

THE BIBLE IN SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE - WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

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Abstract

The Bible is one of the most significant bases for values-persuasion and the shaping of the ethos of the South African population.¹ This significant influence of the Bible is potentially a serious stumbling block for social transformation and the advancement of a human rights culture in South Africa. In order to state the aim of this paper, a specific event in the not so distant history of South Africa will be recounted.

1. Introduction

- The *Bible itself* is a possible stumbling block for social transformation and the advancement of a human rights culture in South Africa. The Bible presupposes ancient social values which are in many important respects contrary to values normally associated with a human rights. As Carrol (1992:5) says: 'Whatever the Bible may say about oppression, it has in its time served the interests of the oppressor... not just the *use* of the Bible, but also some of the substantive things in the Bible itself. The Bible, in whatever version, may make a good servant; it can be a bad master. Treating it as the divine word exempt from criticism can blind eyes to that truth. Also, the Bible contains some appalling practices of an uncivilised nature and nobody should treat these as normative.'
- The *use of the Bible* is also a possible stumbling block. Due to the reality of widespread literalistic interpretations of the Bible and related religious

1 Christianity is the religion of the majority of the South African population (about 70%). Apart from the direct influence of the Bible in churches, more or less 100 000 matriculating pupils took Biblical Studies as examination subject in 1994 and at about 70 Teacher's Education Colleges Biblical Studies (or Religious Studies with Biblical Studies as an important subsection) is a compulsory subject for thousands of students. About 10 000 University students were in 1994 enrolled in Biblical Studies or Religious Studies (with Biblical Studies as an important subsection) at 16 universities. In addition to this, millions of school pupils in primary and secondary schools are doing Religious Instruction, in most cases based on the Bible (see Müller 1995).

A visiting New Testament colleague recently remarked to students of the Seminary in Stellenbosch that he knows that 'people like Bernard Lategan and Dirkie Smit want to take the Bible into Khayelitsha, but they are part of a small minority. What they do is not real the Biblical scholarship of the sort that is internationally practiced and respected...' Leaving aside the many possible responses to this remark, it takes no particular insight to realize that the Bible does not need 'to be taken into Khayelitsha' or any other township or any other area for that matter - it is already there! The choice whether to work with that reality or to work only with the other reality of the Bible in academic scholarship is, of course, the choice of a particular scholar.

convictions in South Africa, those social values and practices in the Bible which are in tension with the values associated with human rights and democracy, may continue to have important influence in South African society.

On the other hand, the Bible is potentially a powerful means of *promoting* a culture of human rights and democracy in South Africa. The development of the idea of human rights as well as many of the fundamental values associated with human rights (e.g. human dignity, justice, freedom, equality, etc.) can be traced, *inter alia*, to the influence of certain Biblical and Christian notions. Neither the human rights debate nor the contextualization of positive Biblical notions such as justice, human dignity, etc., are closed issues. Much more can and need to be done in this regard, especially in the continuously changing South African situation.

Aichele et al (1995:12) are convinced that Biblical scholarship has an important role to play in the effort to achieve social justice. Drawing extensively on the resources of contemporary thought on language, epistemology, method, rhetoric, power, reading as well as reflections on the pressing questions of 'difference' - gender, race, class, sexuality, religion - they argue for a transformed and a *transforming Biblical criticism*, that is, 'an effort to understand the ongoing impact of the Bible on culture and an effort to bring biblical scholarship into meaningful and ongoing engagement with the political, cultural and epistemological critiques that have emerged in 'modernity's wake'' (1995:2).

2. Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem and Mass Action in South Africa in 1992

On 6 September 1992 an unarmed protest march took place in Bisho with the aim to remove the Ciskei military ruler, Oupa Gqozo, from his throne. After restrictions were placed on the protest march, the crowd was to proceed from King William's Town to the Ciskei Stadium and not to Gqozo's Bisho headquarters. However, after breaking through a gap in the stadium fence, a column of people following Ronnie Kasrils began running towards Bisho. The soldiers of the Ciskei Defence Force acted on their orders. A barrage of gunfire lasting several minutes left 30 people dead and more than 200 wounded.

One week after this event, the Annual Meeting of the Institute for Contextual Theology was held in Johannesburg. The programme of the meeting was suspended for one morning and about 100 members of the ICT held a prayer service at the SABC studios in Auckland Park. The aim of the service was to show solidarity with the bereaved families of the Bisho massacre and to spell out the ICT's view on mass action from a Christian perspective. During the service a statement 'Mass Action in a Christian Context', drafted during the previous two days at the ICT meeting, was read out publicly and later it was also published in *The Weekly Mail* (18 September 1992) and *Challenge* (Oct/Nov 1992).

I quote a few excerpts from this statement:

- (6) By now it has been well established that the people have a right to engage in mass action... Christians would want to uphold this right and support all those who choose to exercise their right to protest action. We would also uphold the

right of those who choose not to march, or participate in strike action, stay-aways or any other protest action.

- (7) Above all, we believe that Christians have a special responsibility to engage in public witness for justice and peace.
- (8) *Protest* has been a very important part of our tradition since the days of the great biblical prophets.
- (9) It is quite wrong to believe that Christians should never protest against the wrong-doing of a government... or should not go into the streets to protest through mass action.
- (10) *Action* is not foreign to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus took action by riding as Messiah together with many marchers into Jerusalem even though the authorities tried to stop him (Luke 19:39-40). He took action by overthrowing the tables and driving out the money-changers and exploiters (Mark 11:15).
- (11) Christian faith without action, according to the letter of James, is dead (2:26).

Participating in the public discourse of the time on the issue of mass action, a political leader, Carl Niehaus (1992:27), made the following remark:

... Christians have often been deeply involved in peaceful forms of protest, and the churches have encouraged and led marches especially in South Africa. Was Jesus himself not taking part in a demonstration when he led the cheering crowds into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday?

From this brief retelling of a very tragic episode in our history, it is clear that religious as well as political leaders in South Africa sometimes make direct appeals to the Bible when they argue matters of general public interest.² It is also significant that the appeals to the Bible are made as substantiation for the immediately preceding appeal to human rights in the ICT statement.

The exigence for this paper thus is this specific instance of the role of the Bible in public responses to a specific cluster of human rights violations. Taking this contemporary situation as point of departure, the purpose of this paper is to bring various problems confronting a biblical scholar in this regard into focus, namely

- Can, and if so, *how* can the Bible function as a critical and constructive discussion partner in human rights issues of today - being fully sensitive to the power relations operative in any appeal to Biblical authority?
- What, if any, could be the value of traditional Western Biblical scholarship (specifically historical-critical interpretations of the Bible) in a concrete situation like this - given the following devastating assessment expressed by Aichele et al (1995:2):

2 During the 1995 session of Parliament, shortly after the ruling of the Constitutional Court on the death penalty, there were members of Parliament who called theology and religious studies academics with the question: 'What does the Bible say about the death penalty? We need to know since we are now debating it in parliament'

The pervasive modern emphasis on the objective recovery of the ancient context in which biblical texts were produced had the double effect of obscuring the significance of the Bible in contemporary Western culture and turning the Bible into an historical relic, an antiquarian artefact. It has also produced a modern biblical scholarship that, for many, has become a curatorial science in which the text is fetishized, its readings routinized, its readers bureaucritized.

- Related to the previous problem is the broader problem of the public responsibility of the scholarship. What is the role and possible contribution of a biblical scholar *as scholar* in public discourses where the Bible is directly and indirectly invoked. Is it part of the public responsibility of scholarship 'to pronounce right or wrong' in concrete cases of appeals to the Bible in public discourse?

In what follows I will keep to the order of the ICT statement and begin with remarks on human rights related to protest and resistance as rhetorical act. Following that I will survey some of the results of historical critical investigations of Jesus 'triumphant entry' into Jerusalem. In the final section some of the limitations and possibilities of analogy as mode for 'making the Bible relevant today' will be explored.

3. The Right to Resist in Human Rights Declarations

There is no single 'right to resist' with that name to be found in bills of human rights. However De Wet (1992:2-3) argues that the right to resist can be regarded as a fundamental right and he suggests a taxonomy for the cluster of rights to be found in various bills of human rights that deals with protest, resistance and civil disobedience. Rights pertaining to resistance are prominent in all the important declarations or bills of human rights. I quote some of them:

3.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideals through any media regardless of frontiers.

Article 20: (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

3.2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

Article 19: (1) Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. (2) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. (3) The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be subject such as provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others (b)

For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.

Article 21: The right to peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

3.3 African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981)

Article 11: Every individual shall have the right to assemble freely with others. The exercise of this right shall be subject only to necessary restrictions provided for by law, in particular those enacted in the interest of national security, health, ethics and rights and freedoms of others.

3.4 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 - Chapter 3: Fundamental Rights (1993)

After the breakdown of CODESA II in May 1992 the Multi-Party Negotiating Process (MPNP) came into being in March 1993. One of the structures of the MPNP, the Negotiating Council, appointed seven technical committees - one of them a committee with the brief to make proposals for the protection of fundamental rights during the transition. This committee consisted of 5 members, mostly lawyers, and they served in a non-representative capacity. This technical committee had to prepare written reports for discussion by the Negotiating Council. The committee worked from May 1993 and almost six months and various progress reports later, Chapter 3: Fundamental Rights of the new South African constitution was agreed upon by the Negotiating Council.

As is the case with other bills of rights, this Chapter reflects the specific issues of the situation in which it was born. Although the Chapter builds on an international tradition of almost 50 years of development in international law, it is directly tailored to suit the South African context. For example, the formulation 'right to assemble and demonstrate with others peacefully and unarmed, and to present petitions' is a reflection of the substantial curtailment of this right in South African political history and it came as no surprise that this formulation was immediately widely accepted (see Du Plessis & Corder 1994:160). The specific limitation of 'peacefully and unarmed' was also to be expected.

The relevant articles in the Chapter are:

Article 15: (1) Every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media, and the freedom of artistic creativity and scientific research. (2) All media financed by or under control of the state shall be regulated in a manner which ensures impartiality and the expression of diverse opinion.

Article 16: Every person shall have the right to assemble and demonstrate with others peacefully and unarmed, and to present petitions.

Article 17: Every person shall have the right to freedom of association.

This South African Chapter of Fundamental Rights did not exist in September 1992 when the ICT Statement 'Mass Action in a Christian Context' was published. However, since these rights have been included in all the major international bills of human rights, it is clear that it is to these rights that the ICT appeal when they state: '*...it has been well established that the people have a right to engage in mass action...*' What it is important for our purposes, is to note that the ICT and political leaders like Carl Niehaus, appeal to the Bible in their calls to Christians to assert these rights to protest. Specifically, appeal is made to Jesus' 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem. Before I survey the results of historical-critical studies of this New Testament story, a brief remark about rhetoric and protest.

4. Speech, March and Rhetoric

Usually rhetoric is understood as some form of *verbal* human interaction. Four of the most widely known definitions of rhetoric all suppose that rhetoric is related to human discourse:

- That 'a text must reveal its context' (Sloane1975:804) is for Wuellner (1987:450) the most important difference between rhetorical criticism and literary criticism. By *context* is meant more than historical situation or genre or the generic *Sitz im Leben*. For modern rhetoric 'context' means the 'attitudinizing conventions, precepts that condition (both the writer's *and* the reader's) stance toward experience, knowledge, tradition, language, and other people' (Wuellner1987:450)
- Rhetoric is *goal-oriented discourse*, or, *persuasive discourse* (Aristotle's definition *Rhetorica* I.1.2), or *social interaction*.
- Rhetorical criticism seeks to reveal the *interests* of a speaker (cf. ideological criticism), it seeks to discover and expose the *powerplay* manifesting itself in an act of language.
- For the New Rhetoric (the theory of argumentation proposed by Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:4) rhetoric is 'the study of the discursive techniques allowing us *to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent*'

George Kennedy (1992) has argued recently for a conceptualisation of rhetoric prior to speech. According to Kennedy (1992:2)

...rhetoric in the most general sense may perhaps be identified with the energy inherent in communication: the emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, the physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message.

Rhetoric can thus be understood as 'to make noise effectively'. Noise is needed to persuade. However, persuasion through effective noise-making is to avoid physical contact and violence. As example of what he means, Kennedy refers to fighting stags 'attempting to intimidate each other with growls, physical movements such as

circling or pacing up and down, and other signs of intent... Their encounter involves a great deal of expenditure of physical and emotional energy... the stag that can roar the loudest and longest wins... They rarely actually fight. One outroars the other and the latter leaves' (1992:4-5).

In a sense a protest march is such a rhetorical act. To march is to 'say' something. To march is to proclaim. To march is to make a point of view publicly known. But once a march deteriorates into physical violence or damage to property, it is no longer a rhetorical act: If we have to believe Kennedy, rhetoricians never fight physically, they argue and persuade and threaten and make noise! Seen in this light a noisy protest march seems to be a very rhetorical act!

An investigation of the rhetorical function of the entry stories in the gospels might elaborate further on this point and might provide interesting thought for food. However, since a detailed rhetorical analysis of the entry story in each of the four canonical gospels will take us well beyond the limits of a paper like this, I will not pursue this issue any further in the present context.

It is clear that appeals to the Bible in the context of the South African public discourse, significantly contributes to the effectiveness of an argument. It raises the level of the 'noise' being made by a speaker since the Bible is regarded as an important and influential authority by many South Africans. Whether we as scholars like it or not and whether we can agree with the different ways the Bible is used to raise 'noise', it happens around us almost on a daily basis. Therefore I deem it as part of the public responsibility of Biblical scholars to engage in this discourse.

Given the history and the traditions and customs of our discipline, one of the primary tasks for biblical scholars is to investigate the original historical and literary contexts of the entry story. This will be our concern in the next section.

5. Historical and Literary Interpretation of the Entry Stories in the Gospels

5.1 The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in historical context

5.1.1 Greco-Roman entrance processions

According to Catchpole (1984) There were three types of Greco-Roman entrance processions:

- magic processions: processions to ensure the fertility of crops.
- offering processions: the presentation of an offering to a deity
- epiphany processions: processions which features the visitation of a deity.

Between the typical Greek entrance procession and the Roman entrance procession there were certain significant differences (see Catchpole 1984 and Esler 1994).

Elements of the Greek march:

- the entering ruler/conqueror is met at the gates of the city by the citizenry and escorted in procession into the city

- a hymnic acclamation by those accompanying the ruler/conqueror into the city
- a rite whereby the entering ruler appropriates the newly won territory, usually though a sacrifice in the city's temple

Elements of the Roman triumph march:

- a victorious general and his army enters
- first go the booty and the prisoners, followed by white oxen (to be sacrificed at the end of the procession)
- the general follows, led by his lictors carrying *fasces* wreathed in laurel. The general rode in a chariot, was dressed in royal robes and carried an ivory-topped sceptre; his face was painted red (like the statue of Juppiter)
- A slave rode next to the general whispering in his ear: 'look behind you and remember that you are many'
- the army follows shouting praise *Io triumphe*, songs of praise, but also hurting insults at him. (Hurting insults was typical of a crowning procession)
- the procession ends at the temple of Juppiter where the oxes are sacrificed
- a feast follows in the temple. The feast represents the actual ritual of appropriation

Whether it is a march into the ruler's own city or whether it is a march of a conqueror into a newly conquered city, the ruler/general symbolically appropriates the city by way of ritual in the temple. Without this final act, the march is incomplete. The march of Jesus into Jerusalem is thus directly linked to his actions in the temple.

5.1.2 Marches into Jerusalem

Twelve marches where Jewish crowds were involved during the three hundred years before Christ are known from the works of Josephus and 1 Maccabees. These texts provides a family of stories which make it possible to locate the gospel tradition of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem:

1. Alexander the Great enters Jerusalem from Gaza (*AJ* 11:325-329).
2. Alexander enters Sechem (*AJ* 11:342-345).
3. Appolonius enters Jerusalem (2 Macc 4:21ff).
4. Judas Maccabeus returns home after victory over Gorgias (1 Macc 4:19-21f; Josephus *AJ* 12:312).
5. Judas Maccabeus returns from a military campaign, passing through Judea to mount Zion with singing and finally undertaking sacrificial activity (1 Macc 5:45-54)
6. Jonathan Maccabeus is welcomed in Askalon (1 Macc 10:86).
7. Simon Maccabeus enters Gaza and cleanses idolatrous houses (1 Macc 13:43-48).

8. Simon Maccabeus enters Jerusalem with celebrations (1 Macc 13:49-51). Antogonus returns from a campaign with glory and enters the temple. (*BJ* 1:73ff; *AJ* 13:304-306).
9. Marcus Agrippa is welcomed in Jerusalem (*AJ* 16:12-15).
10. Archalaus goes to Jerusalem with a procession after he was appointed king by Herod (*AJ* 17:194-239).
 - a) Alexander is given a formal welcome by the Jewish population in Rome, of all places. They go out to meet him and surround him, shouting good wishes, while he is said to have 'all the trappings of a king'. (*AJ* 17:324-328; *BJ* 2:101-110).
 - b) Having analysed this family of stories, Catchpole (1984:321) concludes that a number of standard features characterise these marches:
 - c) Victory is already achieved and status is already recognised for the central person.
 - d) A formal and ceremonial entry takes place.
 - e) Greetings and/or acclamations are shouted together with invocations of the gods.
 - f) The entry into the city is climaxed by the entry to the temple (if the city in question has a temple).
 - g) Cultic activity takes place (positive: offering of sacrifice; or negative: expulsion of objectionable persons and the cleansing of uncleanness).

It is significant that so many marches were held by Maccabean rulers and generals. They were active during the years 166 BCE and later when the Jews won back their independence from the Seleucids (before they were again overruled by the Romans in 66 BCE). In Jesus' day the Maccabeans were of great nationalistic significance. The Jews glorified them and dreamed and sang about their great heroes. For Jesus to enter Jerusalem with a march must undoubtedly have been seen as a highly symbolical and *political* act by the Jews living in Jerusalem. The connotations with the Maccabean marches are simply too clear not to be recognised. Who else would enter Jerusalem, if not a very important figure? That his entry was seen by the authorities as a threat and a challenge, is attested by the reaction of the Pharisees as reported by Luke (19:39-40):

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

(See also John 12:9: 'The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'')

5.2 Literary precursors of the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

5.2.1 Israelite kinship ritual

For Catchpole (1984:319, see also Loewe 1981:360) the ultimate precedents of the entry story are to be found in the Israelite kinship rituals, specifically 1 Kings 1:32-40, which has the following elements:

- an acclamation (vs 34): 'long live King Solomon!'
- a ceremonial entry (vs 35): 'You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.'
- the king-designate rides on the royal animal (vs 38): 'So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and led him to Gihon.'
- followed by a celebrating crowd (vs 40): 'playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise'

5.2.2 The march of the Divine warrior

The figure of the Divine Warrior is well-known in the Old Testament (see the warrior hymns in Exodus 15, 'The Song of the Sea' and Judges 5 'The Song of Deborah') and other divine warrior hymns in Psalm 2, 9, 24, Isaiah 42:13, and Zechariah 14).

The divine warrior follows a conflict myth pattern in Zechariah 14:

- the threat against Israel is described (vss 1-2)
- the conflict between YHWH and his enemies is described and YHWH's victory is implied (vs 3)
- YHWH appears on Mount of Olives, and prepares a processional highway by filling up that mountain and its valleys (vss 4-5)
- On this highway the divine warrior and his holy ones enter the city of Jerusalem (vs 5b).
- YHWH's entrance results in a new creation (vss 6-8)
- manifestation of YHWH's universal reign (vss 9-11)
- description of how YHWH's enemies are destroyed (vss 12-15)
- the gentiles come to observe the feast of the Tabernacles (vss 16-19)
- Jerusalem is sanctified and the distinction between sacred and profane has been overcome (vss 20-21).
- The Divine Warrior is transformed into an eschatological figure.

Many scholars have pointed out the similarities between the vision of the entrance of the Divine Warrior in Zechariah 14 and the gospel narratives of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (see Loewe 1981, Catchpole 1984, Moessner 1988).

5.3 The entry story in the gospels

5.3.1 The entry story in the Matthew, Luke and John

Catchpole (1984:322) finds no evidence of any use of non-Markan sources by Matthew and Luke and for him there are thus no grounds for concentrating on any version of the entry story other than Mark's version. The Jesus Seminar go much further and conclude that 'the speech of Jesus (Mark 11:2-3), like the story, is a contrivance of the evangelist' (Funk et al 1993:97). Literary and/or rhetorical critical approaches to the entry story, however, do not share this historical critical assumption. The specific manner in which the entry story functions rhetorically within each gospel necessitates the analysis of the story in each gospel in its own right.

However, when they invoke the Bible in public discourse people usually do not care much about either the historical-critical assumption (of working only with the earliest tradition or being interested in 'what really happened') or the literary/rhetorical critical assumption (analysing the function of the story within each gospel's unique literary context). Rather, the story as told in all four canonical gospels merges together into one story in the public imagination - with details to be quoted from any gospel where it is deemed most relevant to the point needed to be underscored. For example, the ICT Statement quotes both from Luke and Mark to underscore Jesus' activism.

Nevertheless, accepting for the moment the historical-critical preference for the earliest tradition, I will deal in detail only with Mark's version of the entry story.

5.3.2 The entry story in the Gospel of Mark

Mark's rendering of the entry story clearly echoes Zechariah 11:

- the march begins at Mount of Olives (11:1)
- Jesus and followers enter Jerusalem just as Divine Warrior and holy ones in Zechariah 14
- Mark's reference to vessels in the temple (11:16) recalls Zechariah's reference to vessels in the temple
- Hymns are sung by disciples and followers, especially Psalm 118³, which was in Jesus' time recited at the time of the Festival of the Tabernacles. Psalm 118 was a royal psalm - usually recited on the occasion of the annual enthronement of the king. The mixture of motives from the vision of Zechariah 14 and the

3 Ps 118:26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

quotes from Zecharaia 9:9⁴ and Psalm 18 and their citation in the entrance narrative would have been explosive in the context of first century Palestine.

- Symbols of Jesus' authority: garments are laid across a colt and on the road (see 2 Kings 9:13)
- Leafy branches: symbols of Jewish nationalism - associated with *Sukkot*.

Thus there are many direct and highly loaded political connotations to Jesus' entry (see Hollenbach 1985 for a discussion of the complex issue of Jesus and the politics of his day).

However, Mark's story differs from the Zecharaia-march in important respects which become clear from the co-text of the entry narrative in Mark:

- 11:1-11 - entry
- 11:12-14 - curses fig tree
- 11:15-19 - cleanses temple
- 11:20-25 - lessons from withered fig tree
- 11:27-33 - Jesus' authority questioned

- Jesus does not appropriate authority: once inside Jerusalem, he looks around and exit again. This is a very surprising and unexpected action - given the usual pattern of ancient entrance marches. He comes back next day without any ado.
- Jesus does not enter the temple to sacrifice, but to totally *disqualify* the temple - like the fig tree it must die down to its roots.
- His *actions* in temple constitute a total rejection of the temple institution rather than a purge of its excesses
- His *words* in the temple (v 17) constitute a further rejection of the temple

Thus, it is not a glorious entry and act of appropriation on the pattern of ancient marches, but compared to customary entrance marches it is an ironical act on the part of Jesus (Visser't Hooft 1985).

I conclude this survey of the results of critical scholarship with brief reference to two traditional views of the significance or function of the entry story in Mark.

Catchpole (1984:319) points out various parallels between Mark 11:-110 (the story of the entry in Jerusalem) and Mark 10:46-52 (the story of the healing of Barthimeus) and suggests the following function for the entry story in Mark: 'The 'triumphal' entry, therefore, matches the confession and has to do with the disclosure of Jesus's identity and status'

Visser 't Hooft (1985:497) sees the significance of the 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem as part of the persistent attempt by Jesus to explain the true nature of his messianic mission, namely that Jerusalem will be the place of a supreme sacrifice

4 Zecharaia 9:9 Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

and not of worldly success. When the disciples think about the messiah their thoughts turn to the power which they as associates of the messiah may acquire. Jesus did not mean to imitate the famous triumphs of his day but to protest against the spirit which animated them and to show a better way of fulfilling the meaning of human destiny.

Critical New Testament scholarship usually ends at this point. The historical and literary context of the story is explained. Task completed. No wonder that some of our colleagues consider historical-critical Biblical scholarship to be a curatorial science.

The problem remains, however, where do we go from here? What can people do with this story today? Or rather, what are they in fact doing with it (as, for example, in responding to the Bisho massacre)?

6. The Limits and Possibilities of Analogy

For people taking the New Testament seriously but not literally the process of analogy remains an attractive option to think about possible theological or ethical applications of biblical statements for today.

Robin Scroggs (1994), however, is sceptical about the possibilities of analogy. He emphasises the uniqueness of the historical situations in which ethical/theological judgements emerge. Unique situations cannot be superimposed on one another. Therefore the principle of analogy must be seriously challenged. Furthermore, using social-scientific approaches to investigate the First Century Mediterranean World, scholars have made significant progress during the last 25 years to recover the social, economic, and political situations that lie behind the New Testament texts.

Gone is the day when a statement of Jesus or Paul could be interpreted independently of the network of societal factors of which the statement is but a part. That is, the uniqueness of those historical moments has been recovered. The conclusion is clear, if very difficult for all of us: the context is unique, and thus analogy between then and now seems virtually impossible... The more we learn about the New Testament and its contexts, the more impossible it seems to be to use its statements in any specific way for today's reflections on faith and morals (Scroggs:1994:276-277).

Jewett (1993:3-18) is more optimistic about the possibilities of analogy, although he explains it as a process of 'looking for resonances' in the life situations and stories of the communities at both ends of what he calls the 'interpretative arch' - the community in New Testament times where the story was first told and today's community.

From the New Testament we have a story of many people marching through a city with the aim to challenge the *status quo*. The marchers are confronted by reactionary authorities. God is on the side of the marchers. They march to challenge injustice and to install the just reign of God. Resonances of the story with the story of the Bisho-marchers are easy to see and more could possibly

pointed out. Elements could be selected from the historical-critical and literary constructions presented above to turn the noise of these resonances louder.

Obviously, however, there are also many dissonances between the two stories. In the words of Meeks (1986): 'the ways in which the symbolic universe we inhabit differs from that in which the writers and first hearers of our texts lived are so many that they defy cataloguing'. Elements in the historical-critical construction presented above could be selected to discredit the ICT's story of the entry story of Jesus.

Thus, the results of historical-critical constructions of New Testament stories can hardly be used by scholars 'to pronounce right or wrong' on instances where the Bible is invoked in public discourse - although I suspect that is often the expectation with which participants in public discourse turn to biblical scholars.

The problem remains: what could be the constructive and critical contribution of biblical scholars in a case like this? I end with a few brief suggestions which need much further reflection and refinement:

- Can we not follow feminist critics like Schüssler Fiorenza (see Aichele et al 1995) and take our starting point *outside* the New Testament texts, namely in the vision of the full realisation of a human rights culture in South Africa?
- Those Biblical stories and cultural values which function as stumbling block in the way of this vision, need to be critiqued and rejected. In this regard historical-critical scholarship has an important contribution to make. It is the public responsibility of biblical scholars to do so (see Schüssler Fiorenza 1987)
- Yet, there is also another side to this coin. Can we not re-tell Biblical stories - those stories that are suitable - to contribute to the realisation of a human rights culture in South Africa?

In 1994 I gave the second year class in Biblical Studies at the University of Stellenbosch an assignment asking them to respond to the question: How do you evaluate the use of the New Testament in the ICT Statement? Out of 25 students there were only 2 who responded that they consider it as a valid interpretation and a justified use of Scripture. The majority of students rejected it as an abuse of Scripture. The most frequently used arguments as substantiation for this view were (i) Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was a 'spiritual event' related to his mission to die for the sins of the world, (ii) Christians cannot be expected to do everything that Jesus did because he lived in a total different world and (iii) please, keep the Bible out of politics! Had the composition of the class been different (with the majority of students from population groups disadvantaged by apartheid), the response most probably would have been 25/2 in favour of the ICT's interpretation of the entry story. For those not having experienced the injustices of apartheid it is more difficult to associate with such an interpretation of this New Testament story. For many of them it was a surprise to hear that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem could be used to justify Christian participation in mass action. Some found it ridiculous and laughed out loudly. However, in the serious situation of 1992 this story came alive in a new way for many South African Christians, providing a fresh perspective and serving as a source of inspiration.

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