

BIBLICAL STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA? THE CASE FOR HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract

The question of the place of Biblical Studies in South Africa is asked against the background of the common perception that religion and what goes along with it, is being devalued in the new South Africa. In a first part of the argument on whether one could plausibly claim any worth to be derived from offering Biblical Studies in South African educational institutions, the contribution it can make to the promotion of moral values was pointed out. The powerful and positive role which the Bible can play in post-Apartheid South Africa can nevertheless not be adequately addressed without proper attention to the African context, on the one hand, and the importance of hermeneutics in the appropriation of the Bible. To this our focus will now turn.

1. The African Context

This is not the place to argue for the position and role of religion in human life, but a word in this regard may be helpful to the general argument here. Krüger (1993: 10, 13) states simply:

'To be human is to be religious'.¹

This statement is nowhere more true than in Africa, including South Africa.² Although being part of a diverse and complex, and in many ways secular, society many people in South Africa live according to a religiously informed perspective and world view.

A touchy issue is the role of returned exiles to all, including the academic, spheres of life in South Africa. Without wanting to question the identity, integrity or credentials of those who returned or belittle their major contributions, the question is simply to what extent the exiles are still in touch with grassroots communities. Especially expatriates who have grown accustomed to the secularised³ and vastly different religious scenarios or lack of it abroad, seem to have little comprehension of the nature of religious commitment of especially grassroots communities.⁴ The divide between the 'intelligentsia' and especially the political

1 Krüger (1993: 10, 13; 1995: 5, 6) furthermore stresses the African origin of homo sapiens, calling Africa the 'cradle' of both the human species and of religion.

2 Among the vast amount of literature on this, e.g. Lategan (1993: 28, 32) refers to the 'incurable religiosity' of Africa, where religion 'still exerts considerable influence'; Turner (1980: 3, 4) calls South Africa a 'most religious country'; Lombard (1995: 102) refers to the 'pervasive public reality of religion in Africa'; Prozesky (1992: 6) reminds about secularism's influence but adds that 'South Africans are still a comparatively religious people'.

3 Perhaps less pervasive, but secularism is of course a reality in Africa as well. (Idowu 1972: 200, 201)

4 The argument is not that the devotional-confessional commitment should remain unquestioned, informed as it is so often by different kinds of ideologies ranging from (missionary created) fundamentalism through political subservience to transcendent and apocalyptic concepts of God and religion.

It is, however, questionable not to take the religious aspects and nature of life of people into consideration, and even more questionable to disregard and eventually discard religion in toto for its potentially and, in South Africa, actual and marked harmful influences.

However, Lategan (1993: 30) referring to Harvey and Farley, reasons that secularism is not the only or most important cause for the 'marginalisation' of theology'. The fragmented nature of the theological curriculum, specialisation in the sub-field of theology and clash in interests of different schools and

leaders of and people of South Africa is real:⁵ the neglect of the popular religious consciousness is a good example of this.

Much of the perceived negative sentiment against Christianity in general and the Bible in particular, which is found amongst returned exiles and popular leaders can probably be explained by the negative role and influence of Christianity, especially since the days of Colonialism. (Onwu 1984/5: 39; West 1993b: 137)

However, the enduring power of the Christian gospel also has to be acknowledged,⁶ especially regarding the foundational nature of Scripture in the whole exercise.⁷ There is no dispute about the centrality and pervasiveness of Christianity and especially the importance of the Bible on the African continent and in South Africa in particular.⁸ Pobee (1987: 31) calls the Bible the 'foundation document' of the church and pleads that African Theology should be rooted in it.⁹ According to West (1995: 1) the Bible is 'liberatory' and

'... plays a central role in the lives of many, particularly the poor and marginalized. The Bible is a symbol of the presence of the God of life with them'.¹⁰

Schoonhoven (1989: 3) quoting J Mboguri, says the Bible can be called 'the Book of Africa', due to the central place it occupies in African churches, schools and homes. This central position is due to positive and negative reasons: ranging from the Book in which the 'notion of human dignity was discovered' in Africa, to being one of the few or even only book in some African homes.¹¹

The role of the Bible in the lives of people is not limited to an informative one, or one of religious instruction. Rather, the role of the Bible for people in the South African context is a (world-) creative one, which may prove to be settling or unsettling, confirming or challenging.¹² In the context of the interpretation of the Bible, West (1993b: 134; 1995: 3) remarks

'Ours is a context in which biblical interpretations do matter; they do shape our world', and

'... biblical interpretations have life and death consequences; they shape the type of response the state, the church, and ordinary people make to particular social realities.'

professional equipping should also be blamed. Clines (1993: 74) argues that the fragmentation of the last decades took place 'in the name of contextualization'.

5 Cf. Mphahlele (1994: 124, 125) calling the denial of a divine existence among the 'intelligentsia' and others 'fashionable', i.e. politically correct.

6 Mandela (1993; cf. below) carefully refraining from indicating the church as a liberating agent in the South Africa struggle for freedom, does acknowledge the role of individual Christians: the 'backbone' of the struggle.

7 Hartin (1988: 2, 3) quoting Schillebeeckx, refers to the Bible as the 'Magna Carta' of Christianity.

8 For the impact of Africa on the Bible, cf. West (1993b: 137, 138). By no means is it suggested that there exists general agreement on the interpretation of the Bible. (De Gruchy 1995: 72)

9 Cf. Pauw (1994: 21, 22).

10 My emphasis. West supports this claim with reference to two recent grassroots studies by Cochrane (1991) and Philpott (1993).

Cf. also Smith, quoted in Schoonhoven (1989: 1, 5). Schoonhoven evaluates the role of the Bible in Africa according to articles published in some journals of theology and/or religion in Africa.

11 Idowu (1972: 199, 200) describes how and why the Bible is often received as an 'unearthly Book' in Africa.

12 The 'constructive' role of the Bible is attended to below; for the 'negative' regulative role of the Bible, cf. Jobling (1993: 104) and Clines (1993: 78) referring to the Bible as 'tool for social control', and as a 'source for uniformity'.

This dual role is present in religion as well; cf. Houlden (1989: 408) who refers to religion as a 'corrupter' as well as 'liberator'.

However, tension also exist between the biblical world view and the African one¹³ and therefore one should be on guard against over-simplified and idealised positions on the similarity between the Biblical and African world and theological concerns in the Bible and in Africa. However, it cannot be denied that

'African theology, in its openness to story and myth, political involvement and life-encompassing culture, offers a fruitful terrain for socio-historical and cultural analysis of the Biblical narrative, and ideology critique of its use and reception.' (Lombard 1995: 105)¹⁴

Mitchell (1993: 5) contends that the 'academic study of the Bible' can greatly benefit from 'interaction with the religions of Africa'; perhaps one should rather say: the potential for deriving mutual benefits from an encounter between African religions and the Bible is very real.

2. A question of hermeneutics!

The nature of the theological enterprise is hermeneutical, by which is meant that theology is based upon a search for understanding and therefore in need of interpretation. (Lombard 1995: 104)¹⁵ Many theologians in South Africa will agree with West¹⁶ that the most serious issue surrounding the Bible in this country is hermeneutical in nature,¹⁷ an ever 'deepening interpretive crisis', or

'... a cry to reread the Bible in such a way as to discover the God of life in the midst of death'. (West 1995: 3)

This should not be considered a strange remark in South Africa where, in biblical studies the emphasis has been very much on hermeneutics: interpretive theory and method.¹⁸ Of course hermeneutical responsibility and accountability is of extreme importance in the reading of ancient and 'classical' texts, especially when it is the foundational document of a religion. The question is whether hermeneutics can legitimately be seen to provide 'the answers', or at least some of them.¹⁹ Three aspects of hermeneutics can be mentioned here.

Ethics of Interpretation (or Ideology)

The 'ethics' of interpretation²⁰ is a most serious and important aspect in hermeneutics in South Africa: the need to 'come clean' on one's perspective. The modernist and positivist

13 Cf. Schoonhoven (1989: 1-49; esp. 3-5). The question on how the Bible and the African context interacts with one another dominates in Schoonhoven's discussion.

For some (different) perspectives on the relationship between African Traditional Religions and the Bible, cf. Renju (1980: 113-118), Tienou (1983: 89-101), Horton (1984: 391-436), Mbiti (1986), and Gehman (1989).

14 Cf. Pauw (1994: 18-20) who argues that the African context should not be isolated from 'rest of the Christian world'. The African Christian context is in any case one of 'ecclesial pluralism'.

15 Not only the theological enterprise, but according to Gadamer human life is in an ontological sense based on understanding; cf. Schneiders (1991: 158, 159)

'To be in the world as human is precisely to understand'.

16 Cf. above.

17 Cf. Schoonhoven (1989: 12-18).

18 This quest for methodology is criticised and defended in various ways. For the New Testament, cf. e.g. Combrink (1986), De Viliers (1989), Draper (1991), Du Toit (1994), Lategan (1984a, 1988), Malherbe (1992), Vorster (1994), West (1991).

19 Pobeë (1989: 13) quotes De Gruchy in saying that viewing theology as hermeneutical ('the retrieving of the tradition in the present') will 'reconcile' the disparate position of disciplines within theology. In this effort, Rousseau (1988) pleads for a 'multi-dimensional approach'.

The way of reading the Bible will be determinative for its role (perceived and real) in a Democratic South Africa.

20 E.g. Botha (1992), Schüssler-Fiorenza (1988). Cf. also the plea for a responsible hermeneutic made by Lundin, Thiselton & Walhout (1985).

notion of simply representing the facts is once and for all to be discarded for the fantasy it is,²¹ while due recognition is given to the situatedness of the reader-interpreter.²²

However, the particular and specific approach of a given interpreter should not be seen as necessarily detrimental: the ability to 'recover and claim' a specific perspective can be illuminating and liberating.²³ The identification and acknowledgement of a specific approach allows for the one following the approach to be self-critical, as well as for others to enter into dialogue with the former. In the curriculum development and teaching of Biblical Studies the need for perspectival accountability will require a new look at the content of the courses on offer, as well as the perspective from which it is offered.²⁴

Reader

The emphasis on the perspectival accountability of the interpreter can be understood in the light of the history of abuse of the power of religion in South Africa,²⁵ but also in view of the new emphasis on the role of the reader in the interpretive process: not only an important role, but a determining and constructive one.²⁶ Emphasising the reader's role in interpretation²⁷ implies saying our farewells to the one-sided emphasis on historical and structuralist modes of investigation, not least because of the danger of getting trapped in the worlds behind or in the text.

Yet the interpreter or reader has to be careful: he or she can equally get trapped namely in an romanticised, allegorised and over-subjective emphasis on readers having no need of the text neither of the text's originating context.²⁸ The interpretive quest is indeed one of

'communicating with the text, forcing the text to speak with the audience in front of the text'. (Lombard 1995: 104, 105)

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- 21 Cf. West (1993a: 7) who stresses the 'contextual nature of all biblical interpretation', and Schüssler-Fiorenza (1989: 5) who calls for the deconstruction of 'the rhetoric of value-neutrality, disinterestedness, and scientific positivism'.
- 22 Imasogie (1985: 56) views the theologian's awareness of six 'givens', which 'condition his (sic!) theological activities and thought', of utmost importance for contextualisation. The six aspects are: the theologian's 'existential experience of Christ; church tradition; own imaginative insights; intuitive reactions to the ideas of others; self-understanding in his (sic!) worldview; and, cultural background', the latter which determines one's 'thought-pattern' and experience of 'reality and language'.
- 23 Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza (1989: 7). West (1993b: 144) refers to the 'partiality of particularity', and also (1993: 2-4) argues that 'engagement', 'criticality' and 'contextuality' has a threefold reciprocal relationship and as such are 'core concepts' in teaching and learning Biblical Studies. On the need for the ethical accountability of white, male exegetes, cf. Patte & Phillips (1991: 7-28), Schüssler-Fiorenza (1989: 15).
- 24 For the importance of the hermeneutic of suspicion and ideology critique, cf. e.g. Schüssler-Fiorenza (1989: 18) and Lombard (1995: 104-105). Clines (1993: 86) says:
'... 'ideology' is going to be the catchword of the 1990s in biblical criticism...'
Patte & Phillips (1991: 7-28; esp. 22, 25, 26) warns against the particularly oppressive nature of the white, male interpretive perspective, and how this perspective achieved domination in biblical studies by suppressing the contributions outside of this perspective.
- 25 For the role of the Bible in 'the struggle for power', especially as it functions in contextual theologies, cf. De Villiers (1993: 1-28).
- 26 Cf. e.g. Houlden (1989: 407); Ntshah (1990: 249); and Goldingay (1993: 5-10). This can be radicalised as in Clines (1993: 78-82) who argues for a pragmatic 'end-user theory of interpretation'.
- 27 Indeed, realising the rhetorical nature and power of the text leads Vorster (1994a, 1994b) to emphasise the value of the 'epistemic nature of rhetoric'.
- 28 It is probably within this context that the pendulum's swinging back to the concerns of the 'worlds behind and in/of the text', could be understood.

The dialogue between the reader and the text with all their respective baggage²⁹ constitutes the continuing contextualisation process, what West (1993a: 6) calls a 'contextual thrust' which provides a way of integrating 'engagement and critical distance'.

To put it in another way: the 'necessity of particularity' of the reader constitutes, along with the 'partiality' implied in it, the important condition of integrity, without which contextualisation is not possible. (West 1993b: 144)

Contextualisation: 'Let Africa speak ...'

'... 'the Bible itself is an interpreting text', i.e. the Bible gives a succession of interpretations of revelational data' (Schoonhoven 1989: 13).

The Bible sets the example in that it is already the interpretation of revelatory experiences by early believers, and thus in need of ever being interpreted. The need for reinterpretation or contextualisation finds its origin in the continuing changing contexts of situations people find themselves in.³⁰ Thus,

'... an African interpretation of the Bible has to be considered not only legitimate, but even necessary'. (Schoonhoven 1989: 13; cf. 43, quoting Kato).

Deist argues that in the case of Biblical Studies, we have a subject which is quite capable of reconciling different people and different forms of consciousness. Biblical Studies can be taught without an imposing of either Western or African thought forms on it, but opting for a middle road between the two. Deist intends to merge these different world views by the following:

'... letting the various epistemologies ... function ... as complementary 'poles' ... in the sense of ... complementarity'

'... let the differing views interact in a deconstructive manner'

'Instead of concentrating on the detailed contents of the Bible we should rather focus on problem areas in our day to day living'. (Deist 1991: 45-48)³¹

In teaching Biblical Studies in the context of the Humanities the focus should be on developing the art of understanding and the skills of interpretation - this would presuppose hermeneutical consciousness on 3 levels: communication, history, existence itself (Lategan 1993: 34)³²

29 In the case of the text, interpreters frequently fail to come to terms with the *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Thompson 1993: 248-272) of the interpretation of biblical texts. Traditions governing texts can be very pervasive, dominant and determinative, which results in 'qualifying and transforming' the meaning of a text. (Schneiders 1991: 175)

30 Apart from these two common aspects of contextualisation, i.e. the context of production of the text, and the present context of the reader, West (1993a: 7-11) stresses the importance of two other senses of contextualisation: 'the contextual nature of all interpretation', and the commitment to read the Bible from a specific perspective, e.g. the option for the poor. Cf. also Hartin (1988: 2, 3).

31 Pauw (1994: 19, 20) similarly argues for dealing with contemporary issues in light of the Bible: religious, political, economic, developmental, etc. Cf. also Onwu (1984/5: 35-46).

Idowu (1972) and Kealy (1976) for example, explicitly attempts to do justice to both the 'content' of the Bible and relating it to current issues.

32 Cf. Cox (1993) in response to Banana's (1993) call to 'rewrite the Bible': Cox pleads rather to recontextualise the Bible through hermeneutical efforts.

However, Spangenberg (1995: 1-10) believes attention to 'paradigm shifts' in biblical studies, specifically that the 'Bible is the product of a long process of origination' (7) obviates the need for rewriting it: this realisation will also enable people to 'live a meaningful life in a country with a diversity of cultures and religions'. How the latter follows on the former is not clear!

3. Conclusion (The way forward ...)

South Africa, for everything else that can be said of it (ranging from violence to natural beauty?), is a deeply religious country.³³ The attempt to ward off religion from the public sphere of life, especially the educational, is hopefully not seriously considered. Further, to deny a dominant religious overtone, *viz* Christianity, in South Africa will be as disastrous as denying the importance of religion. Fundamentalist groupings, especially those of Christian persuasion, thrive on 'life-and-death' apocalyptic scenarios - the USA with their First Amendment experienced this in a dramatic way during the last two years - and will be quick to fill an artificially created gap.³⁴

On the other hand, to overemphasise Christianity by idolizing and absolutising it, that is to rank it as superior to all other religious traditions smacks of intolerance and religious imperialism and will be equally harmful to religions and the people of South Africa in general. Stating the case of the retention of Biblical Studies in a revamped format regarding curricula and syllabi does not negate this statement, but attempts to address the specific context of South Africa.

1. The majority of problems in the world and in South Africa seems to lie on the intersubjective level or level of human interaction: major financial input and sheer political will are not going to solve South Africa's problems. These problems cannot be addressed by a technocratic revolution or financial adequacy or prosperity (alone), as was shown in the North Atlantic world. 'Scientism' is not the cure for the ailments of the world. (Deist 1990: 9)
2. In South Africa one cannot wish Christianity, its adherents or its influence away. Prozesky (1992: 14) argues that 'Christians will affect the (South African, JP) future more than any other religious faith'. Add to this the statement of Clines (1993: 76) that the Bible is 'an item of common cultural property', and it would mean that the course Biblical Studies cannot merely be done away with, but instead should be transformed into a course with a (more) transparent positive value for the society. Pobe (1989: 10) states categorically

'... developing African theologians especially in biblical studies, is a key to the future of a well founded African theological education'.

To merely replace Biblical Studies by opting for an 'as-inclusive-as-possible' Religious Studies approach will perhaps be politically correct and satisfying a (vague?) pluralist conception but will not be satisfactory for any particular religious persuasion (which will leave many things unsaid) or religions in general (since all are virtually the same, what reasons exist for dialogue?).

However, the perceived difficulty especially at school level in teaching a class on Biblical Studies to children of different religions³⁵ - difficult both for teacher and student - may not be insurmountable. Also, the notion that Biblical Studies with 'comparative religion' as part of the course will radically alter the 'character' of subject (Vosloo 1990: 41, also referring to Domeris) may reflect a debatable notion on the content and mode of teaching the course.

33 Cf. above! In how many countries would a Joe Slovo and Chris Hani as prominent communists get a religious (and Christian at that!) funeral?

34 This danger is identified by Lategan: if theological concerns are not given its rightful due in the educational framework, it might open the door to 'imported fundamentalist theologies'. (Lategan 1993: 32)

35 As optional examination subject, the choice to follow the course lies before the student!

Recently Vosloo (1995: 186) changed his views by claiming that Biblical Studies is to include

'basic biblical knowledge, explanation of the phenomenon of religion, other religions in the country, relationship between Bible and everyday life, the ethical applications of the Bible, and the inter-action between religion and socio-economical conditions, religion and political structures, religion and art in all its varieties.'

Vosloo suggests that the course then be called 'Biblical and Religious Studies'.

An aggressive and confrontational approach in Biblical Studies cannot be tolerated and is to be avoided. Du Toit (1991: 27-38; esp. 31, 32) briefly outlines the cultural domination and imperialist designs of Christianity which is often based on a presupposed superiority which led to the medieval Crusades and the later world missionary efforts.³⁶

3. A few constructive proposals regarding Biblical Studies in the future curricula of South Africa education is in order.³⁷

3.1 *The 'mode' of discourse*

Non-confessional: the real danger exists that Biblical Studies are offered within the confines of a narrow confessional-devotional approach;³⁸ there is no room for evangelization in the classroom, much less for denominationalism.³⁹ Indeed, Lategan (1993: 33) reasons that the biggest problem in the relative low influence of theology in society and at University is due to the 'mode' of teaching: as a teacher of Biblical Studies one is not to become devotional or confessional.

However, Markham (1991: 265, 267) analysing the results of a survey in Exeter, England among students stresses the 'relevancy of their study for their faith' as one of the 'primary concerns' and even an 'expectancy' of students in religion and theology. It is 'unrealistic' and rationalistic to expect a purely detached approach to the subject.⁴⁰ West (1993a: 2-4) argues that 'engagement' is 'not contrary to 'critical understanding', but a component of it'.

The question will be how to relate the informative and analytical-synthetical study of the Bible to its societal relevance and influence.⁴¹

Style of teaching: the need for a teaching style characterised by dialogue and interaction has to be emphasised. (Hunter 1992; Lategan 1993: 33; Coetzee 1994) This

36 One needs to reread the Bible in its context, which will relativise or at least put some of the radical viewpoints into perspective, cf. e.g. Stendahl's remarks on Paul's exclusive language as love-language; the notions of universal salvation in Paul (Soards 1987: 185, 186)

37 The remarks of Lategan (1990: 1-11) on 'Religious Education' curricula can be helpful for an in-depth look at Biblical Studies curricula for schools.

38 Lategan (1993: 33) warns of the danger in teaching theology in the schools in 'first audience discourse', i.e. 'the language of the church'. This often leads to perceptions of irrelevancy and inadequate addressing of societal needs.

39 Vosloo (1990: 44) calls for 'ethical relevancy', an 'involvedness' regarding 'patterns of rational thought, religious beliefs and life-values' among the teachers of Biblical Studies in the schools.

40 Goliath (1984: 35, 36) argues that the 'faith-dynamic' in Biblical Studies have to be taken into consideration. In so far as devotionalist or even fundamentalist attitudes are encountered,

'(e)very university teacher in Theology has a moral obligation to handle such (fundamentalist, JP) students with great sensitivity'. (Markham 1991: 266)

41 Cf. the suggestions made by West (1993a: 1-17). The title of Kealy's article *The irrelevance of the Bible*, belies his conclusion. (Kealy 1976: 348-354)

would mean avoiding 'transmission teaching'⁴² as Mitchell (1992) calls it. Especially when one considers the inevitable inclusion of values in the teaching of Biblical Studies, it becomes imperative that the style of teaching should not be one of imparting knowledge, but one of dialogue: dialogue between the values of the Biblical texts and modern society, the values of teacher and student, etc.

The dialogical nature should explicitly take the African context into consideration. The exclusivist stranglehold of the North European, American and Western models of reading and understanding the Bible has to be broken, and the various voices of Africa must be allowed to become involved in the debate on the understanding of the Bible.⁴³ (Lombard 1995: 113, quoting Schreiter 1991; Pobee 1985: 26, 27)

Schneiders: epistemological and existential nature of human understanding ???

Creatively: Van Huyssteen (1984: 13) argues that any teacher of Biblical Studies is involved in a creative act, creative thought in 'juggling' concerns of faith with that of the biblical sciences.

Du Plessis (1990: 28-37) in somewhat different way also makes a plea for creativity in teaching Biblical Studies, which for him is based on a theological rationale: creativity is the basis of the Bible, rooted as it is in humility, love and sacrifice. Especially with the potential 'religious diversity in the classroom', Mitchell (1993: 5) thinks creativity might also enable mutually enriching experiences. Creativity could be seen in terms of 'bisociation', according to Van Heerden (1993: 339-350), and then be 'paradigmatic' for both the exegesis of texts and the 'application' thereof in a pluralist society.

Van Huyssteen (1984: 19-20) pleads for a legitimate epistemology for Biblical Studies, focussing on engagement, criticality, creativeness.⁴⁴

3.2 *Content*

Vosloo (1990: 45) argues that less emphasis should be given to traditional questions in favour of current concerns.⁴⁵ There is indeed a need for the 'basic data' regarding Biblical Studies

'on which scholarship is built and is taken for granted by lecturers or seen as too elementary for inclusion in the course',

which also includes 'semi-technical terms', e.g.. Pentateuch, patriarchs, atonement, and platonic. (Markham 1991: 267) In South Africa this is of special concern with the effects of Apartheid's biased Christian National Education and 'Bantu education' still lingering on!

However, courses in Biblical Studies should incorporate discussions on

42 What Freire calls the 'banking' or consumer model: the shovelling of 'knowledge' from the all-knowing (impartial) teacher to the 'knowledge-less', tabula rasa student in a non-prejudiced way. Cf. Lombard (1995: 113, quoting also Waetjen.

43 Cf. Saayman (1991: 29-44) for the role the missionaries played in South Africa by promoting the Enlightenment worldview accompanied by the subject-object dichotomy especially in education.

44 Cf. West (1993a: 1-17): engagement, criticality, and contextualisation. Cf. Lategan (1984b: 6, 7) on criticality.

Although not discussed here, the role of 'imagination' in theology and religion are becoming more important. The names of Gordon D Kaufmann, Garrett Green and Walter Brueggemann, to name but a few, are often associated with this emphasis.

45 For Vosloo the former consists of 'Introductions', geography, history of revelation and archeology, and the latter of Biblical content, Biblical translation, historical problems, literary approaches, hermeneutics, exposition and topical issues. However, these 'content' of these categories are not so self-evident. Cf. also Vosloo's more accommodating views in 1995 above.

'the explanation of the phenomenon of religion, other religions in the country, relationship between Bible and everyday life, the ethical applications of the Bible, and the inter-action between religion and socio-economical conditions, religion and political structures, religion and art in all its varieties.' (Vosloo 1995: 186)

Many of these issues can be discussed having as starting point the biblical scenario itself. For example, a fruitful discussion on the relationship between religions, the mutual influencing of religions on one another, religion and ideology, religion and nationalism can be engaged in starting from the relationships between various religious groups within the Hellenistic world, Judaism and 'Early Christianity' as reflected in the New Testament.⁴⁶

3.3 *Contextualisation and Africanisation*

The attempts to supplant African thoughts and worldviews with those of the Bible needs to be rooted out in favour of a contextualisation approach. This means that Biblical Studies needs to get 'back to Africa'. (Lategan 1993: 33; Lombard 1995)⁴⁷ This can happen by way of a comparative method: the Bible entering into religious dialogue with other, especially then African religions.⁴⁸

Lombard (1995: 104) asks that 'the North Atlantic captivity and inheritance' of African theology' be acknowledged, especially as seen through 'scientific methods' of Enlightenment and the inadequacy of 'exegetical tools developed in the Western world' which are to be recognised and accounted for. There is a need for a thoroughgoing africanising dialogue with the Bible. (Turner 1980: 14-18)⁴⁹

The plea for contextualisation is simultaneously a plea for relevancy of the course contents to people's daily lives, but not relevancy in a superficial way.⁵⁰ Biblical Studies needs a reinterpretation which should be accompanied by 'revitalizing of the original life-relatedness of the Christian message' and 'relevantising of the Bible in our teaching'. (Malan 1993: 47-66)

3.4 *Interdisciplinary*

Biblical Studies need to be offered not as 'an island' in itself but in association with other subjects. Lategan (1993: 33) argues for the multiplicity of discourses in Biblical Studies because of the varied nature of human existence.⁵¹ Quoting Foard, Lategan

46 Cf. Smart (1991: 6)

'As for Biblical Studies, they can be transformed by a history of religions approach into dealing with the roots of Christianity - in the Mediterranean world - seeing it swimming in the same sea as early Rabbinic Judaism, Gnosticism, mystery religions, Graeco-Roman rites, and new religions.'

One shivers to think that Biblical Studies can be offered outside of this broader religious framework.

47 This should not be viewed as an attempt to prohibit the internationalisation of biblical studies, but rather a way of enhancing it. (Clines 1993: 67-87; esp. 73)

48 Cf. Mitchell (1992: 42-50; 1993: 4-5).

49 For Turner this includes even Hebrew/Greek lexicons in African languages.

On the oppressive and dominating nature of Western culture and its view of Christianity, cf. those cited above, e.g. Rousseau (1988), Pobee (1989), Patte & Phillips (1991), Du Toit (1991).

50 Cf. Malan (1992: 51, 52; 1993: 47-66) pleading for constant reinterpretation of the Bible in order to highlight the life-transforming aspects contained therein; and Lombard (1995: 108), stressing that relevancy is not adapting to 'what seems to be the newest craze'.

On a different level, Long (1992: 50-64) sees in deconstruction's disavowal of final interpretations the basis and theory for continuing reinterpretation of texts.

51 Cf. Krüger (1994: 5) who warns against divorcing religion from 'the wider socio-cultural networks in which it is enmeshed'.

argues that there is a need for at least discourse between religious studies and that of one or more particular religious tradition.

3.5 *Wider setting in religion*

Taking the ecumenical and multi-faith (Lombard 1995) and 'pluralist' society (Goliath 1984: 34, 35) in South Africa into account, requires a broader religious setting for Biblical Studies. Certain religious studies components, e.g. the science and philosophy of religion need to form the wider background of Biblical Studies.⁵² Smart (1991: 4) argues

'(t)he framework of religious studies can ... liberate Biblical Studies from its narrowness'.

A fitting anecdote with which to close is probably well-known, but perhaps not the elaboration added by the South African 'rainbow-man' himself, Desmond Tutu. The anecdote: 'When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us 'let us pray'. After the prayer the white man had the land and we had the Bible'. Bishop Tutu's response: 'And we got the better deal'.⁵³

I conclude with a sense of having drawn only a broad, sketchy and biased portrait of an involved and complex issue and debate. Hopefully it served the broader aim which was to argue for retaining Biblical Studies courses in South African education and to hint at ways in which its value can be and should be seen. Much remains to be said!⁵⁴

52 Cf. amongst others, Turner (1980: esp. 11-13).

53 Quoted in West (1995: 1). Cf. also West (1993b: 137) for some implications of this anecdote.

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