

BEKENDSTELLING



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Ná voltooiing van haar voorgraadse studie in Lettere en Wysbegeerte aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch en die Hugenote Kollege (Wellington), begin sy in 1975 haar loopbaan as kerklik-maatskaplike werker in die destydse Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (tans die Verenigde Gereformeerde Kerk) se gemeente Canzibe in Transkei. Daarná is sy vir 10 jaar betrokke by verskeie bedieninge van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Oos-Kaapland – eers as kerklik-maatskaplike werker vir Bedyf- en Livingstonehospitaal-bediening in Port Elizabeth, en daarna as hoof uitvoerende beampte van die sinode se Vroueaksie.

Intussen verwerf sy die grade HonsBA (Bybelkunde) *cum laude* by die Universiteit Stellenbosch en MA (Nuwe Testament) *cum laude* by die Universiteit van Port Elizabeth. In 1995 behaal sy 'n DTh-graad aan die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland onder leiding van professore Bernard Lategan en Dirkie Smit.

Vanaf 1990 doseer Elna vir 10 jaar Nuwe Testamentiese vakke in die Departement Bybel- en Godsdienkunde (Fakulteit Lettere en Wysbegeerte) aan die Universiteit van Port Elizabeth. In 2000 word sy benoem as eerste voltydse vroulike dosent aan die Fakulteit Teologie op Stellenbosch. Sy sien die begeleiding van studente in die geloofwaardige vertolking van die Nuwe Testament as die kern van haar taak: “Ek wil studente help om die bybel genuanseerd te ontsluit as God se gesagvolle woorde van bevryding en heling vir *álmal*. Daarvoor moet ons leer om fyn te *luister* – na die Gees van God, die bybelse tekste, na mekaar én ons omgewing.”

Haar spesialiteitsrigting binne die Nuwe Testament is die brief aan die Efesiërs. Sy is geïnteresseerd in die verantwoorde gebruik en lewensveranderende krag van die Nuwe Testament vir die prediking, pastoraat en die Christelike lewe van elke dag – veral met betrekking tot geregtigheid teenoor vroue en kinders in kerk-, gesins- en samelewingsverbande. Sy dien op verskeie kerklike kommissies en tree gereeld as geleentheidspreker by verskillende kerke op.

Sy het verskeie akademiese artikels en hoofstukke in boeke nasionaal en internasionaal gepubliseer, asook bydraes tot populêre bundels en tydskrifte gelewer. Haar doktorsale proefskrif, “Reading a New Testament document ethically”, is in 2002 gesamentlik deur die Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta) en Brill (Leiden) gepubliseer.

Elna is aangewys as dekaan van die Fakulteit Teologie vanaf 1 April 2005.

THE PATHOS OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES: OF WHAT USE ARE WE TO THE CHURCH AND ITS (PUBLIC) ETHOS?

ABSTRACT

Currently many Christians worldwide – particularly in Africa – are (re)discovering the power of scripture for their daily lives. The moment affords theology in general and the biblical sciences in particular a golden opportunity to assist the ecumenical church in accounting for the ways in which scripture functions in its (public) ethos, so as to be truly *authoritative* and life-giving. The paper takes this challenge as its point of departure, while exploring the dynamic yet complex interface among the various elements implied by such interpretive events. From within New Testament perspectives these elements refer to (1) the God of Jesus Christ and the Spirit (as ultimate *sender*), (2) the New Testament writings (as *medium*), and (3) implied and historical (first, later and present-day) *receivers*. The essay argues that New Testament Studies are challenged to define and nuance its primary functions at the very *epicentre* of these interacting dimensions of textual communication. This ‘inner sanctuary’ of New Testament Studies is a rich yet fragile, liminal space from where scholars have to account for the hope and faith implied by these documents.

Ultimately, the essay is concerned with the *pathos* of New Testament Studies – with its persuasive power, reception and lasting (sense-making, problem-solving) *effects* in the lives of real people. With reference to voices from within various disciplines and contexts, it argues that the life-changing power of the New Testament writings, their continuing authority across times and cultures, lie in their metaphorical ability to *disclose (glimpses of) an alternative moral world* – a radically new perspective on reality, a new way of living in the world. New Testament Studies are continuously challenged to do *likewise* – to facilitate and mediate the discernment of such an alternative world, a world characterised by God’s radical, surprising yet paradoxical presence in Jesus of Nazareth and the Spirit. The essay concludes with tentative suggestions as to how New Testament Studies (in South Africa) may serve such a purpose.

When I asked colleagues about the *genre* of an inaugural lecture and its implied purpose, I was convinced – obviously with relief! – by those who encouraged me *not* to try and cover the entire New Testament field, but rather to exhibit my personal vision for the subject and its attractiveness for prospective students. That led me to a myriad of questions with respect to the *what, how, where, why* and *who* of New Testament Studies, ironically ending up with probably a more encompassing task than I originally tried to avoid!

As the seventh professor in New Testament Studies at this institution since its inception in 1859,¹ I am not only challenged to build on the rich and varied legacy of my predecessors (albeit predominantly ‘white’ and male from within the Dutch Reformed tradition),² but also on twenty centuries of New Testament interpretation in numerous church and cultural contexts worldwide. How I see the task of New Testament Studies at this point is coloured further by my own spiritual and intellectual journey with these texts. My understanding of the bible was informed

¹ The first three professors of New Testament (NT) Studies at this institution – first as a seminary, and since 1920 as a Faculty of Theology – were also responsible for teaching other theological subjects: Adriaan Moorrees (1908-1930), Daniel Gerhardus Malan (1931-1937), and Gustav Bernhard August Gerdener (1937-1955). Jacobus Johannes Müller was the first professor responsible for NT Studies only (1946-1975), succeeded by Jan Lodewyk de Villiers (1969-1987), Hans Jacob Bernard Combrink (1976-2000), and Barend Abraham du Toit as senior lecturer (1988-1997). The dates indicated in brackets refer to each colleague’s entire term of service, and not necessarily to their periods of professorship. I was appointed as associate professor of NT Studies in 2000, and promoted to professor in 2004 – the first full-time female lecturer in the institution’s history of 141 years.

² This includes the Department of Biblical Studies in the University’s Faculty of Arts since 1966, renamed to the Department of Religion in 1993. The department was rationalised and phased out in 2001. New Testament colleagues who lectured in this context were Pieter GR de Villiers (1971-1984), Bernard C Lategan (1978-2004), and Jan Botha (1992-1997), who all impacted on my academic and personal development in significant ways.

primarily by my early exposure to various church, cultural, language and academic contexts, coupled with a growing passion for righteousness toward *all* people – the socially and economically marginalised in particular.³ Enthused by the wisdom of ‘ordinary readers’, students and colleagues, I developed a growing interest in the ‘authority’ of the New Testament texts across times and cultures – especially with respect to their paradoxical nature as both ‘word of God’ and products of *human* interpretation from within male-dominated (androcentric and patriarchal) cultures (cf. Schneiders 1991). My questions therefore gradually focused on the nature and purpose of these writings as *ancient canonised texts*.

A better understanding of human interpretation in general – and metaphorical language in particular – finally liberated and excited me to appreciate the *life-giving potential* of these texts amidst their (necessary) cultural constraints. At the same time I became increasingly aware of *life-threatening* effects when these texts are interpreted as the living ‘word of God’, but in unnuanced, one-sided, and absolutistic ways. For me these tensions eventually translated into an urgent challenge to account adequately for the rich yet complex nature, authority, and intentions of these texts, and in the light thereof, for the full personhood and equality of *all* people – women and children in particular. Hence my concern with the ‘pathos’ of New Testament Studies – for its persuasive power, reception and lasting effects in people’s lives, for its ability to assist the church in making sense of history (including the history of biblical interpretation) and life in general, in taking wise decisions and actions, in solving problems in responsible ways.

Through the ages – at least until the Enlightenment – Christian believers listened to, interpreted and appropriated the bible in a great variety of ways, with a view to understanding *their everyday lives*. They were not so much interested in the bible itself, or in what we today know as the *academic or intellectual* study of the bible, but in the bible as *canon*, as norm – a guiding lamp, a light for their path. Without appropriating the bible to their everyday challenges, suffering, fears and hopes, the reading process would for many simply be incomplete and pointless. For them the bible would be *only* useful in so far as it helped them to live *coram Deo* (cf. Smit 1998a:275-291).

Since the Enlightenment, however, the bible was approached differently, by means of different sets of questions. Paradoxically, people often became more interested in this collection of ancient canonised documents as an *object for study*, as yet another “corpse for scientific dissection” (Rousseau 1988:409), as distinguished and separated from understanding life *by means of it*. The questions being asked of the bible were increasingly of a theoretical and ‘objective’ nature, instead of being personal, existential, and related to the everyday life situations of its recipients (Smit 1998a:291-296).

At the moment – broadly speaking since World War I – Christianity is going through a phase during which many believers worldwide are rediscovering the life-giving power of the bible for their daily lives, in many diverse ways, situations, places and institutions. There is much evidence that this trend also pertains to South Africa and especially the rest of the African continent (cf. West & Dube 2000). This trend affords theology in general and the biblical sciences in particular a golden opportunity to assist the ecumenical church in all its manifestations in accounting for

³ While recognising the bible’s rich and dynamic nature, I shall argue that the effects of its interpretation through the ages have not always been life-giving and life-affirming. Since human interpretation is such a fragile enterprise, and because of the human inclination to absolutise and abuse authority – including ‘biblical authority’ – I write ‘bible’, ‘scripture’ and ‘word of God’ consistently in lower case.

A brief account of my spiritual and intellectual journey with the bible may explain my interest in, and passion for the subject. Since my early childhood the bible excited and intrigued me as a powerful *witness* to the involvement of an awesome God in the everyday lives of ordinary people. In retrospect, it certainly had a profound influence on my imagination and grasp of reality. A major turning point in my relation to the bible occurred during the first part of my professional career as an ecclesial-social worker in a congregation of the then *DRC in Africa* in the former Transkei. My exposure to Xhosa-speaking Christians and their entire symbolic universe shaped my identity and thinking in many crucial and irreversible ways, including my understanding of the bible. They particularly alerted me to the *performative* function of scripture – that Christian theology is not primarily meant to be ‘thought out’, but to be enacted, to be ‘danced out’.

It was however as a postgraduate student in Biblical and Religion Studies at the University of Port Elizabeth 20 years ago that I realised – both with disillusion and relief – that the bible, in accordance with its dynamic yet complex, relational nature, does *not* provide later readers with neat, ready-made theological doctrines or ethical answers for all times and circumstances. The subsequent phases of disorientation and reorientation were liberating parts of my journey (back) to the same writings, yet with a new (more tentative) understanding of their probable functions in the life of the church. I discovered that the bible, instead of being *prescriptive* to all Christians in the same way, rather resembles the *creative processes* through which the early faith communities wrestled to understand the will of God for their particular time (cf. Meeks 1986; 1993:1-17, 109-110). Characteristic of these processes were their continuous orientation to the presence of a living God through the course of history (Mouton 2002:189-201).

the ways in which scripture functions authoritatively in its daily (public) ethos and decision-making processes. What makes this a particularly *moral* issue, is the influence of these texts on people's understanding of God, of their own identities, and of their daily choices regarding their personal and public life.

The growing debate worldwide with respect to the functioning of scripture in Christian ethos and ethics needs to be appreciated within this context.⁴ It forms part of a much broader discussion among literary scholars on 'the ethics of interpretation', which requires that people take responsibility for their acts of reading – both with regard to the nature of the literature involved and the socio-historical contexts within which it is read.⁵ This challenge becomes even more urgent when it comes to canonised (religious) texts, which are read with the anticipation to communicate hope and new life.⁶ That this is by no means a straightforward issue speaks from the wide variety of ways in which the bible has been interpreted and appropriated during the course of history.⁷ The wonder and complexity of the matter are *inter alia* due to two closely related yet distinguishable factors:

- the rich yet intricate nature and purpose of the biblical texts themselves (representing a wide variety of witnesses to the relationship between a living God and historical human beings from within their socio-cultural realities), as well as
- the vast temporal, socio-historical and philosophical differences between the worlds of the bible and later/contemporary audiences.

An 'ethics of New Testament interpretation' would thus be challenged to account for (1) the dynamic yet complex nature, authority, and intensions of these texts on the one hand, and (2) their appropriation in terms of the faith experiences and needs of present-day audiences on the other.⁸ The essay takes these challenges with respect to the

⁴ For major contributions to this debate see, among many others, Ogletree 1983; Verhey 1984; Curran & McCormick 1984; Russell 1985; Fiorenza 1988, 1999, 2001; Birch & Rasmussen 1989; Ackermann 1991, 1992, 1994; Fowl & Jones 1991; Smit 1992, 1994b, 1996, 1997; Spohn 1995; Hays 1990, 1996; Dube 2000, 2001; Brown 2002; Lancaster 2002. The debate distinguishes broadly between Christian *ethics* as a critical, scientific discipline (mainly dealing with processes of decision-making on moral issues), and Christian *ethos* (morality) as "the habitual character and disposition of a group" (Smit 1991b:52; 1992:303-317; cf. Birch & Rasmussen 1989:39; Meeks 1986; 1993:4). "The difference between ethics and ethos often has something to do with the difference between (moral) decisions and acts and (moral) human beings, between acts and agents" (Smit 1991b:52; cf. Richardson 1994:89-96), or the difference between an ethics of Doing (*Sollen*) and an ethics of Being (*Sein* – cf. Birch & Rasmussen 1989:39-62). For some time Stanley Hauerwas (1981, 1985a, 1985b) and others have argued for a shift in emphasis toward the latter, toward the formation of the moral identity and ethos of a group. According to this shift, an ethics of responsibility (Doing) presupposes an ethics of relationality (Being). What we do is the result of who we are (cf. also Heinz E Tödt's well-known processes of ethical decision-making, and particularly the role of identity and 'seeing' in each phase – Tödt 1977; Mouton 2002:243-251). Of significance for the present topic, therefore, is that *ethos* is the more comprehensive and socially influential factor.

⁵ Cf. Fiorenza 1988; Smit 1990a, 1990b, 1991a, 1998b; Botha 1994a, 1994b; Patte 1995. To describe the reading process as particularly *ethical* basically refers to the wide range of choices readers have to make: "(T)he ethics of interpretation asks (i) *who* (that is, which individual or group) reads (ii) *which* bible (that is, what view of the text does the interpretive community hold, what authority does it grant the text) (iii) *how* (that is, using which methods) and (iv) *why* (that is, whose interests are at stake, what does the interpretive community want to achieve with their acts of interpretation?" (Botha 1994b:4-5; cf. Mouton 2002:10-13).

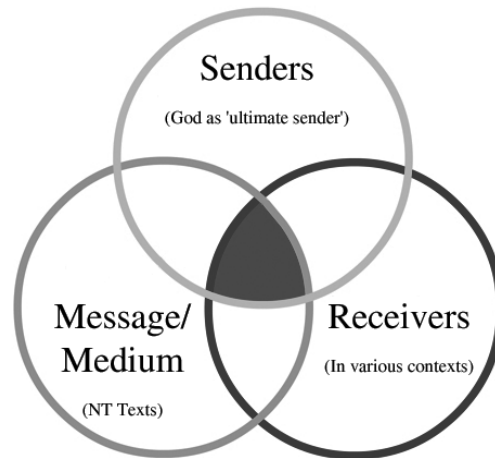
⁶ Christian communities explicitly appeal to, or implicitly presuppose the continuing *authority* of the biblical writings when using them to explain and justify their expectations, moral arguments and behaviour. The question is not *whether* the bible is authoritative for Christians (today), but *how* this authority is to be defined, and how its continuing relevance across times and cultures has to be understood.

⁷ See Smit 1994a for a useful typology of historical paradigms in Christian ethics, with dominant questions being asked during those phases. A major implication of such a historical overview is that the bible has been used in many different ways in the past with regard to Christian ethos – *depending on the particular question(s) being put to it*. This confirms the relational nature of all human knowledge, including interpretations of the bible (cf. Botha 1994a:40-42; Hartin 1991:2-4; Smit 1998a, 1998b; Mouton 2002:201-219).

⁸ The first aspect represents the multilayered 'texture' of these texts (cf. Robbins 1996). As products of human interpretation from within specific historical and language contexts, these writings are necessarily 'multidimensional' in nature – representing syntactic (linguistic-literary), semantic (socio-cultural), and pragmatic (theological-rhetorical) aspects of communication. The wonder about them is precisely that *people* were (and still are) involved in the interpretation of God's revelation. Thus, while reflecting typical processes of human wrestling to understand God as the totally other, they are undergirded and 'framed' by the awareness and confession of a living God's radical, liberating and healing presence in creation and the human story (cf. Schneiders 1991). This awareness ultimately represents the 'point of view' or orienting 'perspective' of the NT texts, providing a sense of coherence and integrity amidst their rich diversity of *genre*, style, context, and theological perspectives. Any view of the life-giving and life-affirming authority of these writings therefore has to acknowledge the creative tension (of a sovereign God in relation to finite human beings) *within* these documents themselves (Lategan 1982, 1984; Rousseau 1986; Mouton 2002:7-52; see also n. 7). Since language is the *only* human way of speaking

interpretation of the New Testament writings as its point of departure, with the objective to explore the dynamic yet complex interface among the various elements implied by such interpretive events. Drawing from twentieth-century communication theories, one may summarise the interactive elements regarding New Testament texts as referring to:

- the God of Jesus Christ and the Spirit (as ultimate *sender* or *protagonist* in the New Testament story);
- the New Testament writings (as written *medium* through which mainly oral *messages* were conveyed); and
- implied and historical (first, later and present-day) *receivers* of those texts.



It is at the very *epicentre* of these interrelated and interdependent dimensions of textual communication (God as ultimate *sender*, the New Testament texts as *message/medium*, and *receivers* in various contexts) that I wish to argue that the primary functions of New Testament scholarship have to be defined and nuanced. Since this ‘epicentre’ is such a rich and densely structured space – involving the dynamics and intricacies of divine revelation experienced and interpreted by finite human beings – its exploration will of necessity be an interdisciplinary and ecumenical task.

Since we only have the ancient New Testament texts as (awesome yet limited) artefacts of multilayered communication events, I shall start with text as written medium which conveys messages to various implied (and historical) audiences. According to their nature and purpose, these texts invite multiple questions, of which I will attend to only five here. Firstly, *what* are these texts (about)? Secondly, *how* do they refer to God as ultimate reality (*sender*)? Thirdly, *where* does redescription of reality by contemporary *receivers* occur (with reference to the liminal ‘epicentre’ of

about the awesome yet mysterious ultimate reality that we call ‘God’, our language about God cannot be anything else but humble, provisional, tentative efforts reflecting on that reality. At the same time an ethics of responsible reading is committed to taking the texts of the NT and their ‘textuality’ seriously, and to read them with the full sophistication offered by present-day scientific methods of reading.

The second aspect of an ‘ethics of NT interpretation’ is challenged to account for the differences between what may be described as *biblical* and *Christian* ethos. Christian ethos (the dynamic and creative reinterpretation of biblical perspectives by subsequent readers, in different socio-historical circumstances) has to be distinguished from the implied ethos of each biblical document as understood in its particular context (Verhey 1984:159-160, 169-197; Gustafson 1984:151-154; Birch & Rasmussen 1989:11-14; Botha 1994a:36-42). While sharing a basic faith commitment with those early faith communities, contemporary readers of the bible are confronted and shaped by different moral issues, stories, historical contexts and forces.

This is confirmed *inter alia* by the hermeneutical approach of so-called ‘contextual’ (e.g. postcolonial feminist) interpreters who often view the bible as resource for the Christian life with suspicion, because of its intrinsic embeddedness in the patriarchal value system of the ancient Near Eastern world, and its silence on, for example, slavery as institution (cf. Dube 2000, 2001). In the light of the differences between biblical and Christian ethos, the ethics of NT interpretation holds contemporary readers responsible and publicly accountable for their understanding of the authority of the NT writings, and particularly for the consistent appropriation of their implied rhetorical effects (Mouton 2001:122-123; 2002:176-201). What makes this an urgent *moral* issue, is not only the *integrity* of the bible (in general, and the NT in particular) as foundational resource for systematic theology, church histories and church polities, practical theology and missiology, but more acutely, *its influence on contemporary audiences’ understanding of God, their identities and public ethos.*

NT Studies)? Fourthly, *why* would these writings still make sense (in Africa today)? And finally, *who* are the proponents of New Testament Studies (in Africa today), and of what use are they to the church and its (public) ethos?

WHAT ARE THE NT WRITINGS (ABOUT)?

Starting with the New Testament texts, a first set of questions would pertain to their origin and intended purpose. What are these writings? Why do they exist in the first place? What were the circumstances that gave birth to them, and that led to their canonisation in centuries to come?

In general, one may say that these texts are the result of very real human processes which sought to *understand* and to *interpret* transforming experiences arising from the authoritative yet paradoxical presence of Jesus of Nazareth. It is particularly in the radical and overwhelming experience of the *resurrection power* of Jesus as the crucified messiah that the origins of Christianity and the New Testament writings have to be sought (Johnson 1999:95-122). “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile”, Paul writes to the young congregation in Corinth (1 Cor 15:14, 17). Although the concept of resurrection after death was a popular theme in Greek and other mythological narratives (cf. Van Eck 2004:564-565), the resurrection of a *crucified messiah* – and especially the life-changing *effects* of Jesus’s resurrection – was shockingly new to the Mediterranean symbolic world.⁹

Because the resurrection faith of the early Jesus followers was rooted in paradox, it created an urgent need for *interpretation*. That a man everyone knew had died was now alive, that a man who died a scandalous death as a sinner was now perceived the source of forgiveness of sins for all others, was a conviction and an experience that created multiple problems for human understanding – particularly for those whose lives were transformed by his power. Continuous experiences of God’s life-giving Spirit in the present – in diverse and changing social contexts – would constantly challenge them to interpret and reinterpret inherited traditions, and to imagine, re-imagine and reconstruct the future. The living, collective *memory* of Jesus’s life, death and exaltation would thus be inextricably intertwined with the formation of their identity and ethos as a community.¹⁰

Any interpretation, including the interpretation of ‘religious’ experience, obviously happens in the light of available symbols.¹¹ This would also be the case with the early Jesus followers. They were forced to interpret radically new experiences and changing circumstances in the light of a pluralistic first-century Mediterranean symbolic world, constituted by diverse and complex combinations *inter alia* of Roman rule, Greco-Roman (specifically Hellenistic) culture, and the religious symbols of Judaism (the torah, prophets and writings).¹² The rapid spread of the movement

⁹ “It was because men and women of the first-century Mediterranean world, both Jews and Greeks, found their lives suddenly and inexplicably transformed by a new and unsuspected power from a new and confusing source that they were forced to reflect on their lives in a new way and infuse the symbols of their world with new content ... The conviction that Jesus is alive and powerfully active in the believing community is the implicit, and sometimes explicit, presupposition of all the writings of the NT” (Johnson 1999:104, 117).

¹⁰ For the early church the Christ event would exceed all previous experiences and interpretations of the God of the Jewish scriptures. In Jesus God is found in places where God would not be perceived. In Jesus of Nazareth God is particularly and dramatically present at the margins of human existence. Not to say that God is not at the centre of life, but in Jesus the centre profoundly *shifts* to marginal people and places. Jesus is born in a place where no child was meant to be born. In showing compassion to children, tax-collectors, Samaritans, women (particularly prostitutes and the demon-possessed), Jesus subverts the established values of power in the moral world of first century Palestine. He dies violently at a place where criminals were executed. Through the trauma of the cross’s humiliation and shame, a shocking vision of God is presented. The ultimate site where God would *not* be perceived, thus paradoxically *becomes* the site of God’s presence. In shifting the margins to the centre, God’s concrete presence in Jesus becomes a radical moment of shock and surprise, inviting people to *look* differently, to adopt new roles, and to revisit their understanding of God and their traditions in the light of the Christ event (cf. Mouton 2001:121-122).

¹¹ ‘Religious’ in this sense is referring to individual and social experiences, convictions and interpretations having to do with what is perceived as ‘ultimate reality’. It may involve encounters with the holy, the mystery of a totally other and transcendent reality, and usually carries with itself “the weight of an absolutely authoritative presence” (Johnson 1999:108).

¹² A symbolic world is “the system of meanings that anchors the activities of individuals and communities in the real world. Nothing is more down to earth and ordinary than a symbolic world ... The task of a symbolic world is that of making our lives work ... ‘Symbolic world’ is best used of the whole complex system of actions and words that constitute the self-understanding of a group, including physical as well as linguistic products” (Johnson 1999:11, 13). Such symbols serve to interpret human experience. New experiences may threaten a group’s identity, and may challenge the group’s ability to understand and interpret those experiences in the light of their symbolic world. When old symbols fail to explain or make sense of new experiences, they might have to be reshaped or even abandoned.

by many messengers required flexible adjustment to new settings (cf., for instance, the fundamental transition from predominantly rural to urban settings addressed by Paul and Peter). As (written) medium of (mainly oral) processes of interpretation, the New Testament texts were conditioned linguistically by such diverse historical settings and contemporary voices. In the process they did not so much invent a new language, but rather *reinterpreted, rearranged and reappropriated* available traditional symbols, particularly from within the symbolic world of torah (cf. Johnson 1999:5, 35-38). In fact, the New Testament *radicalised* inherited images from the root – particularly those related to *power and authority* – by describing the early Christian communities as completely *recreated* by God in Jesus Christ, with a radically new identity and corresponding ethos (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:15; 4:23-24).¹³

Similar processes of *experience* and *interpretation* continued during the collection, selection and canonisation of these documents by the early church fathers. This process would be determined fundamentally by the *sensus ecclesiae*, the sense of the church – by its communal discernment and awareness of being inspired and guided by a living God. Through the process of canonisation the early church affirmed that those writings – *particularly* in their being addressed to, and conditioned by specific historical contexts – possessed enduring authority and ‘relevance’. For the church those texts had the power to liberate and to heal, to bring the church into being, and to shape it in its many personal and public manifestations according to the ‘mind of Christ’ (cf. 1 Cor 2:16; Johnson 1999:608).¹⁴

The ‘relevance’ of these writings would, however, not (necessarily) be the same in every time and place. It is particularly in their *diversity* of settings, genre and style (representing a huge chorus of voices, speaking from various times, places and circumstances, witnessing to the dynamic relationship between a living, speaking, acting God and living, speaking, acting human beings in the *everyday concrete reality* of their lives) that these texts would be able to address different contexts through the ages. For this reason, the *whole* collection of writings – in all its diversity and even divergence, complexity and coherence – has to be kept alive if the church is to affirm its identity in every time and place.¹⁵ Such an interactive dynamic provides New Testament Studies in particular with a useful framework – namely to act in continuation with interpretive processes of the early church, while accounting critically for our own acts of interpretation in the light of changing times and circumstances.

HOW DO THESE WRITINGS REFER TO THE ULTIMATE REALITY CALLED ‘GOD’?

We have seen that the Christ event was to challenge and exceed all previous experiences and interpretations of the God of the Hebrew scriptures. It would challenge the early (and later) Jesus followers to radically revision their everyday lives from within a faith relationship with a living God through Jesus Christ and the Spirit.¹⁶ So, if we say that

¹³ By *retelling and reactualising* these stories, by constantly *reorienting* themselves to the alien, completely other, yet for them *truthful* story of Jesus Christ, the moral identity and ethos of the early Christians would be shaped and constituted *as a community* (Hauerwas 1981; cf. Richardson 1994; Dunn 2003). “(T)o be a Christian was to learn the story of Israel and of Jesus and the ongoing church traditions well enough to experience the world from within those stories, and to act in keeping with that experience, as a member of that community” (Birch & Rasmussen 1989:21, cf. 66-84; Hauerwas 1985a:181-184; Meeks 1993:172-173, 189-210).

For those participants in the Judeo-Christian story – both in the Jewish scriptures and the NT – the cult, its festivals and specifically its liturgy provided the *interpretive space, the frame of reference, the horizons for a reality* within which they collectively expressed and cultivated their vision of, and trust in a living God. Through rituals of public worship (sacrifices, hymns, confessions of faith and guilt, prayers, blessings, listening to the covenant stories and the torah, and later the participation in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist), they were constantly reminded of, empowered and encouraged by who God is and by what God had done in the past. It is precisely in these original contexts of interpretation that NT Studies may find guidelines to the possibilities of present-day receptions of those texts.

¹⁴ It is of crucial importance to acknowledge the dynamic nature of these texts, not only in terms of processes of reinterpretation represented by them, but also by *ongoing* processes of interpretation and sense-making stimulated and facilitated by them (cf. Verhey 1984:179-187). The *imperative* of such ongoing processes is in fact implied in the very nature of these texts (Lategan 1982:48-50; Fowl & Jones 1991:36-44). Interpretations of the bible by subsequent audiences therefore calls for continuous wrestling, for Spirit-filled, *faith-full* and critical reflection on the active presence of God in changing times and circumstances (Fiorenza 1988:13).

¹⁵ “It is precisely the way in which these writings work *together* to shape Christian identity that makes the canon such an important and intricate organism ... It is precisely in those elements of plurality and even disharmony that the texts open to new meanings, so that they are allowed to speak to the disharmonies and disjunctions of contemporary life” (Johnson 1999:609, 613).

¹⁶ Gustafson’s major work on ethics, his two-volume *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (1981, 1984. Chicago: University of Chicago Press) emphasises that the essence of Christian ethos is the perspective of faith in a sovereign God. This approach focuses on Christians’ response to what God has done in history and is still doing today. It places God in the very centre of moral activity.

Jesus (as interpreted by the New Testament writings) authoritatively opened up new ways of thinking and speaking about God, humanity, social issues, the earth – *how* did it happen, and how was it supposed to happen?

To be able to explore, know and describe reality is an awesome responsibility entrusted to human beings. However, perhaps even more remarkable is the ability of human imagination to *redescribe* reality, to *rename* experiences, to *retell* their stories from new angles. This refers to the human capacity to speak *metaphorically* – to see new possibilities and to make new connections between known images and (past and present) experiences.¹⁷

Metaphorical language typically permeates the New Testament writings. Literary devices such as *genre* (narrative, parable, poetry, apocalyptic symbols), liturgy, art, tradition (as extended metaphor), and even people all function rhetorically as instruments for *re-describing* reality from new perspectives. The early Christians – by, for example, referring to God as recreator and redeemer in Jesus Christ; Jesus as the son of God, their lord (*kurios*) and saviour; by witnessing to the Spirit of God as the seal of their ownership by God; to themselves as the body of Christ, God's household, a holy temple – *reimagined* and *renamed* their understanding of God and their (ordinary) life experiences from the new perspective of the Christ event.¹⁸ In this way language functions as a powerful lens, a reorienting device toward a renewed self-understanding and ethos, toward making sense of the past, present and future.

My interest in metaphor here particularly lies in its imaginative and transformative nature, in its ability to refer to an alternative reality, and to make sense of reality. According to Ricoeur (1975; 1976:89-95; 1977:216-256), the transformative (referential, authoritative, life-giving) power of a text lies *in its ability to suggest, to open up, to mediate, to make possible (glimpses of) a 'proposed world' which readers might adopt or inhabit, an alternative point of view with which they can identify*. In this way a text has a persuasive thrust toward renewal, toward transformation, inviting people to re-imagine their life stories, and to inhabit its world as the real world for them. In this way a text may disclose new possibilities – new ways of looking at things, new ways of relating to people, new ways of thinking and behaving.¹⁹ In this regard Lategan (1994:134; 1996:226-229) makes a strong claim that a “better understanding of the function of reference in all its forms holds the key to unlock the transformative potential of (biblical) texts in contemporary situations”.²⁰

Biblical metaphor and story (as extended metaphor) function on two important levels. Firstly, they are used to *identify* different dispensations, and preferred or non-preferred positions, attitudes and actions. Secondly, they are used as rhetorical strategies “*to effect the shifting of position*” (Lategan 1993:402). Indicating preferred and non-preferred positions is one thing. To achieve a shift in the right direction is, however, quite another matter. How do the New Testament authors go about ensuring the desired result? How do they influence their readers to accept

Gustafson's approach is closely related to the views of Richard H Niebuhr (1941), who underlined Christians' responsibility to *listen* carefully, to be open and responsive to the work of God (cf. Botha 1994a:41-42; Stassen 1996; Mouton 2002:227-243).

¹⁷ By means of comparison, a metaphor creates a relation of meaning between two things in such a surprising way that something new comes to the fore about the unknown factor in the comparison. Metaphors are heuristic devices for the redescription of reality or lived experience, which break up inadequate interpretations of human experience and the world and open the way to new, more adequate interpretations (Lategan 1985; 1993:404-407; 1994a:21).

¹⁸ NT metaphors may serve as 'windows' (albeit hazy) through which the processes of identification, estrangement and reorientation – typical of the image-making capacity of the human mind – can be viewed. Any creative act of interpretation, discovery, decision-making, transition or transformation can be recognised as the imaginative combination and synthesis of the familiar into new wholes (McFague 1982:35-36), which is a redescription of reality (Ricoeur 1975:122-28; 1976:45-69; 1980:26). These notions provide important insight into the processes through which the Christian story may impact on audiences of NT texts by continuously reorienting and reforming their understanding of God, themselves and their ethos as disciples of Jesus Christ – whose life always reorders, shocks and upsets familiar, conventional preconceptions and understandings of God.

¹⁹ Cf. Thiselton 1992:351-372; Lategan 1992:154; 1994:131-133; Van Huyssteen 1987.

²⁰ The transformative potential of a text corresponds with the notion of the implied reader as “a device to engage the real reader by offering a role to be played or an attitude to be assumed” (Lategan 1989:10). It is “the reader we have to be willing to become in order to bring the reading experience to its full measure” (Vorster 1989:25). Since the development of reader response and reception theories, Iser's concept of the 'implied reader' became a powerful tool in describing the role of audiences/readers in the process of understanding. The implied or textually defined reader refers to “the anticipated role a potential reader is expected to play in order to actualize the text ... (It) is a device to engage the real reader by offering a role to be played or an attitude to be assumed” (Lategan 1989:5, 10). In this sense metaphors are important lenses, clues, signals or shifting devices by means of which an author can instruct or guide her audience/readers toward adopting a preferred position, or inhabiting a new moral world. By shifting the (meaning or reference of the) language people use, such lenses may help them to see differently, and to redescribe and integrate their experiences – in so far as they are willing to accept the alternative perspectives of those texts (cf. Schneiders 1991:15-17, 27-63, 138-156).

their new position and lifestyle *coram Deo*? And how is the change of attitude and behaviour on the side of the audience supposed to take place?

According to McFague (1982:31-66, 90-194), the heart of the drama of Jesus's death and resurrection is the *tension* that it manifests between accepted ways of relating to God and to others, and a new way of living in the world.²¹ As such, Jesus's life and especially his death, resurrection and ascension have to be viewed as radical and disturbing, continuously calling into question the comfortable and secure homes that our interpretations of God have built for us (McFague 1982:51-54). Like Christ, his followers are called to lives that always stand in criticism of the status quo and that press toward fulfilment of the body of Christ.

In sum, what was the language of the New Testament writings supposed to *do* to their audiences? What were their implied rhetorical *functions*? Ultimately, it seems that these texts were meant to focus their audiences' attention on the God of Jesus Christ and the Spirit – as a *proclamation* of God's liberating and healing grace, but also as an *invitation* to identify with God's revelation and purpose for creation in Christ. By emphasising the early faith communities' identification with Christ, these texts provide a basis for the readers' new self-understanding and perspective on reality (Lategan 1993:404-406). They are a reminder that the believers' own dramatic change was not self-initiated, but rather was effected by the closest possible association with Christ.

For the church to identify with, and inhabit, the strange, alternative world of the New Testament writings is a delicate, ongoing, interactive process. It involves the wonder of a creating and recreating Sender-God's initiative, on the one hand, and the receiving of God's grace by ultimately dependent individuals and faith communities, on the other hand. It is as much a *gift* of God's grace as a faith-full hermeneutical *choice*:

In a cooperative shared work, the Spirit, the text, and the reader engage in a *transforming process*, which enlarges horizons and creates *new horizons* (Thiselton 1992:619).

Therefore, for New Testament Studies to give account of the nature of these writings *and* their reception in new times and places – as life-giving and sense-making activity – the authority of these texts has to be (re)focused and (re)structured within the dynamic site of continuous *interaction* between God's Spirit, their multiple textual dimensions, as well as the interests and needs of contemporary faith communities. Such an approach would embrace the many dimensions of the full hermeneutical circle, and would be truthful to the dynamic nature and purpose of these texts.

WHERE DO SUCH METAPHORICAL ACTS OF REDESCRIPTION OCCUR?

It is within such creative yet complex spaces that I believe the imaginative, transforming and authoritative power of the New Testament texts come to the fore. Surprisingly, the spiral movement between the Spirit, scripture and the concrete needs of current audiences is crucial also for the *unlocking* of the liberating meaning of those ancient canonised texts. It is exactly their rhetorical power to affirm and to nourish life, to facilitate new possibilities, to encourage and to heal, to console and to invite, to move and to challenge us to imagine and re-imagine – that makes them authoritative!

The continuing, risky process by which the early Jesus followers had to learn to match their new identity to a lifestyle and language worthy of their calling occurred in the creative, 'liminal' tension between (past) memory and (future) hope.²² The authors of the New Testament writings facilitate this process by constantly reminding their

²¹ This tension corresponds with the tension inherent in the NT writings themselves (representing *both* divine revelation and human interpretation).

²² The concept of 'liminality' was introduced by French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, who uses the term 'rites of passage' in connection with the ceremonies and rituals performed at different stages in the life cycle of individuals and groups (birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, retirement, and death). Van Gennep compares such events to the crossing of boundaries between territories. Like geographical boundaries that consist of stretches of land that function as neutral zones, a change from one phase of the life cycle to another often consists of a period of time that functions as a neutral zone, where the person is neither in the one stage nor in the other. These rites or ceremonies serve principally to provide guidance for the responsibilities encountered in the new phase (Van Gennep 1960:1-13, 21). Van Gennep distinguishes three types of rites, namely rites of separation from a previous world, rites of transition and rites of incorporation into a new world (1960:15-25, 192-194). Using the Latin word *limen* (threshold), he respectively calls these rites preliminal, liminal and postliminal.

readers of the privilege and associated ethos of their new position in Christ, in contrast to whom they were before. By inducing a process of continuous reorientation to Christ, these texts serve as a warning against any form of moral stagnation, false stability, absolute certainty, or closed ethical system.²³ It is in this context that their rhetoric and quest for moral identity and appropriate behaviour has to be understood. In continuation with their rich yet fragile nature I wish to argue that liminality be regarded as an essential characteristic of the Christian life, of theology in general, and of New Testament Studies in particular.

In textual communication the movement from one position to another within liminal space may be described in terms of the typical metaphorical processes of orientation, disorientation (alienation) and reorientation (cf. Ricoeur 1977; McFague 1975, 1982, among others). Categories and skills developed by related disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, literary science, classical and modern rhetoric, history, hermeneutics, and particularly the arts, would therefore be needed for ongoing explorations of the communication processes represented and stimulated by the New Testament texts.

It is in this context that I find the concept of 'liminality' particularly helpful for describing the dynamic 'epicentre' of New Testament Studies. The main reason for choosing this metaphor for the complex and ambiguous interface between sender, text and receivers is that such delicate processes are implied by the very nature of the New Testament texts. The majority, if not all, of the implied readers of these documents found themselves within liminal or transitional phases – characterised by comprehensive changes in the attitude of their minds, from within the concrete political, economic, social and moral conditions of the first-century Mediterranean world (cf. Meeks 1986, 1993; Malina 1993, 1996).²⁴

In the fields of cultural anthropology and sociology the notion of liminality has since been developed further by several scholars, in particular by North American anthropologist Victor Turner. It has also been adapted and appropriated by theologians such as Gerald Arbuckle and Leo Perdue, both with reference to Turner, and Mark Kline Taylor (1990:199-208), with reference to anthropologist Paul Rabinow. Mindful of the resocialisation of Christian communities into new roles and groups, Arbuckle (1991:31-37) reworked Turner's social-anthropological model (Turner 1974:37-42; cf. Perdue 1990:9-11) by emphasising three major phases during a time of change. The first involves a breach or separation from the known (often a well-structured, prosperous and orderly situation, also known as a *societas* phase). The second is a liminal, often a crisis phase of transition, during which previous roles, regulations, structures and certainties may be relativised and fundamentally rearranged. This phase is often a lengthy and complicated process, during which people feel an urgent need to discover meaning in what is happening, and to redefine their humanity. Turner (1974:45-57, 273-274) refers to this as a *communitas* phase, a phase of "reflexivity" and "redressive action". A third phase is that of reintegration and reconstitution into new roles and groups, often by means of insights gained during the liminal phase.

Mark Kline Taylor, systematic theologian from Princeton, New Jersey, develops liminality – together with 'admiration' – as a Christian reconciliatory strategy for dealing with human differences. He observes, "*liminality* is the term I reserve for the kind of life known 'betwixt and between' differentiated persons, groups or worlds. This is an experience of the wonder, the disorientation and discomfort that can rise when one is suspended between or among different groups or persons" (1990:200). Taylor describes the liminal space between cultural (including gender) boundaries as a difficult, fragile, risky and trying experience, of which the ambiguities and strains are not easily tolerated. At the same time the liminal encounter represents a dynamic and dialectic process wherein no one remains static. As new alliances are constructed in the interaction between different worlds, people's moral identities and lifestyles are reconstituted by it.

Despite their different time-frames and historical situations, and the different disciplines from which they write, both Van Genneep and Taylor emphasise the elements of risk and creativity within liminality. In tandem with other disciplines, their analyses are helpful in understanding the complex nature of liminality in a more nuanced way.

²³ In the ongoing, open-ended movement within liminality, the question may arise as to what extent the NT writings allow for the existence or formation of boundaries. How, for instance, would a community of faith deal with the continual confrontation with, and assimilation of strangers, and with new knowledge, new experiences and new situations? From within the context of the NT it is clear that any structures and boundaries (necessary though they may be under given circumstances) would only be justifiable in as far as they impel movement, communication, healing, reconciliation and moral formation (Taylor 1990:207). Where they inhibit movement, stop communication, or absolutise differences, they have to be dismantled. Rhetorical processes in the NT writings resemble an ongoing interaction between the identity awareness and ethos of followers of Christ. *These documents thus consider the creativity, tension, paradox, and risk of liminal spaces as the optimal context for moral formation and spiritual growth.*

²⁴ These changes were marked by shifts both from a view of God and humanity defined by exclusivity/separation (between people and God, and between Jewish and Gentile believers) to an identity and ethos of inclusivity/unity, and from an emphasis on cultic activities (covenant, circumcision, law, temple) to an emphasis on relations in which people of different ethnic groups, gender, and social status have been united with Christ into one new body or household. The way in which the NT authors facilitate these processes (*inter alia* by utilising metaphor and tradition as rhetorical strategies), seem to have a paraenetic and transformative function analogous to that of ritual and rites of passage during liminal phases in the lives of individuals and groups, reflected in liturgical elements such as prayer, hymns and sacraments.

If the epicentre of New Testament interpretation is characterised by such a rich yet fragile dynamic, it provides New Testament scholars with an important clue toward the ethos of their work. Moreover, if the authority of the New Testament texts lies in their metaphorical ability to *disclose (glimpses of) an alternative moral world* – a radically new perspective on reality, and a new way of living in the world, New Testament Studies are continuously challenged to do *likewise* – to facilitate and mediate the discernment of such an alternative world, a world characterised by God’s radical, surprising yet paradoxical presence in Jesus of Nazareth and the Spirit. It is in this regard that I believe New Testament scholars are called to assist the church in all its manifestations – particularly with respect to its public ethos – by becoming *a liminal site*, by facilitating and mediating discourse from within the epicentre of an interactive, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, shared space. In its diversity and divergence, complexity and coherence, New Testament Studies may serve the church – in creative and critical continuation with the texts we study – by *speaking more humbly and provisionally* (and therefore more *authoritatively!*) about the paradoxical yet radical, healing presence of a compassionate, vulnerable and impartial God in a complex world.²⁵

WHY (STILL) READ THE NEW TESTAMENT (IN AFRICA TODAY)?

If we say that ongoing processes of *experience* and *interpretation* within liminal space are characteristic of the Christian faith, we may ask more concretely about the spatial settings *where* such interpretations occur. As the experience and interpretation of the early Jesus followers occurred in concrete geographical, socio-economic, political, religious and philosophical contexts, the bible is read in (South) Africa today from within many diverse socio-cultural and historical contexts.

To illustrate the significance of an ‘ethics of New Testament interpretation’, of responsible, life-giving choices and decisions under given circumstances, I briefly refer to two stories from Africa during the last 10-15 years. First a story (or few observations rather) from South Africa. The reasons for telling this story is to show how crucially important the relation between *identity*, ‘*perspective*’ and *choice* is regarding people’s daily (public) ethos. It also shows to what an extent ‘context’ may provide and prioritise the agenda for theology.

The radical processes of transformation taking place in South Africa since 1994, with numerous societal shifts, have left no person or institution untouched – including the church and theological education. Amidst all the complex relations among various forms of theology/faith and socio-economic realities in South Africa, and in spite of significant shifts away from simplistic hermeneutic stances, “(i)t cannot be denied that, both within the Reformed communities and from the perspective of outsiders, apartheid has given the Reformed tradition, and even Christianity itself, a bad reputation in South Africa and has caused a lack of credibility and even self-confidence” (Smit 1999:4). In the process many people – black people and women in particular – feel *disillusioned* and *deceived* by the many ways in which scripture had been used to justify and solidify racial and gender apartheid.²⁶ For such people to be surprised (again) by

As the *medium* between radically different modes of existence, the NT writings metaphorically function as thresholds or bridges between inherited traditions and new interpretations of reality. It is the unavoidable challenge to account for their faith in a crucified, exalted Christ, that provided the NT authors and their audiences with the stimulus to *redefine* their humanity and moral existence in different times and places, under many diverse circumstances (cf. McFague 1982:154; Mouton 2003). It was the creativity of such ‘in between’, liminal stages – inspired by the radical presence of God’s resurrected Christ and life-giving Spirit – that led to the production of these texts in the first place. The addressees of the NT writings originated from a wide variety of backgrounds – culturally, socially, economically, geographically, religiously. Their movement and growth from one world to another, from a position ‘outside Christ’ to being ‘in Christ’ (to use typical Pauline language), is presented from various cultural contexts and times as a continuous wrestling to understand, a risky process with significant analogies to Van Gennep’s stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. However, the structure of their rhetoric does not seem necessarily to resemble a linear pattern from a preliminal into a postliminal phase, but *rather a cyclical movement of continuous reinterpretation and renewal within liminal space*. Quite often, their implied readers have already accepted Christ, and the authors wish to guide them towards a better understanding of that position and its implications for an ongoing reinterpretation of traditions, language and behaviour.

²⁵ However, we are often not comfortable with ambiguity, paradox and complexity, particularly when it comes to theological matters. The reasons are probably legion and highly complex. Perhaps the dogmatic frameworks of church traditions do not allow adequately for uncertainty and ambivalence. Perhaps our comfort zones won’t be easily disturbed by the subversive nature of the biblical texts, or the complexities involved in change. The easiest yet least authoritative way out would be to revert to quick, one-dimensional interpretations of either the NT texts or the contexts where they are being read today.

²⁶ African-American pastoral theologian Edward Wimberly calls the feeling of being excluded and forsaken by God “the ultimate shame, and one from which it is almost impossible to recover” (Wimberly 1999:51; cf. Volf 1996:57-98).

scripture's liberative and healing power has indeed become an enormous challenge.

Although the present moment in South Africa bears the promise of a new, more accountable hermeneutic awareness, it ironically often seems to *strengthen* the deeply entrenched sense of alienation among and within people (Mouton 2001:114-117). A potentially constructive yet dangerous consequence of a secular ('westernised') society and postmodern thinking, for instance, is that they lead to a breakdown of the hegemony of truth claims.²⁷ Instead of celebrating the richness of plurality and complementarity, the postmodern attitude for many becomes synonymous with a certain disintegration, with a loss of orientation, cohesion and integrity, a loss of a collective moral identity, memory and destination, a loss of trust in all forms of leadership (including church leadership), a loss of trust even in the truthfulness of the biblical texts, with a general attitude of apathy, of 'who cares?', and as a logical result, the loss of a corresponding corporate ethos of dignity and respect for life, and a lack of responsibility and involvement.²⁸

From a rhetorical perspective, such a profound sense of loss pertains to all three the basic elements of communication (sender-message-receivers), to which Aristotle referred as *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* (cf. Kennedy 1984:15-16). In South Africa many people – including Christians – have lost trust in the *ethos*, integrity, truthfulness and authority of their (pastoral) leaders, as well as the *logos*, content, authority and intention of their (spoken and nonverbal) 'words'. Consequently, the *pathos* of their audiences, the rhetorical *effect* of their words and gestures in the lives of people, is often inhibited detrimentally, leading to a sense of agnosticism and apathy – particularly among critical thinkers and historically disadvantaged groups. With regard to Christianity, all these prerequisites for authoritative communication have come under deep suspicion, have lost credibility, and need to be revisited fundamentally. At the heart of these symptoms, in my view, lies the basic need for an accountable view of *authority* – the authority of people and their words (texts) in general, and the biblical texts in particular.²⁹ Hence my interest in *pathos* as the end result of the communication process.

As far as the church is concerned, these tendencies go against its distinctive nature as a diverse yet uniting, life-giving *community*. These trends tragically witness to the reality that Christians have somehow lost their *orientation and integration*, their sense of calling, their *primary identity as Christians*. This is essentially a *theological* problem, which often manifests itself as a 'moral crisis', but in actual fact goes much deeper.³⁰ It therefore calls for a careful and coherent *theological* response.³¹

²⁷ In a secular, postmodern society no institution, including Christianity with its Truth claims (with a capital T and in the singular) and authoritative biblical texts, has any privileged status. For many people this means that all truth claims merely become a matter of opinion, and that morality is a matter of personal preference. Quite often the emphasis is on *different* rationalities and view points, with little regard for that which binds people together.

²⁸ These observations have serious implications for how people read and interpret the NT today, for how they read and respond to societal and economic challenges in Southern Africa and the rest of Africa, to global issues, for how they speak about God. Of what use can NT Studies be in the *kaïros* moment? What attitudes and actions would match the proportions of such a crisis, and contribute to lasting solutions?

²⁹ The other side of the 'authority' coin is *submission* and *obedience*. If authority has to be truthful, liberative and healing in order to communicate life, submission has likewise to be free, voluntary, mutual and subversive. Within the rhetorical movement of the NT writings, the nature of Christ's power and authority, and its strange, subversive relation to obedience and submission deserves special attention here. Right through the NT – particularly in the Gospel accounts – Jesus radically turns the patriarchal understanding of submission (as assumed subordination according to Jewish/Roman cultural conventions) around toward voluntary respect and awe. This essentially reflects Jesus's attitude toward God and his parents (Lk 2:51; Phlp 2:5-8). This would also apply to his followers. To serve and obey the God of Jesus Christ would imply an openness for God's radical presence under all circumstances – a willingness to acknowledge God's sovereign authority. *To submit oneself – like Christ – to God and one another is a prerequisite for the Christian faith*. The problem however is that the concept of 'submission' has been severely distorted through the ages – with painful results. To this day the attitude of Christ disturbingly goes against our personal and cultural grain.

³⁰ This is particularly pertinent with respect to the understanding of (sexual) violence and the abuse of power in South African societies and churches. There have been significant changes. However, the memory of nearly two thousand years of a male-dominated church, backed by theology that is derived from mainly Western male scholarship has left us with enormous challenges. Denise Ackermann aptly remarks: "An appalling and too often unacknowledged side of the endemic violence in our society is the sexual violence inflicted on women and children. Even if this fact is acknowledged, it is often not understood that sexual violence is essentially an evil abuse of power. As such, it is a *theological* problem. Racism and sexism are structures of domination which create conditions for the abuse of power" (Ackermann 1994:205; italics mine).

³¹ Smit (1999:11) reiterates this observation: "The most serious reason for concern about the state of Reformed Christianity in South Africa ... is not the alarming proportions of our moral crisis and our lack of responsibility, but the integrity of our own identity and the

This brings me to a second story from Africa. The reasons for telling this story are the same. It wishes to underline the importance of 'theological perspective' and choice in people's daily ethos. It also shows how (biblical) story can function to open up and facilitate alternative perspectives on reality.

A remarkable contemporary example of continuous interpretation stimulated by the biblical texts in general and the New Testament texts in particular is to be found in the activities and writings of *The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, founded in 1989. The Circle consists of about 400 women from across Africa, within various contexts and disciplines, committed to searching for, and publishing on creative alternatives to *all forms of power abuse and injustice* in African churches and societies, and to gender justice in particular. From their efforts originated the *Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture* at Trinity Theological College in Accra (Ghana), of which Professor Mercy Amba Oduyoye is the director.³²

At a consultation in March 1998 the Circle was divided into four research areas, one of which is African biblical and cultural hermeneutics. The project resulted *inter alia* in a seminal work which was co-published by the Society of Biblical Literature and the World Council of Churches, entitled *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (2001). It was edited by Musa W Dube, at the time associate professor in Biblical Studies at the University of Botswana, and currently serving as consultant for the World Council of Churches with the task of helping theological institutions to integrate HIV/AIDS issues into their programmes.

From the outset the Circle's consultation for African biblical and cultural hermeneutics was challenged with issues of methodology, particularly with respect to the new approach of African feminist readings of the bible. They were to devise alternative ways of reading the bible that would account for African women's life experiences from within a plurality of religious, socio-cultural, geographical, racial, political and socio-economic contexts, and that would encourage and inform discourses and practices toward radical church renewal and transformation. These ways of reading were to account not only for the continuing authority of (written) biblical texts in those contexts, but also for the authority of other vibrant texts in the lives of women, such as (oral) African cultures. All these texts had to be studied and brought into dialogue with each other "for the creation of a just world and the empowerment of women" (Dube 2001b:1; cf. 2000:197-201).

In the process of reviewing the study of African biblical and cultural hermeneutics, the consultation realised that the discipline was *in dire need of many more trained women scholars* if it was to address adequately the need to develop African women's ways of interpreting both the bible as well as their particular cultural canons. As it is, there are very few academic and literate biblical interpreters on the African continent, given the orality of African societies and their

credibility of our own life and witness. We face a theological – not primarily a moral – crisis and we need a theological response". In his paper *Scripture as Sacramental Word*, North American theologian John Burgess (1998:380) refers to recent studies of mainline Protestantism which have suggested that the critical issues are *theological*. He particularly refers to an analysis of the so-called 'Presbyterian predicament' by Coalter, Mulder and Weeks, published in 1992, where they argued that the renewal of the denomination depends on a recovery of theological vision. A key issue, in their view, is the urgent need to recover the *authority of scripture* as the 'word of God'.

³² What makes the contributions of the Circle particularly remarkable is how boldly its members take responsibility for their own destiny, in spite of their disillusionment with how the bible often functions in (mainly patriarchal socio-cultural and church) contexts in Africa, and amidst the dire societal needs of the African continent with respect to employment, health, education, and safety. A fundamental problem for women (also Christian women) is the *polarity between the household and public sphere*. Women's roles (in church and society) are defined largely by their household roles, leading to unequal power, even when secular laws provide for equality. Recognising how important the bible is for churches in Africa, the Circle takes as a primary challenge the task of deconstructing some old and reconstructing anew the ways in which the bible is being read. Their consistent emphasis is on the necessity to reread the bible through women's eyes *if there is to be gender justice in the church* (cf. the "Final statement of the Women's pre-council meeting" to the 24th Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana, on July 31, 2004). The Circle's responses may be summarised in terms of two phases: (1) the development of a hermeneutic of *suspicion* toward literal, ahistorical biblical interpretation, deconstructing patriarchal dominance through story-telling and theory-forming; (2) the development of a hermeneutic of *affirmation* by reconstructing theologies and ecclesial ethos through feminist and postcolonial biblical interpretation characterised by mutuality, partnership and interdependence.

That the Circle makes sense of life – particularly by emphasising the transformative power of the bible – says much for the life-giving authority of the God of the bible and the bible itself, as well as the creative, re-imagining, sense-making capacity of human beings, especially in fragile, risky, liminal situations (cf. Ukpong 2000; West 2000; Punt 1998 for general trends in the reception of the bible in Africa, witnessing to its importance for Christians in Africa, and – simultaneously – the crucial importance of the rich yet complex African context for the interpretation of the bible).

economic status. Due to the patriarchal nature of African societies, women and girls are generally more affected by illiteracy than men. This is exacerbated by the reality that African patriarchy is often supported by biblical patriarchy (Dube 2001b:8). The tragic consequence is that there are probably not more than ten female biblical scholars with a doctoral degree in the whole of Africa (Dube 2001b:12).

For the purpose of developing African women's ways of interpretation, the Circle showed a preferential option for a *storytelling* approach. Many reasons have been articulated for considering narrative to be a potentially powerful instrument for rereading the bible and culture toward liberating and healing practices in churches and societies. The Circle at the same time realises that the retelling of biblical stories together with African cultural folktales as a form of cultural hermeneutics would "have to be informed by and grounded in critical theories *that seek to avoid all forms of oppression*" (Dube 2001b:2; emphasis mine; cf. Dube 2000:3-21, 47-56, 97-124, 197-201; Punt 2003).³³

³³ I list some of the reasons why the consultation regarded storytelling a potentially useful tool for the purpose of the project (Dube 2001a:3-6). These aptly illustrate the imaginative, transforming power of story as extended metaphor:

- In African communities, "stories are told and retold repeatedly to depict life, to transmit values, and to give wisdom for survival. The art of telling and retelling stories remains central to African societies" (Dube 2001b:3). As such, stories provide a consistent resource for the formation of moral identity and ethos;
- Storytelling in Africa, very much like singing and dancing, is largely a participatory and performative activity. Listeners are invited to comment and add their interpretations through which fixed stories are opened up for continuous and fresh retelling. As such it is a familiar *genre* to literate as well as illiterate audiences;
- In Africa, storytelling is a *traditional source of theology*. Narrative (as extended metaphor) provides space for alternative visions, perspectives, and values in the struggle for economic, ecological, gender and racial justice (cf. Ackermann et al. 2000; Phiri 1997; Phiri et al. 2002);
- Various characteristics of African stories make them useful toward developing biblical and cultural hermeneutics that empower women. Many African stories (including proverbs and idiomatic sayings) represent philosophies and strategies of survival. Stories are often gender-neutral and could be used subversively to counteract patriarchal and colonising interpretations of life. As such they provide a lens for social analysis and critique, as well as *role models for resistance against, and survival amidst* oppressive systems and institutions;
- Stories hold the potential of *re-imagining, re-telling and re-enacting* the experiences of biblical women from the perspectives of later audiences. Biblical narratives are retold and re-imagined through the biographies of women living in patriarchal societies (cf. Abbey 2001). They identify with the point of view of those narratives as if they were insiders in the story. In this way the dynamic nature of ancient texts may be unlocked in fresh and surprising ways, *even beyond the intentions and capabilities of their patriarchal authors*. No wonder that the stories of the Samaritan and Syro-Phoenician women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene have become such powerful elements of those 'revised canons'. Another popular example is the personification of 'Mama Africa' as a raped and bleeding woman who is invited to rise to life like the daughter of Jairus (Dube 1996a; 1996b; 2000:127-195; 2001c; 2003; Wamue & Getui 1996). These characters are interpreted as bold women of faith who were prepared to cross cultural barriers because of their faith in Jesus. They embody new ways of existing in a male-dominated world which Jesus opened up for women, reclaiming their worthiness as image-bearers of God (cf. Mouton 2005);
- Storytelling is a female role in many African societies. To retell biblical stories in the light of their own biographies therefore provide women with an opportunity to "reclaim their place as interpreters of social reality and as proponents of their own strategies of resistance and survival" (Dube 2001b:13);
- From re-telling and re-interpreting biblical narrative *new liturgical expressions are inspired* which hold the potential of internalising values such as hospitality to strangers; inclusive images for God and humanity; the reinterpretation of power in terms of non-violent, caring, and nurturing activities; the celebration of women's gifts and strengths that resist and transform stereotypical views of womanhood such as confusing gentleness and compassion with weakness; healing processes of lament, participation and community-building;
- Biblical narratives of women who followed Jesus, as well as parables, provide imaginative bridges leading audiences to judge a situation from new angles. In this way they often serve to *counteract unnuanced, ahistorical quotations from Scripture* to justify the silence and submissiveness of women, such as Paul's injunctions in I Cor 14:33-40 and I Tim 2:8-15 (cf. Mouton & Van Wolde 2005);
- Stories from within African cultural (and specifically economic) contexts inform *critical questions to other expressions of feminism*, particularly middle class feminist discourse which privileges gender oppression over other forms of oppression such as imperialism, colonialism and poverty (cf. Dube 2000:23-43, 57-83, 157-195). In this respect African feminist biblical interpreters find strong resonance with African American womanist hermeneutics;
- Narrative, according to its very nature, opens up *rhetorical space* in interpretive activities by allowing for questions pertaining to its function within larger literary units. It specifically asks what such texts were supposed to *do* in the lives of their recipients by their suggestion of a 'proposed world' (Ricoeur) to inhabit, of new roles to be adopted.

Dube and others use storytelling as “a feminist theory of analysis and as a method of rewriting the patriarchal silences about women’s lives in biblical texts and in African history” (Dube 2001b:5; cf. Dewey 1996, 1997). In general, the method serves as a “subversive rereading underlining African women’s full understanding of their political, economic, and social positions, in both historical and contemporary times, and showing *that they are taking hold of their own destinies*” (Dube 2001b:6; 2001c). Of crucial importance in Dube’s approach is her consistent emphasis on the *interconnectedness of power issues related to gender, race and economy*, with particular reference to the biblical justification and authorization of all these aspects. At the same time she continuously connects with ‘non-academic’ audiences – an aspect often lacking in Western scholarship.

Women interpreting the New Testament in Africa is of course not a new phenomenon. Within various church traditions women form the backbone of core activities such as bible study, catechetical training, women’s auxiliary associations and works of compassion. However, because of the socio-culturally determined private and submissive position of most African women – often legitimised by one-sided biblical interpretations – the (public) voices of women had been kept silent for centuries (Phiri 1997, 2000; Kawale 2001a, 2001b).³⁴

The emergence of African women’s contextual biblical hermeneutics as a response to the situation, however, is relatively new and certainly to be welcomed and encouraged. By placing the presence, contribution and survival of women in history at the centre of the interpretive process (Abbey 2001; Dube 2001c), these women introduce academic and non-academic interpreters of the New Testament to new understandings of both the biblical texts and present-day contexts. By so doing they invite later audiences to build a world in continuation with New Testament perspectives that would honour diversity and justice. Through re-telling and re-imagining biblical stories from their socio-cultural perspectives, African women do not only find models of power abuse which relate to their own circumstances, but also models of women who creatively use their power to empower others. In the process *the oppressed boldly and ironically become agents of their own empowerment* (cf. Dube 2003).

In his review of the volume *Other Ways of Reading*, Tinyiko S Maluleke, professor of African Theology at UNISA, acclaims the voices of African women’s interpretation of the bible as representing “the cutting edge, the prophetic voice in African theological and biblical scholarship” at the moment (Maluleke 2001). He describes the significance of their contributions to theology as follows (2001:237-238):

African women’s theologies are charting a new way. This theology is mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do ... There is no doubt that, in the past twenty years, no dimension of Christian theology in Africa has grown in enthusiasm, creativity, and quality like women’s theology.

An appropriate response for New Testament Studies (in South Africa) to this ‘tale of two stories’ would be *firstly* to recognise and affirm the rich contribution of Christian spirituality in Africa – specifically as embodied by the Circle. It is characterised by its passion for wholeness of life (with no dualism between ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’, ‘spirit’ and ‘body’, ‘male’ and ‘female’), by community life as central to all meaning, and by its respect for the integrity of creation (Phiri 2004). *Secondly*, cognisance has to be taken of westernising, secularising tendencies in societies and churches, that seriously undermine the primary identity of Christian communities as well as (traditional) community life in Africa. *Thirdly* – as a concrete response to the previous two aspects – New Testament Studies in South Africa (particularly in far south Stellenbosch) are challenged to respond with utmost sensitivity to the invitation of that small group of biblical scholars on the African continent who for too long have been silenced because of multifaceted (economic, racial, gender) power structures in theology, churches and societies. Their invitation (outcry!) to churches and theology to *accompany them in their efforts to reread the bible with new eyes, and to engender theological education*, cannot be taken for granted (cf. n. 32). It provides biblical scholarship (in South Africa) with a unique opportunity radically to revisit its calling with respect to the vulnerable liminal spaces among people of diverse paradigms and life experiences on this continent (cf. Lategan 1997).³⁵

³⁴ There have been hopeful changes. According to *Reformed World* 49/1 & 2 (1999:66-76), there were 303 female ordained ministers in Reformed churches in thirty African countries in 1999 – Madagascar being at the top of the list with the Democratic Republic of Congo in second place. Of the thirty countries of which statistics were available, five did not have a single female ordained minister.

³⁵ As the first female professor in NT Studies at this institution I find myself in a constant state of liminality. My own historical development as a white, middle-class woman from within the (Dutch and Uniting) Reformed tradition, has defined my identity in profound

SO, WHO ARE WE AS NT SCHOLARS, AND ARE WE (STILL) OF ANY USE?

The point should be clear. New Testament Studies (in South Africa) is not the prerogative of a privileged few. Its rich yet fragile liminal epicentre involves every person and community who interprets and experiences the living faith mediated by the New Testament, directly and indirectly. For this reason 'ordinary' and 'professional' readers of these texts – biblical scholars, systematic and practical theologians – all share the *moral obligation* to engage the creative tension between the dynamics of these texts and the multiple needs, suffering, and hope of present-day readers. Those who have chosen to inhabit their alternative, life-giving world, desperately need one another in the process of understanding and sense-making.

Thus, whoever 'we' are as New Testament scholars (in Southern Africa and in Stellenbosch), whose interests and voices 'we' represent (or ignore), whom 'we' choose as discussion partners (and whom not), will determine the *pathos*, the persuasive power, and life-giving authority of 'our' words and actions in significant ways. Which means that we can't assume that our work would be of any use to the church and its public witness. Perhaps we should rather ask whether the church (still) needs us, and whether we are really indispensable as a life-giving, sense-making influence? As little as we as New Testament scholars can assume that we have been of use in the past (cf. Smit 1992), we can assume that we will be right now. The question for me has to do with *what* New Testament Studies refers to, and *how* it refers?

We have seen that the authority of the sacred texts we study lies in their referential power, in their ability to point beyond themselves to an ultimate reality which they could only describe in limited and provisional ways. Their authority for subsequent readers *likewise* resides in the continuing encounter with the God mediated and stimulated by them. Ethically responsible interpretation of these texts therefore calls for a continuous wrestling, for imaginative, Spirit-filled, *faith-full* and rigorously critical reflection on the radically active presence and will of God in ever changing times and circumstances.³⁶

It should be evident that the interactive 'epicentre' of New Testament Studies is a surprisingly rich yet complex, noisy and even messy space. If its inhabitants would be truthful to its nature and purpose, they would first of all have to experience the silence, solitude, perceptivity, sensitivity and *sense-ibility* that would enable them to hear, to see, to feel, to smell, to taste, to discern, to make sense of the past, present and future, and to be moved toward imagining new possibilities. In order for New Testament Studies to be taken seriously, to be *heard*, to be authoritative and life-giving, we first need to become 'receivers' ourselves, to listen carefully and prayerfully to what (the authors, and God as ultimate sender of) these texts sought to *accomplish*, and to pay special heed to their intended *functions* (rather than

ways, and has made me aware of the unequivocal wealth of interdenominational, ecumenical and intercultural fellowship. My spiritual and academic development through faculties of Arts and Theology have likewise sensitised me to the necessity of interdisciplinary thinking with respect to the interpretation of biblical texts and their appropriation in new contexts. For these and many other reasons I have become a liminal site of different stories, interests, dreams, and fears – committed to affirming the infinite worth and dignity of all people, to re-imagining wholeness and integrity in the body of Christ, to refusing to accept present realities as the final possibility for God's world.

³⁶ The obstacles involved in such a journey are also implied and anticipated by the NT texts. Amid their glorious visions and powerful potential for the good, they also reckon with the fragile realities of human limitations and fallibility. Yet, vivid memories of the Judeo-Christian story were meant to remain a source of living hope in the present. The question today is how the culturally-bound alternative world of those ancient texts may be brought into relation with (post)modern theological and moral challenges. To respond faithfully and with sensitivity to their implied rhetorical functions is to account for their life-giving authority and transformative potential *amid* their cultural-historical biases – that is, the typically human process of reinterpretation underlying them. To allow for interpretations and experiences of a living God who is constantly revealed in new and surprising ways (Hays 1989: 32-33; Meeks 1993:217-219), later audiences are challenged to account for their patriarchal contexts and language, and to create the inclusive language needed to make sense of new faith experiences. The NT texts do not bind us in rigid, legalistic ways, but liberate us toward the imaginative appropriation of the mighty, healing power of God's love in new circumstances. Amid their patriarchal embeddedness, they invite contemporary receivers to identify with Christ in the paradoxical power of his resurrection, and to grow beyond all limited and stereotypical views of humanity. Anything less would confine the God of Jesus Christ and the Spirit to the boundaries of ancient texts in ways contradictory to their own dynamic nature! Committed to the authority of scripture as liberating practice for all people – in all times and places – interpretive communities, including NT guilds and societies, are called to critically examine their exegetical, hermeneutical and theological traditions in terms of the ethical *effects* they had and still have in the lives of people.

their intended meanings).³⁷

If such are the sensibilities required at the epicentre of New Testament Studies – as requisite for its *pathos*, persuasive power, healing thrust and effects – it is, according to its very nature, a deeply sacred, sacramental and liturgical subject. I therefore suggest that what we as New Testament interpreters need most is a *hermeneutic and a theology of listening*.³⁸ The New Testament writings often refer to receiving the gospel as ‘hearing the word’. A ‘hermeneutic of listening’ implies the willingness to hear with openness and receptivity. It includes a hermeneutic of *paying attention to*, of *acknowledging*, of *submitting to* the paradoxical, life-giving authority of God’s words in human language (cf. n. 29). As such it would be truthful not only to the nature of the texts we study, but also to the Reformed principle of biblical reading as listening to, as *discerning the voice of the living God*. A hermeneutic of listening reclaims the life-changing, transformative potential of the New Testament writings as an invitation to accomplish a healed and healing body of Christ. It will therefore embrace and enable *action*, knowing that those texts are the result of actions and are intended to produce action (Snodgrass 2002:27). A hermeneutic of listening will pay attention to all the voices represented in the epicentre of New Testament interpretation, refusing mentally to block out the voices that have not been considered important in the past, including the silenced voices within the biblical texts themselves.³⁹ “Such openness does not eliminate a hermeneutics of suspicion and evaluation, but it does eliminate a hermeneutics of arrogance and of accusation and a presumption that prejudices and presumes the ancient world should look like the modern or that we already have the truth. Humility is part of a hermeneutics of hearing; it seeks to know *rather than professes to know*” (Snodgrass 2002:28; italics mine) – an implicit claim to fame of professors!⁴⁰ It therefore does not offer universal, absolutistic, final and unalterable answers, decisions and certainties, but rather seeks for solutions that would be truthful to, and that would make sense in individual contexts. It challenges us to live patiently and humbly with the tension of risk – the risk to remember, to love, to forgive, to hope – the tension of paradox, ambiguity, ambivalence, even ridicule and pain.

Ultimately, a hermeneutic of listening gives *priority* to the imaginative possibilities of God’s radical, liberating, healing love over the broken realities of our lives and the world. The early Christians were overwhelmed and surprised by God’s presence in the resurrected Jesus and the Spirit. Perhaps we should simply *prepare* to experience this likewise.

³⁷ This means that the process of reading and listening, of discerning God’s will, has a *distancing* effect on readers. To interpret wisely, to listen and discern, is to divert attention from one’s own context and that of one’s own group, and to be moved past your own experiences and that of your group (cf. Snodgrass 2002:23).

³⁸ The subject index of Thiselton’s *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (1992:681) lists fifteen ‘hermeneutics of’ categories, which could be expanded easily. Each category functions as a lens through which interpreters try to understand, to evaluate and discern, to make sense of, and integrate (the meaning of) life. My choice for a ‘hermeneutics of listening’ is motivated by the way in which NT reception of the gospel is described as “hearing the word” (Acts 10:44; 13:48; 16:14; Eph 1:13; Col 1:6; 2 Tim 1:13). Right through scripture priority is given to acts of *hearing*, of *recognising*, of *discerning*, of *paying attention to* – particularly in the sense of *receiving*, of *believing*, of *being moved and persuaded by*, of *submitting to*, of *obeying* God’s will (cf. the *Shema* in Deut 6:4, foundational to Old Testament covenantal thinking, and affirmed by Jesus as ‘the greatest command’ – Mat 22:37; Snodgrass 2002:11-12, 23-27). “Hearing/reading is the process of analyzing verbal and non-verbal signals to recreate communication contexts and of choosing new contexts by which one understands, adopts, adapts, or rejects the opinion communicated ... Listening is a reaching activity, straining for wholeness as we connect the lines of God and God’s world” (Snodgrass 2002:15, 21-22).

³⁹ In concurrence with Ackermann’s relational anthropology (1991:100-103; 1992:16-23) and feminist theology as liberating praxis (1994:201-208), the key words in a hermeneutic of listening are ‘relationality’ and ‘risk’. “Relationality as basis for a transformative view of humanity is ... concerned with our relationships with ourselves, with one another, with God and with our environment” (Ackermann 1991:102). It is the opposite of alienation, apathy, and exclusion. ‘Risk’ refers to the courage, energy, and commitment required to deal with the deeply entrenched power of patriarchy and other forms of oppression (Ackermann 1994:207). Christ is the model with regard to this stereoscopic vision of transformation.

⁴⁰ In this context Snodgrass refers to Ricoeur’s explanation of ‘hearkening’ (*l’écoute*) as pre-ethical obedience. It is a stance prior to hearing, a mode of *being* that is not yet a mode of *doing* (cf. n. 4). “The one ‘hearkening’ is no longer master, and this situation of nonmastery is the origin of obedience and freedom. This is an ethics of the desire to be. This desire to be, this hunger, enables hearing” (Snodgrass 2002:29). Ricoeur comments further that *silence* is the origin of hearkening and obedience (referred to by Snodgrass 2002:29, n. 75).

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