up to their contribution in Apartheid, whether it was a contribution of complicity or of silent condonation through the lack of criticism and action against Apartheid. In this regard then the 'political' aversion for 'Christian components' in the educational curriculum can probably be explained.

It, however, remains a question whether political aversion should determine educational content,<sup>15</sup> whether the political climate in South Africa requires or expect the exclusion of potentially and 'proven' enriching qualities of subjects due to its particular history.<sup>16</sup>

In this time of 'political correctness' one should not be surprised that voices are calling for the replacement or substitution of Biblical Studies with more politically correct subjects, and that Christian studies, including Biblical Studies have switched into an apologetic mode.<sup>17</sup> Biblical Studies will have to avoid changing into a vaguely defined course with a mixed-grill content and becoming a 'theology of the market-place':<sup>18</sup> a fad and fashionable course. The celebration of political relevancy or correctness without substance, will obscure the continuing critical and proven liberating potential of biblical studies.

## 1.2 Postmodernism

Another climate currently sweeping the (academic) world is a broader and in South Africa perhaps not such a well articulated position or attitude: late modernism<sup>19</sup> or

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In as far as it existed, the greatest source for popular discontent with the position of Christianity is probably the abuse of this religion and its Scripture by especially the Apartheid system. Cf. the Kairos document, admittedly written by the clerical 'elite'.

- 12 For examples of a popularised view, cf. Uys (1995: 8) and a recent letter to a local Eastern Cape newspaper (1995: 4).
- 13 The popular presentation of Apartheid by members of the former government is still one of a mistake, procedures gone wrong, 'the odds were against us', etc. Cf. Sebothoma (1992: 20, 21)
- 14 De Gruchy (1980: 32, 33) argues that Religious Education and Biblical Studies were used to provide 'religious legitimization of national policies'.
- 15 A repeat of the education along political-ideological lines (as it was found in its most perverse form under Apartheid government) should be avoided. Cf. Khoapa (1993: 47)  
'... too often, numbers and political considerations have prevailed over quality and nationality in shaping the undergraduate course of study.'
- 16 Ironically, in the sphere of economics the very Arms industry that literally were responsible for the loss of thousands of South African (and other!) lives are going from strength to strength. ('Money is the name of the game', even going beyond political considerations' ???)
- 17 Many departments of 'Biblical Studies' are now departments of 'Biblical and Religious (Religion) Studies' or 'Religious (Religion) Studies'. Pobee (1989: 15, 16; 1992: 126-152, esp. 146) argues that the change from 'theology' to 'religion' at African universities was in acknowledgement of Africa's pluralism juxtaposed to non-confessionalism.
- 18 Vosloo (1990: 44) quoting Kinghorn; yet, Biblical Studies should be 'market-related'. (Vosloo 1995: 186)
- 19 Cf. e.g. Van der Ven (1994: 254, 255).

Postmodernism. Part of the difficulty in evaluating Postmodernism is the lack of definition of Postmodernism itself:<sup>20</sup> is it a paradigm in Kuhnian sense, an attitude, a world view, a philosophy, a 'myth' ...?

Regardless of various definitions or lack thereof, Postmodernism does attempt to achieve certain positions and imply certain characteristics. Postmodernism is a very necessary corrective on the absoluteness of the positivist and rationalist scientific paradigms which have been and to a large extent, especially in 'populist' science are still dominating thought and perceptions. West (1995: 4), in a recent article refers to the positive value of Postmodernism in initiating a shift towards an 'engaged, even subversive, philosophical perspective' in reading biblical texts. In biblical interpretation the 'hegemonic status' of past and present 'tenuous and provisional vocabularies' is identified, and allows and even promotes an emphasis on the usefulness of readings rather than the correctness of it.<sup>21</sup> Postmodernism signifies 'the end of the modern world', with its insistence on objective and verifiable 'facts'. (Allen 1993: 339-348)

Postmodernism rejects the grand narratives<sup>22</sup> of modernity which 'described, explained and systematised in all-encompassing natural laws and theories' nature, society and even individuals according to criteria of universal, spaceless and timeless nature. (Van der Ven 1994: 254)

In Postmodernism there is the acceptance of an openness, indefiniteness and indeterminacy of existence; thus no absolute or ultimate truths exists, rather one finds a 'carnivalising of the truth'. Truth is 'linguistic, symbolic, semiotic', it is 'perspectival and pluralistic'. The all-knowing 'subject' of Modernism is 'decentered'. (Du Toit 1988: 37; cf. Keegan 1995: 1-14)

These few general characteristics should be augmented by another, less positive but relevant aspect to the discussion below (especially regarding values): in Postmodernism there is an emphasis on the relativity of values and morality, potentially leading to relativism and nihilism.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, Postmodernism can also become a fad, a fashion, without necessarily either encapsulating the human mind, celebrating human existence or providing refuge from

20 This very attempt at definition is viewed as modernist. (Du Toit 1988: 36)

21 West (1993b: esp. 134-136), however, also strains himself to simultaneously do justice to Postmodern and Liberationist hermeneutic concerns.

For the influence of Postmodernism or more particularly deconstruction, on biblical criticism specifically, cf. Keegan (1995: 1-14). Keegan also argues that one can

'... honestly deconstruct the biblical text while remaining open to the transcendent...'

In the same vein, Van Huyssteen (1993: 373-386) argues that Postmodernism does not necessarily imply 'postfoundationalism', and that a postmodernist 'might even turn out to be a crypto-fideist'.

22 Or metanarratives or great designs; e.g. 'reason', 'progress', 'democracy'. Cf. Lyotard's 'definition' of Postmodernism as 'incredulity toward metanarratives'. (Lundin 1993: 4; Lyon 1993: 118) As people are no longer reduced to someone's grand narrative, Tracy (1994: 108) can assert with Levinas, that 'the real face of Postmodernity ... is the face of the other'.

23 In Postmodernity beliefs, values and norms are 'contextual constructions' in a given time and place. (Du Toit 1988: 39, 40; Van der Ven 1994: 255) Lundin (1993) refers to a 'therapeutic' culture as the one created by Postmodernism: of primary concern is a 'manipulatable sense of well-being'.

In terms of theologising in general, some scholars, e.g. Du Toit (1988), Allen (1993), Keegan (1995) sees in Postmodernism the possibility of revitalising of theology in a number of ways. McLeod (1992: 275-293) sees positive value specifically in Postmodern influence in 'Christian Higher Education'.

the modern age.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Postmodernism with its opposition to 'metanarratives' can become the final and most absolute grand narrative ever: the summit of Modernism!<sup>25</sup>

Coleridge (1994: 139-151) argues for viewing the Bible as a 'polyphonic master-narrative', which in the quest to escape the pre-Postmodern totalisation and Postmodern privatisation, means avoiding

'... the anachronistic demand for a totalising master-narrative ...'

and

'... the unrealistic and finally hellish demand that we create our own master-narrative'.

### 2.3 Pluralism

In his discussion of biblical studies during the last thirty years, Davies (1986: 53-64) sees a 'new pluralism' as one of the two most significant developments during this time. This pluralism emerges amidst a resurgence and public manifestation of 'biblical conservatism and even fundamentalism', which has since Davies' article rather increased than decreased. Davies celebrates this pluralism for its capacity to escape the 'literal fundamentalism' and the subtler 'confessional fundamentalism' of the Christian tradition, and even the 'rigid, narrow, cribbed, confined and confining' nature of the 'older confessional multiplicity'. The new pluralism is found in the

'increasing recognition by religious communions of our day of an accepted religious pluralism.'

The result is the peaceful co-existence based on 'mutual respect and often admiration' of religious communities. This goes hand in hand with the discovery of valuable aspects in other religions than one's own, as well as viewing one's own religion from the perspective of other religions. Davies refers to the positive value of this: the new perspective of Christians on their and other's religious and confessional traditions, enabled by the distance created in pluralism.

Accepting the positive value of pluralism Davies, however, finds more to bemoan in it: the 'dubiety of uncertainty', the removing of intolerance without 'generating fundamental insights or commitments' (pluralism for the sake of pluralism!), and the new pluralism's 'banal, trivial and pretentious' nature.<sup>26</sup> These tendencies naturally mitigates against an appreciation of 'biblical values'.

### 2.4 'Survival ethic' and 'market-place philosophy'

Dr BA Khoapa (formerly of the University of Fort Hare) at a national symposium on 'The employability of BA graduates' mentions the 'survival ethic' and 'market-place

24 E.g. Lyon (1993: 123) acknowledges Postmodernity's transcendence of Modernity, but despairs of its efforts to alleviate 'injustice, suffering and evil'. Van Huyssteen (1993: 376) argues that Postmodernism 'can mask a repressive and intolerant neo-positivist attitude'.

25 In the sense that human beings exists by virtue of their ability to function linguistically, i.e. textually and intertextually, linguistics not only becomes a metanarrative but also defines metanarrativity.

However, cf. Du Toit (1988: 41, 42, 47) on the suspicions levelled at theological language in Postmodernism: language is non-referential, conceals more than it reveals, is never 'innocent' and is thus never genuine and can never be trusted.

26 Cf. Davies (1986: 58)

'... like a fish in that ocean (of the transcendent, JP) always keeping its mouth wide open, afraid to shut it, and therefore never taking a bite'.

Prozesky (1992: 14) finds himself asking whether the 'real religious challenge' is not so much 'coming to terms' with pluralism, but 'overcoming' pluralism.

philosophy' which, in a time of diminishing resources, is becoming increasingly set in place at institutions of higher education. To put it bluntly, Khoapa is worried by the tendency that students at university level are channelled into a certain restricted and vocational-oriented sphere: 'narrow training for a specific job'.<sup>27</sup>

Instead of 'hunkering<sup>28</sup> down' with a 'diminished vision', Khoapa (1993: 47, 48) argues that the time of 'diminishing resources' should rather be seen as an 'opportunity for renewal', with higher education's aim set for enabling students to achieve more than mere acquisition and integration of knowledge. Students should be enabled through their curricula, especially then at BA level, to develop those abilities that will lead to 'a life of responsible citizenship and human decency'. This education is offered to the student in such a way that it will prepare the student 'to adapt to a changing world'.

Khoapa (1993: 71) does mention the selection of courses for the BA degree to be problematic, and within the Fort Hare situation the overloading of the teaching vocation with Xhosa and Biblical Studies as major courses offered for the degree. However, referring explicitly to the usefulness of Biblical Studies in the degree, he quotes the response of some teacher training students

'... if properly taught, Biblical studies gives an opportunity to teach content from geology, history, geography, law. The problem is not Biblical studies as a subject, but whether we are using the potential of such a course to teach inter-disciplinary and generalist content'.

Again, in terms of research the financially attractive avenues attract the attention of researchers. Universities end up

'... researching what society ... was `prepared to pay for rather than for what it needs'.'. (Gourley 1994: 8)

However, the most pressing issues in and needs of society do not accrue the research resources it should get which in turn leads to a neglected output, simply because many of these issues are in the field of Humanities: it simply 'does not pay as well' as Science.

## 2.5 Western theological oppression

Schoonhoven (1989: 9-12) refers to the wide ranging condemnation of Western thought and world views dominating Biblical interpretation in Africa, what Pobee (1989: 2) calls the 'North Atlantic captivity and inheritance' of theology in Africa.<sup>29</sup> The domination is not found so much in terms of the wide influence of Western ways in theology as in the prescriptive or normative nature of its influence on research and teaching programmes:

'... African scholars are not satisfied with reproducing western scholarship...' (Schoonhoven 1989: 9)

Sometimes the criticism of the influence of Western thought in Africa turns over into 'vehement rejection' thereof.

Western scholars are castigated for, amongst others their individualist and intellectualist tendencies. Pobee (1989: 4) includes Western liberalism as something foreign to Africa, especially in as far as it includes a church-state separation, and the faith-life, individual-community dualisms if not dichotomies. Denominationalism is a further threat to the

27 Cf. Vosloo (1990: 42)

'Met die eis van spesialisasie word die gevaar van eensydigheid al groter.'

28 Sic! Maybe bunkering?

29 Cf. also Onwu (1984/5: esp. 39).

Christian church in Africa and is perceived to have been introduced by historical events in Europe and America. (Pobee 1989: 4)

The Western approach to the Bible resides in especially its epistemological and hermeneutical assumptions and is criticised by Deist (1991: 32-50): the idealist (Platonist-Kantian) approach in the teaching of Biblical Studies is present in the 'unarticulated suppositions' of the 'content-oriented syllabi' and the accompanying 'hermeneutical assumptions' which has its point of departure in a 'fundamentalist' position on the Bible as a source of 'timeless, normative' messages.

While admitting to his (over-?) generalised typologies, Deist maintains the untenability of the Kantian epistemology and hermeneutic in South Africa, based on a perceived total contrast between 'Western' and 'African' thinking: 'idealist, theoretical' as opposed to 'pragmatic, practical'. (Deist 1991: 33-39).

Mitchell (1993: 3) quotes Mosothoane in saying that the problem with Western scholarship is not its scientific endeavours with or methodologies for the study of the Bible, but the tendency of these scientific exploits to become a way of regulating and controlling even African biblical studies.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.6 Pragmatic concerns

### *Glut of teachers*

Pragmatic concerns are very often offered as reasons for eliminating Biblical Studies from educational curricula. In the context at the University of Fort Hare, e.g. the popularity among students and the resultant abundance of Biblical Studies students aiming for the teaching profession,<sup>31</sup> is seen by some as reason enough to remove or at least to downgrade the course. This course of action is, however, not detected in other courses in which 'too many students' enroll: e.g. in Xhosa, with an equally limited - even in the University of Fort Hare setup! - scope, or in Psychology.

Naturally the suspicion arises that one is dealing with a situation where pragmatic concerns are used as justification for a prior negative decision or evaluation of Biblical Studies.<sup>32</sup>

### *Teaching mode/style*

The style of teaching is seen in some case to inhibit the teaching of Biblical Studies. Sometimes pupils and students experience the teaching mode to be 'top down', esoteric, and even one of mere rote-learning: 'objective' and 'value-free'. (Van Huyssteen 1984: 9) Even in the South African context of many different communities and cultures, Biblical Studies sometimes are offered without any concern for the contiguous communicative, dialogical, creative, metaphorical, and contextual and relevant<sup>33</sup> aspects.

30 Cf. also Ngally's concluding remarks. (1975: 36)

31 Cf. above, the remarks of Khoapa (1993: 71). Remarkably, it seems as if almost no-one is interested in the reasons for the popularity of this subject among students. On its popularity, cf. Lategan (1993: 28, 31), Müller (1995: 131). Müller is rather the exception in calling for research on the reasons for its popularity.

Another interesting question would be to establish on what basis this negative evaluation regarding Biblical Studies was made?

32 Obviously practical solutions lie readily at hand: restrictions on numbers of students, etc.

33 The situatedness of Biblical Studies in a wider religious consciousness, amidst African traditional religions, and especially in the broader South African situation of economic and other injustices. Cf. Onwu (1984/5) and West (1991, 1993a, 1993b).

Malan (1993: 47-66) identifies the twin problems of 'traditionalism' and 'authoritarianism'<sup>34</sup> in the teaching of Biblical Studies; these two problems probably dominate in other aspects apart from teaching, e.g. setting of syllabi and curricula. Traditionalism and authoritarianism are counterparts of the same problem which are motivated according to Malan by accepting the existing or dominant traditions to be sufficient, and with the acceptance required as it is seen to be based on divine authority.

In as far as Biblical Studies courses are too often exclusively reliant upon the content of (certain parts of) the Bible, with an emphasis on 'biblical instruction' or 'Bible knowledge', sometimes permeated with narrow confessional or denominational concerns, the teaching of Biblical Studies needs to be rethought.

### 3. Biblical Studies as an Arts course

#### 3.1 Historical background

During a recent survey of the scope of courses on religion and theology conducted by the University of Stellenbosch's Department of Religious Studies, it was found that Biblical Studies is offered as a subject at all South African universities within the BA degree; except for two universities,<sup>35</sup> it can be offered even as a major course towards this degree. (Müller 1995: 127)

The history of Biblical Studies as a course in an Arts (or Humanities / Social Sciences) curriculum<sup>36</sup> is a long and, depending on the position of the perceiver, a proud and enhancing or notorious and dominating history. Naturally even in South Africa with its overwhelming majority of Christians, the teaching of theology is a complex matter. (cf. Lategan 1993: 28, 29)

The teaching of theology and theology-related courses has always taken place within an unhealthy situation of segregation between the theological 'sub-disciplines'.<sup>37</sup> However, Biblical Studies has by virtue of its relatedness to biblical and systematic treatments of theology, yet distinct 'mix, application and ethos' managed to establish itself as a unique course in theology or religion education: a 'subject in its own right'. (Müller 1995: 126)

#### 3.2 The potential role of Biblical Studies in an Arts Curriculum

In an Arts curriculum Biblical Studies has the potential of promoting a certain broad and not confessionally or denominationally restricted ethos and world view,<sup>38</sup> and values and attitudes towards other humans and nature. This creative and formative potential among

34 Geyser (1980: 16, 17) mentions that the educational study field of religion is especially prone to traditionalism. In South Africa traditionalism was abetted by 'Christian-Nationalism'. For some characteristic elements of the latter, cf. Rousseau (1988: 27, 28)

35 The Universities of Vista and Bophutatswana (North West).

36 Unless qualified, 'Biblical Studies' here refers to the Arts course. The position of biblical studies as an constituent element in theological curricula is, as far as my knowledge goes, not contested.

37 Solidified with the eighteenth century distinction by Gabler between 'Biblical' and 'dogmatic' theology. (Boers 1979: 23-38) Cf. Lategan (1993: 130) on the negative spin-offs of this division.

However, Christianity is a 'religion of the book', and thus biblical studies is important as the 'elementary knowledge on which all (Christian, JP) theological reflection ultimately depends'. (Markham 1991: 267)

38 In the sense in which Meeks (1986: 15) uses it: 'ethos' as

'the underlying attitude towards themselves and their world that life reflects',

in conjunction with 'worldview' as

'(people's) picture of the way things in sheer reality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society'.

Cf. Smit (1991: 52).

students is real and has been actualised in many instances and should be reason enough to take the continued existence of this course as a matter of serious concern.

The inherent potential of an arts degree, especially a liberal arts degree as promoted by Khoapa (1993: 46-48, 71), lies in the stimulation of students towards 'self-discovery, critical thinking and exploration of values'.<sup>39</sup> However, in a tertiary educational situation where a 'market-place philosophy' reigns, there is no room for shared expectations and values to be incorporated into educational curricula. The then rector of the University of Fort Hare and current national minister of Education, prof Sibusizo Bengu (1993: 4) warned that an (exclusively) employment-oriented tertiary education is 'naive and short-sighted'.

Khoapa (1993: 47, 48) encourages and promotes the presence of, among many other possible elements<sup>40</sup> in the arts degree, also 'values'. It is clear that Biblical Studies as course, at least potentially, incorporates 'values' and some of the other elements referred to by Khoapa, and can thus make a valuable contribution to the arts degree.<sup>41</sup> This will, however, happen only when Biblical Studies departs from its often traditional direction of emphasising 'facts' to a position where it incorporates (biblical) values and norms relevant to society.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Moral values in Arts curricula

The call for rediscovering the place and role of values in educational curricula is not heard only in South Africa. Wiggen (1991: 257) highlights the danger of viewing people as mere economical beings and quotes the Japanese industrialists, saying:

'What we need is good people; we can make anyone an engineer'.

##### 4.1 Biblical Studies and values

Already in the late eighteenth century Schleiermacher defended the need to teach theology at University level on the basis of its contribution to the education of leaders who will 'serve the needs of the public'. (Lategan 1993: 29)

Smit (1991: 56-58) describes briefly how the Bible shaped Western consciousness,<sup>43</sup> arguing that

... the Bible will influence the ethos, the moral world, of a society to the extent that it teaches people to see and it teaches them to speak'.

However, this influence varies according to the different situations and needs of people and socio-historical circumstances. Smit sees the Bible capable of influencing people in a new South Africa, i.e. of having a formative role on people if communities are to exist or come into existence that are powerful enough to influence the public ethos in the new South Africa.<sup>44</sup>

39 On a theological level, Wiggen (1991: 254, 257) proposes to view a person not only as 'homo economicus', but rather as 'imago dei'. Through an Freirean 'conscientisation', people can re-evaluate their own value and thus also 'find worth within the community'.

40 Some of which, e.g. 'abstract logical thinking and critical analysis' could suggest a modernist paradigm in Khoapa's thoughts. Other aspects and skills which Khoapa would incorporate in an Arts degree, includes: 'literacy, writing, reading, speaking; understanding numerical data; historical consciousness; science; art; international and multicultural experiences; and study in depth'.

41 Cf. section below on values.

42 Cf. Vosloo (1995: 186)

43 He quotes Burnham who argues that in a certain sense 'most of western literature is midrashic commentary' on the Bible. (Smit 1991: 57, 58)

44 Smit warns that people might advocate a formative role for Biblical Studies for selfish reasons (career security, social power and influence, or to reestablish the credibility of the 'servant' (=Bible) of Apartheid).

In the new political context the concerns of South African education policy makers for curricula and course structures that will alleviate the need for human resources on business, science and technology levels cannot be dismissed.<sup>45</sup> The accompanying need for 'corrective action' as far as members of poor and marginalised societies are concerned, have to be addressed urgently.<sup>46</sup> However,

'... science on its own, will not and cannot cure all the ills of the world' (Gourley 1994: 7) and because

'(u)niversities, like all other educational institutions, are important instruments of social engineering' (Bengu 1993: 4),<sup>47</sup>

the task of universities cannot be seen to lie merely on the level of training, education and equipping for vocations. Universities have the responsibility

'... to nurture and develop talent from all sections of society in line with a new social paradigm'. (Bengu 1993: 4)

Bengu (1993: 4) sees in an arts degree the possibility to contribute to the 'reduction' and one can add, hopefully elimination, 'of inter-group conflict' and the creation of 'a certain degree of social and political stability'.

Gourley (1994: 7) goes so far as to say that there are no more 'relevant' aspect in the student's curriculum than the

'... ethics of their particular professions and career choices ...'

Without bringing values into play, the possibility of effecting real and sustainable change in the politically and constitutional democratic South Africa, will be severely curtailed or even made impossible. The challenge is to have the 'human face of our society' restored. In this the Humanities, unlike the indirect influences at work in Theology and Education faculties,<sup>48</sup> has a direct impact on society by addressing the full nature of human life in all its manifestations.<sup>49</sup> (Lategan 1993: 31)

However, it can also be because they believe - and experienced - the biblical message to be 'good, wholesome, liberating, humanizing good news' for society. (1991:63-65)

Cf. also Conradie (1993: 24-49) who takes his cue from the American situation to argue for a 'public theology', and De Gruchy (1993: 57-73) who refer to Niebuhr's views in order to argue for theology as public discourse in South Africa but with its primary concern being that of social justice.

45 Gourley (1994: 7) puts it in this way: there is no problem with what science is, as long as one also realises what science is not. Wiggen (1991: 258) argues that industry's needs must be met, but that

'specialists will be more effective if they have a broader understanding of the context in which they operate'.

46 Cf. Bengu (1993: 4-6) for a brief summary regarding the inequalities and 'distortions' created by Apartheid in South Africa regarding students trained for certain occupations according to race, the financing of Historical White Universities as opposed to Historical Black Universities, etc.

47 This should not be read as an unconditional promotion of 'social engineering' with its potential and real dangerous consequences. The aim is merely to emphasise what Lategan (1993: 34) in quoting Bloom also refers to: that all educational systems want to achieve a 'moral goal', i.e. 'to produce a certain kind of human being'.

For a long time during the age of rationalism and positivism, however, the presence of values in the Humanities was viewed negatively; now it has become a 'focal point'. Cf. Vosloo (1990: 44) quoting Barr, Kinghorn and Van Huyssteen, calling for 'ethical relevance'.

48 I.e. through the ministers- or teachers-in-training.

49 This is assisted by the breaking down of disciplinary barriers, between natural science and humanities, theology and humanities, and the religious context of life in Africa.

The equipping of people through Biblical Studies includes the ability to read the Bible in a responsible way. (Vosloo 1990: 43, referring to Kinghorn)

The creation and development of new people, as it were, takes place not primarily in a scientific and technocratic environment.<sup>50</sup> Rather, in interpersonal relationships and in a context of mutual concern and caring, humanist values can be extolled and nurtured. These contexts inevitably involves morality, which need to be taught implicitly but also explicitly. Human development, the greatest need of South Africa cannot and will not take place in a moral or value vacuum. (Wiggen 1991: 259)

The 'ethical formative' value of Biblical Studies in a democratic South Africa with its large Christian constituency cannot be discounted:

'Biblical Studies is a subject of undeniable formative value'. (Higgs 1984: 50)

The formative value of Biblical Studies, while avoiding narrow and rigid 'ethical systemising' will assist in the inculcation of values especially among the 'lost generation' or adolescent youth of South Africa.<sup>51</sup>

Naturally the 'articulation' and inculcation' of values is never neutral or does not happen outside the arena where power is wielded. Badenhorst (1992: 10) and Kriel (1992: 15) proposes group-centered value education, to avoid conflict between members of different groups espousing different values. In addition children at school will then learn to appreciate values, its background and its functioning in society.

Deist (1990: 6-15) argues that Biblical Studies can be instrumental in restoring the 'spiritual value of meaning' in people in South Africa, robbed of it by the positivist and modernist world views which have also dominated in Biblical Studies curricula.

#### 4.2 Multiplicity of values is no excuse for 'no values'

In a recent article Badenhorst (1992: 1-12) argues for the need for teaching values in the educational curricula of South Africa. His views on cultures and values - from a Calvinist Reformed approach and in particular the strong 'ethnic' slant<sup>52</sup> he adds to it - and especially the rationalization of subjects he forecasts, leads him to conclude that Biblical Studies as an examinable subject does not deserve room in the multi-ethnic educational scenario of South Africa. Yet, biblical values are necessary and 'will ... not only remain, but will become more important'.<sup>53</sup> These values have to be 'articulated ... so that they will be of practical value for everyday life'.

50 Krüger (1994: 10) states that

'A new nation must be built on sound moral and spiritual values'.

This is to be seen in balance with

'the need for technological and economical advance so urgently needed'.

Krüger (1994: 11) also states that with the exception of Angola and Mozambique, all sub-Saharan countries incorporate religion in their school curricula.

51 Cf. Higgs (1984: 45-55); Van Huyssteen (1984: 8-20); Deist (1990: 6-15); Vosloo (1990: 42, 44); Mitchell (1992: 42-50).

52 Regardless of his statement to the contrary, e.g. Badenhorst (1992: 7)

'This will necessitate that less emphasis is placed on ethnic values'.

it is clear that the ethnic basis of values dominate Badenhorst's thinking. (Cf. pp. 3, 7, 9; and the response by Kriel 1992: 13, 14. Kriel, however, misunderstands Badenhorst view on the inextricable mutual informative nature of 'ethnicity' and 'values'.)

Interestingly but also causing confusion, Badenhorst (1992: 4-7) defines the values of traditional black communities according to specific socio-religious concepts (ancestral cult, magical powers), but those of Afrikaner and English speaking communities more loosely in terms of social concepts like individualism, sense of identity, economic progress, etc. Finally, Kriel (1992: 14) challenges the tenability of having these groups as 'cultural archetypes'.

53 The 'ethnic' argument still dominates:

Lategan (1993: 34) in his understanding of religions as 'value systems', and thus rich in values, emphasise the need for dialogue to examine and discuss the values of particular traditions. This will help to determine the relevance and 'usefulness' of particular values for our specific context(s).

At the tertiary level, Gourley (1994: 7) believes that the multiplicity and diversity of 'cultures, values and religions' should not deter universities from making a contribution to the articulation of values. The dangers of being 'politically incorrect' and the possibility of giving offense are dwarfed by possible effects of avoiding or being silent on the issue of values.

Moulder (1992: 23) argues that instead of viewing the many cultures in South Africa as a stumbling block in 'moral education', it can be seen as reason for rejoicing. The multi-cultural environment of South Africa simultaneously provides for 'many different perspectives on value problems', and shows the implausibility and impossibility of coming up with 'dogmatic answers' to value questions in stead of rather encouraging creative solutions.

As cultures are always dynamic, changing and adapting to new situations, cultures cannot be 'threatened', but 'it can only be enriched, by contact with other cultures'. (Kriel 1992: 15)

On a related but different level, Van der Ven (1994: 244-260) reasons that both the monoreligious (either exclusivist or inclusivist) and the multireligious (pluralist) approaches have little possibility of conveying religious values in interreligious dialogue. The former operates with an imperialist notion of approaching all religions from the perspective of one's own religion as being superior, and the latter of diminishing religion into vague philosophical or psychological dimensions of human life.<sup>54</sup> Interreligious dialogue, however, retains the 'reciprocal auto- and allo-interpretation of one's own and the other religion'. (Van der Ven 1994: 251-253)

The interreligious approach contribute to 'mutual understanding, tolerance and respect' and also imply 'self-reflectivity and self-criticism'. Biblical Studies can indeed be helpful in restoring the sense or 'awareness of the sacred', enabling people to interpret religious symbols as signifying meaning in the universe. (Deist 1990: 6)

### 4.3 Role of the Bible (in the new South Africa)

Müller (1995: 131) argues for urgent research on the popularity of Biblical Studies among university students,<sup>55</sup> because he envisages that the subject can and indeed do make an important contribution to development and the RDP in South Africa. However, the full potential of Biblical Studies still needs to be unlocked and developed, especially as (sub-Saharan) Africa is fast becoming the 'new centre of gravity of Christianity'. (Pobee 1989: 4)

In terms of reconciling people divided and alienated from one another by Apartheid, Deist perceives a role for Biblical Studies in aligning with another the 'different, conflicting forms of consciousness' which are often the reason for viewing 'differences' as

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'It is on these values that the different ethnic groups may find one another and be able to co-exist in peace'. (Badenhorst 1992: 10)

54 Van der Ven (1994: 252) refers to the remarks of Eliade. Cf. also Deist (1990: 6-15). Krüger (1994: 3) decries both the 'monochrome sameness and identity of "oneness"' and the 'separatist non-relationality of religious apartheid'. However, his later comments seems to advocate indeed such a religious 'continuum' on a trans or meta level. (Krüger 1994: 9)

55 In contrast, Mitchell (1993: 2) quotes Kili (1988) on the 'lukewarm or indifferent attitude' to Biblical Studies found in a rather limited survey of 212 school children in the former Ciskei.

'insurmountable obstacles' and inevitably then lead to 'policies aimed at reinforcing existing distance'. Deist refers to the contrasting western, idealist-theoretical and African, pragmatic-practical epistemologies and argues that

'Biblical Studies, dealing as it does with the Bible, which is the religious 'instruction book' for 80% or more of all South Africans, must help heal this scar'. Deist (1991: 41)

In 1993 (the current) president Nelson Mandela addressed the Free Ethiopian Church of South Africa, and in his speech issued a challenge to the broader church in South Africa regarding her future role. Mandela stressed the role that the church and prominent figures within the church played in dismantling Apartheid, saying

'... individual Christians have been the backbone of the campaign for accelerated and thoroughgoing transformation in South Africa'. (Mandela 1993: 20)

Mandela (1993: 21) warns about the notion that the church should retreat to ecclesial matters, when it was the church that acted as the 'midwife' when democracy was born in South Africa: the church has the role and responsibility of 'nurturing' this new-born democracy. This task relates to many aspects of social life, the church literally becoming the conscience of society, and this includes the need to create a 'culture of tolerance' and the enhancement of the 'moral fibre of society'.<sup>56</sup> But this task is accomplished through the values and norms promoted by the church, the 'ministry of values': values and norms derived from (in the case of the Christian church) the church's foundational document: the Bible.<sup>57</sup>

Not only morals as broad guidelines for responsible behaviour are important in the democratic SA, but especially the reconciliation of people who are not only from a variety of diverse cultures, groups and persuasions, but who have become accustomed to the separateness of Apartheid and even learned to revel in it. The biblical views on reconciliation holds a powerful message for South Africa.<sup>58</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

An attempt has been made to argue for the - at least potential - benefit(s) which Biblical Studies courses can provide within the broader Arts, or Humanities and Social Sciences curricula. The argument is set against the backdrop of the uneasiness and criticisms which is levelled at the offering of Biblical Studies and also other religion-courses in the South African educational system.

However, in order to adequately address the position of Biblical Studies in educational curricula it is necessary to take two other aspects into consideration: our African context and the importance of hermeneutics - these two concerns will be discussed in the second part of this study.<sup>59</sup>

56 Issues of justice (Mandela for example referred to. the need for real changes, the legacy of Apartheid, national reconciliation based on confession and restitution, violence, economic justice and educational concerns) cannot and should not be separated from moral values; however, the latter, broader concept is the point of discussion here.

57 Indeed, the teaching of Biblical or Religious Studies in schools will accentuate the 'social dimension' of religion. (Lategan 1993: 34)

58 Cf. Summers' views (1992: 21-33) on the contribution of Religious Education to reconciliation (by emphasizing respect, tolerance, importance of inter-personal relationships, and God's demands for justice and righteousness). Also, Goliath (1984: 34); Martin's study (1981) of Paul is called Reconciliation.

59 A consolidated list of works consulted is included in the second part.