

# Celebratory nostalgia: Reflecting on the work and impact of the Department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria

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## ■ Point of departure

The year 2017 marks a momentous occasion for the UP's FT – its centenary celebrations. The celebration of such a significant moment in the existence of the FT almost automatically gives way to a kind of nostalgic indulgence in retrospection. Yet, the

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Department of NTS does not only want to reflect on the past events that have led to the present, but aspires introspectively to examine the Department's current position, task and impact in order to allow for the prospective generation and evaluation of mental representations of possible futures. It is this ability that fundamentally shapes human cognition, emotion, motivation and movement into the future. This chapter thus anticipates briefly to explore the history, work and impact of the Department of NTS at the UP. It is done by focussing on what has been identified as our three widening circles of interest or focal points:

- The Department is, first and foremost, a department dedicated to equipping students from *the partner churches* with the best possible training in NTS.
- The Department must also situate itself within *the greater South African and African contexts* in which it is embedded – especially with topics such as the decolonisation of ‘traditional’ Western scholarship which is currently gaining greater national momentum.
- Simultaneously, as NT scholars, members of the Department will always endeavour to keep close contact with *the larger context of international New Testament scholarship* and the unique perspectives that they might contribute to the discipline.

The history of the Studies (as of 2000; until 1999, it was known as the Department of NT) has been documented before in various contributions at significant junctures (see, for instance, the summarised histories by Steyn 2013a and Van der Watt, Du Toit & Joubert 2009). In these histories, the focus was on each of the different professors<sup>29</sup> associated with the Department of NTS since its inception. This is, of course, of immense value as each one of these lecturers contributed to the development of the Department's ‘exceptional nature’ (Van

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29. J.H.A. Greyvenstein, E.P. Groenewald, A.S. Geyser, S.P.J. Janse van Rensburg, A.B. du Toit, G.M.M. Pelsler, F.J. Botha, A.G. van Aarde, J.A. van der Watt, P.A. Geyser, S.J. Joubert, G.J. Steyn, E. van Eck and J. Kok, as well as E. Mahlangu.

der Watt et al. 2009). The current contribution should thus not be read in isolation from those histories and reflections that have gone before. It will, however, differ from the format of those that have gone before in the sense that it will not use as starting point each individual current lecturer<sup>30</sup> but rather the Department's research projects.<sup>31</sup> This choice is made in order to provide a different vantage point from which to view the Department's work and impact. The aim of this contribution is thus to focus on (1) the variety of methods used by the *current* members of the Department of NTS in their various research projects, and (2) the impact that these projects have and can continue to have in terms of the three widening circles of influence as mentioned above. For this reason, the research projects will be used as the framework for this chapter. Under each project as heading more detail regarding the past, current and future work on the project will be discussed. In these discussions, I shall reference current members of the Department who have been, and are contributing to the specific project.

## ■ Providing context for the current reflection

Hurtado (2009) observes the following:

[7]wentieth-century New Testament scholarship is a story of a great proliferation in approaches, emphases, and methods, a growing diversity of scholars in gender, ethnicity, geography, and religious stances, and also a greater diversity in the types of academic settings in which their scholarship is conducted than had characterized preceding centuries. (p. 43)

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30. G.J. Steyn, E. van Eck, J. Kok, M. Speckman and Z. Dube.

31. Special mention must be made at this point of the continued work of Prof. A.G. van Aarde at the Department of New Testament Studies as honorary professor and editor of the highly acclaimed journal *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* (see e.g. De Villiers 2011; Jackson 2011; Le Roux 2011).

This story is one that has been, and is also playing out in the Department of NTS at the UP. The department was firmly built on the foundation of the classic diachronic approaches such as historical-critical, social-scientific and text-immanent exegesis (see Steyn 2013a; Van der Watt et al. 2009). However, since the upsurge of synchronic approaches during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. structural, discourse and narrative analysis, to name a few), the Department of NTS has made it a priority to ensure that a holistic approach to textual analysis and interpretation is followed (Steyn 2013a) as both the historical (diachronic) and the literary (synchronic) approaches are central to responsible exegesis. This is a sentiment shared internationally in the highest levels of NT research, demonstrated by Tuckett (2014) in an article evaluating the work and significance of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* when he makes the following statement:

A focus wider than one simply on the NT texts alone, bringing into play the broad spread of early Christianity in all its diversity, is vital to the health of our discipline. It exposes us to the breadth of early Christian life and thought. As such, it may challenge us to think through, and to rethink, what might be our response to the claims made by these texts, whatever our background, our prior or current beliefs, or our 'religious' persuasions. (p. 184)

This proliferation was accompanied in the latter decades of the 20th century by the considerably greater salience and influence of a far greater transcultural diversity in scholars and approaches, involving figures and developments in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Hurtado 2009). It is especially important when taking into account that the field was previously heavily dominated by the work of Western or European (especially German) scholars. In fact, Frye (1982; cf. Kwok 2005:82) referred to the Bible as the 'great code' that underwrites Western civilisation. In many other parts of the world, too, the Bible is part of the prevailing cultural legacies (e.g. Brenner 2000:7-12; Sugirtharajah 2003:81). Sugirtharajah (2002) puts it as follows:

The Bible ... 'simply swarms us'. Western culture and literature are saturated with its language and imageries. It has invaded colonies

and has intruded into the political and social and cultural life of peoples who were not necessarily part of the Biblical heritage ... The overwhelming presence of the Bible was the result of modernity. (p. 204)

Emphasising its cultural role, David Tracy (1981, 1987) referred to the Bible as a 'classic' text. As classic, it bears a surplus and longevity of meaning, but it nevertheless resists definitive interpretation. In fact, as in the past, the Bible can also function as a means of 'interruption' in cultural processes, depending on its interpreters' (or consuming audiences') openness to engage its notions of truth (Punt 2016). As a NT department firmly ensconced within the context of an ever-evolving SA (specifically) and Africa (broadly), the importance of the principle of *semper reformanda* (ongoing reformation) is always at the forefront of its work. It is this openness to engage critically with its notions of truth that has allowed the Department constantly to transform or to be at the forefront of transformation, touching the South African context on many levels (Steyn 2013a):

- In the political arena, the insights gained from NT exegesis led to the Department's eventual strong break with political organisations, racism and churchism.
- On a social level, this focus on ongoing reformation led to the termination of discrimination according to gender, language and/or culture.
- By addressing bigger transformation issues like socio-economic, ecclesiological and spiritual transformation, the Department and its members have become instruments of hope in various social contexts.

However, as is the nature of ongoing reformation, it cannot be achieved. It must remain an unremitting process to continue to facilitate transformation which leads to peace, reconciliation and global justice. That is why this process is always the Department's priority through particular focus on the analysis, description and relevance of Judaeo-Christian

identities, conducted on the nexus of Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity as situated within the broader contexts of late antiquity. This becomes evident when examining the various research projects that the Department pursue and to which I now turn.

## ■ Examining the research projects of the Department of New Testament Studies

### ■ The Jewish Scriptures used by early Christian societies

#### □ The LXX and Hebrews

The Department of NTS contributed, through the work of Gert J. Steyn (2011a), to the insight that LXX manuscripts ought to be compared to NT manuscripts – but then ancient manuscript witnesses should be compared with manuscripts, not eclectic modern printed text editions with each other (see also Steyn 2010a:211–226, 2010b:238–255). Further aspects of this comparative and intertextual research on the LXX and Hebrews include investigations related to Hebrews’ possible Egyptian origin (Steyn 2016b:103–122); its composition (Steyn 2011b, 2014a:68–87); quotations from the Torah (Steyn 2000:263–272, 2002:207–223, 2006a:135–151, 2007:152–168, 2011b, 2016c:337–357), Psalms (Human & Steyn 2010; Steyn 2003a:493–514, 2003b:262–282, 2004:1085–1103, 2006b:119–134, 2009a:384–406, 2010c:194–228) and Minor Prophets (Steyn 2009b:119–140); its relationship to the Dead Sea Scrolls (Steyn 2016d); the use of Septuagint terminology (Steyn 2009c:583–607, 2014b:113–125, 2015d:117–143); intertextual connections with the Maccabean literature (Steyn 2015e:271–291); moral language attained from Hebrews’ Scriptures (Steyn 2010d:311–329) and inevitably related aspects of its theology (Steyn 2001:433–440, 2003c:1107–1128, 2005:123–134, 2011c:429–450, 2011d:143–164).

## □ The LXX and the rest of the New Testament

Steyn's investigation into the LXX *Vorlage* of the explicit quotations in Hebrews shows that nearly all of the quotations from the Torah in Hebrews are also to be found in Philo of Alexandria (except the allusions to Gn 47:31 and the quotations from Dt 9:19 and 32:43). In addition, the text form of all these explicit Torah quotations is in agreement with the form of the Torah quotations found in Philo – in contrast to those of the Masoretic Text (MT) and LXX. Both Hebrews and Philo deviate from the readings of the MT and the LXX witnesses. This could mean that Hebrews and Philo might have known and used an earlier common LXX *Vorlage* of the Torah, thus independently using the same version of the Scriptures in another form than that known to us in the reconstructed versions of the LXX (and the MT). This actually strengthens possible Alexandrian commonalities. The phenomenon begged further investigation. Steyn thus expanded his quest for the LXX *Vorlage(n)* of the NT quotations to also include the Pauline literature, the Gospels and Acts. His consequent research that compared the LXX, Philo and the NT involved a number of LXX quotations from the Torah but was also extended to text-critical investigations on the quotations from Isaiah and the Minor Prophets.

### □ Torah quotations

Meticulous investigations into the Torah quotations in the Pauline literature that overlaps with those in Philo brings a clearer understanding of the differences between Paul's LXX *Vorlage* and that of his own editorial hand. In Galatians, evidence surfaces about a text form other than the reconstructed LXX that we have and which might underlie those quotations (cf. Steyn 2012a). In the Corinthian correspondence, there is little doubt that Paul and Philo followed a very similar LXX tradition, but where Philo seems to be much closer to the wording of his *Vorlage*, Paul made some hermeneutical adaptations in 1 Corinthians 15:45 and some stylistic changes in 2 Corinthians 8:15 (cf. Steyn 2013b).

Investigations into the Gospels of Mark and Matthew show that one of the most striking differences among the Torah quotations is the presence, or absence, of the Greek personal pronoun. Mark's readings seem to be, in general, slightly closer to the LXX whereas Matthew's readings tend to be closer to the readings of the same passages in the works of Philo of Alexandria. Matthew probably used Mark as a source in these cases, finding the quotations discussed above via his Markan source. However, whereas the Markan version of the quotations under investigation remains closer to our known LXX text form, the Matthean versions very often differ from Mark and seem to be closer to Philo. The differences are most probably due to the editorial hand of Matthew – perhaps due to adjustment to a known LXX version? (cf. Steyn 2013c).

In his research on the Torah quotations in the Acts of the Apostles, Steyn (2013d) comes to the conclusion that there are no clear traces of another *Textvorlage* of the Torah that was used by Luke and/or Philo in the six cases investigated. Luke's quotations in these instances resemble adaptations and interpretations already made in the Christian tradition by his time. A number of cases show evidence of conflation and paraphrases of the quoted passages. Noteworthy, however, is that Philo's text form and that of the reconstructed LXX text are very close in the cases investigated. Where Philo notably differs from the reconstructed LXX text, Luke tends to represent a text form that is closer aligned to that of the LXX than to that of Philo.

In research presented as a keynote paper during the New Testament Society of South Africa on John, Steyn (2015a) points out that the single Torah quotation in John's Gospel that overlaps with Philo leaves very little doubt that the differences should be ascribed to the editorial hand(s) of the Johannine School, rather than to an alternative LXX text form.



### □ **Isaiah quotations**

The research by Steyn on the text form of the Isaiah quotations in the *Sondergut Matthäus* (SMt) was later requested by acclaimed Hebrew text-critical scholar Emanuel Tov during an LXX conference in Greece. Steyn has shown that there are hardly any differences regarding the Hebrew text form between the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and MT versions. It is clear that Matthew adopted the text form of those Isaiah quotations that came from Mark or Q as he had found it in this source material. Thus, if he stayed close to the text form of those quotations as found in his synoptic source material, he would probably do the same regarding the text form of the source(s) that he used for these SMt quotations. There seems to be a tendency for the text form of the Isaiah quotations in the SMt sections to move closer, at a number of places, to the Hebrew versions (DSS, MT) and to some of the early translations of the LXX such as the Syriac translations (Syro-Palestinian and Syro-Hexapla) as well as the Egyptian Coptic translations (especially in the Boharic dialect). These commonalities are pointing to the likelihood that Matthew used another LXX text form than the reconstructed LXX of today (and one which is also closer to the Hebrew of the DSS and *Codex Leningradensis*). A synoptic overview of the differences and similarities between these texts confirms not only that the Hebrew text form underlying the six quotations in Matthew was close to that of the DSS and *Codex Leningradensis*, but it also points to a possible closer connection with the fifth column of Origen's Hexapla (cf. Steyn 2012b).

### □ **Dodekapropheton quotations: Romans and Matthew as examples**

It is striking that all quotations from the Minor Prophets in Romans are to be found in Romans 9–11, except for the quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17. Paul clearly seems to have followed mainly an LXX version of the Minor Prophets with

traces of minor textual variations compared to those of modern-day reconstructions. The quotations from Malachi 1:2 and Joel 3:5 are in close agreement with the (reconstructed) LXX whereas the quotation from Hosea 2:25 should rather be understood as a paraphrase. The remaining two quotations from Hosea 2:1 and Nahum 2:1 are indisputably conflated quotations (cf. Steyn 2015b).

Two categories of explicit 12P quotations in Matthew are distinguished, namely those of his sources Mark and Q (12PMk and 12PQ) – and those in his *Sondergut* material (12PSMt). The latter includes 12P quotations that belong to Matthew's 'fulfilment *florilegium*' (12PSMt-ff) and the rest of the 'proper SMt' quotations (12PSMt-p). Seven quotations from the 12P were found via Matthew's sources (Mark, Q and a pre-Matthean 'fulfilment *florilegium*'). Quotations from 12PMk and 12PQ were copied by Matthew with clear traces of his own editorial involvement. However, none of the three fulfilment quotations (12PSMt-ff) agree with the existing or extant LXX text forms. In fact, they display closer alignment towards known Hebrew texts (cf. Steyn 2016a). A paper read and published at the Vatican clearly shows how Matthew substitutes Micah's ἄρχοντα for ἡγούμενος in Matthew 2:6. The term ἡγούμενος occurs in Matthew 10 times – all referring to the Roman governor – so that Matthew intentionally adjusted it in order to present Jesus with the *terminus technicus* as governor (*praefectus Iudaeae*; cf. Steyn 2013e).

## □ Investigating the LXX text forms of the Torah quotations common to Philo and the New Testament

If traces of the text form of an Old Greek Version from the Torah are still to be found and if it is at all possible to trace such an early text form, one of the places to look for it would be in the quotations from the Greek OT by Judeo-Hellenistic writers such as Philo, Paul and other NT authors. However,

comparative studies on the quotations from the Torah in the NT seldom take cognisance of the *Corpus Philonicum*. These studies generally tend to compare the quotations to mainly the MT and LXX. Lately, and justifiably so at least, the Dead Sea Scrolls are increasingly included in such textual comparisons of OT quotations in the NT. However, the place of the Hellenistic Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria such textual comparisons remains largely neglected. Similar to this oversight in NT comparisons is the tendency to ignore these quotations in the NT where they overlap in Philo. This overlap of OT quotations between Philo and the NT is of great importance in studies that occupy themselves with the text forms of the LXX that might possibly underlie these quotations. The phenomenon begs further and more careful investigation.

The findings of the study on the assumed LXX Vorlage of the quotations in Hebrews inevitably raise the question whether such an overlap between Hebrews and Philo might be the result of a common LXX Vorlage of the Torah, used by both of these authors, and one that might possibly point in the direction of an earlier LXX text form. In order to address this issue responsibly, a comprehensive investigation into the text forms of all the Torah quotations that show similarities with the *Corpus Philonicum* and the NT is thus planned. Philo's use of Scripture (almost exclusively the Torah) becomes vital for such a study – aspects which Steyn started to investigate recently. A book manuscript on this research problem of a common LXX Vorlage used by Philo and the NT authors is already in an advanced stage of publication.

## □ **A synopsis of textual variants of the OT quotations in the NT**

The aim of this project, envisaged by Steyn, is the compilation and publication of a reference tool, consisting of three volumes, for biblical scholars and pastors as an instrument to be used in the assessment and interpretation of explicit scriptural

quotations by the early Christian writers of the NT. The project proposes to address the general weakness of previous synopses by suggesting that a responsible scientific comparison between quotations in the NT and their OT pretexts can only be done when the variant readings of both testaments are compared, not by merely comparing reconstructed eclectic and printed text editions. Ancient manuscript witnesses should thus be compared to manuscripts and not modern printed text editions to each other. Given the complicated history of 'the' LXX text and its relationship with the Hebrew textual traditions - including that of the Dead Sea Scrolls - it soon becomes impossible to make any responsible remarks about the NT author's hermeneutical activity and theological intention unless the range of different OT and NT textual traditions are compared. Several factors beg for a careful comparison of variant readings when studying the NT quotations:

- The fact that the majority of NT quotations are closer to LXX textual traditions than to Hebrew textual traditions and that deviating readings were sometimes brought into conformity with each other by copiers of the LXX, MT and NT requires caution.
- The fluidity of texts during their written and oral transmission, as the result of editorial, scribal and even liturgical influences, also requires great caution in textual comparisons between the quotations in the NT and their OT counterparts.
- The fact that different versions of the NT text and different LXX versions were in circulation, which means that the particular reading of a printed eclectic text might not necessarily be the one that was used by the other, should also alert scholars in their comparative studies on the text of the OT quotations in the NT.

There is thus a dire need for a tool to engage with the NT writers' interpretation of their Scriptures responsibly. Scriptural interpretation is the basis on which theological arguments are constructed, and the lack of hard evidence frequently leads to gross misunderstandings, subjectivism and discrimination. A technical tool that compares the variant readings available for

the explicit quotations from Scriptures will greatly assist biblical exegetes in determining the availability of alternative early textual traditions and identifying the early Christian writer's own interpretative hand in using the Scriptures. Three volumes are planned, namely (1) the Pauline literature, (2) the Synoptic Gospels and Acts and (3) Johannine literature, Hebrews and the General Epistles. The prestigious publisher, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, has already offered to publish this manuscript.

### □ Side impact on the field

Steyn's (cf. 2015c) work led to a proposal to coin a new term in canonical biblical scholarship, namely 'retrodiction' - in opposition to 'prediction' - to explain a past event or state of affairs in the light of present information.

## ■ The parables of Jesus as symbols of social transformation

Methodologically speaking, this research project has three main points of departure:

- Jülicher (1888:92–111) draws a distinction between the context in which Jesus told his parables and the different Synoptic contexts in which Jesus' parables were allegorically retold. Following from this distinction, the interest of the project is the parables of Jesus the Galilean.
- The project consciously tries to avoid the fallacies of ethnocentrism and anachronism and therefore employs social-scientific criticism as exegetical approach. This approach particularly enables the modern reader to come to grips with the cultural values and social dynamics of the social world of Jesus which are implicit in the parables spoken by him.
- Where applicable, available documented papyri are used to identify the possible social realities and practices (cultural scripts) evoked by each parable. The parables, as Dodd (1961:10) has argued, are realistic narratives about everyday events in

1st-century Palestine. To help the modern reader of the parables to identify what is realistic (normal) in the parables and what is not (normally the 'surprise' in the parable), papyri from early Roman Egypt provide 'solid ancient *comparanda* on the practices and social realities which the sayings of Jesus and the parables presuppose' (Kloppenborg 2014:2). The social *realia* invoked in the parables should not be neglected as in many cases the intended meaning of Jesus' parables can be found in a parable's 'unrealistic' features.

Related to these three main points of departure, the project also believes that the parables should be read against the background of the socio-cultural, political, economic and religious realities of 1st-century Palestine. Furthermore, it believes that the central theme of Jesus' parables is considered to be the noneschatological kingdom of God (see Van Eck 2016:30–35) and that the parables be classified as atypical stories (comparisons) which make ethical points related to systemic and personal transformation (see Van Eck 2016:36–41).

This research project started in 2006 and has culminated in the publication of *The parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a social prophet* (Van Eck 2016). Firstly, the method to be followed in the project was determined (Van Eck 2009a:1–12; see also Van Eck 2015a:1–10), and thus far, 11 parables have been interpreted. The conclusion reached at this point in the project is that the parables have already interpreted Jesus as an ethical-eschatological social prophet (Van Eck 2016:301; see also Van Eck 2011a:1–10).

Several students partook in this project. Oxton (2011) and Van Zyl (2012) did some groundwork for a detailed reading of the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1–8) for which the reading is still to be undertaken. Mabinja (2016) applied the reading of the Tenants (Gos. Thom. 65) to the exploitative situation of day labourers in the De Doorns community. Van Eck and Mashinini (2016:1–10) proposed that the general message of Jesus' parables can be used as a critique on food security systems for vulnerable households across the south-western townships (Soweto) and Pretoria. Finally, Van Eck,

Renkin and Ntakirutimana (2016:1-8) used the interpretation of the parable of the Feast (Lk 14:16b-23) to address spatial justice and reconciliation. It is argued that the parable critically engages with the real-life experiences of marginalised people living on the periphery of Pretoria and the boundaries that are created by mega churches in their close surroundings. In the parable, Jesus advocates for the eradication of all boundaries linked to the social-economic status of the marginalised. From a social justice perspective, there is no such thing as privileged space. On the contrary, privileged space builds boundaries.

The research project envisages to analyse several other parables of Jesus, using the same methodology. Currently, the possible parallels between the parables of Jesus and the rabbinic parables are also being investigated.

## ■ Sexuality in the New Testament

This research project initially focused on marriage as institution in the Second-Temple period in 1st-century Palestine, especially on Jesus' stance on marriage. In a three-part series, attention is first given to the cultural scripts in the 1st century that guided the understanding of marriage, namely marriage as an institution embedded in the social institution of the family (kinship), the role of honour and shame and dyadic personality. Attention is also given to the different marriage strategies that can be discerned throughout biblical times, concluding that the institution of marriage most probably should be seen as a cultural construct. As acceptable cultural norms change, so does the understanding of marriage (see Van Eck 2007a:81-101). The second part of the series, discusses the 1st-century Mediterranean world's understanding of what marriage, betrothal, adultery, divorce and remarriage entail (see Van Eck 2007b:103-128), and in the final contribution, it is indicated that Jesus' stance towards marriage as institution in his time was negative, especially because of its patriarchal structure and the 'legitimate' marginalisation of women and children (Van Eck 2007c:481-513). Building on these preliminary conclusions,

Kotzee (2016:1-112) investigates marriage as understood by Paul, the deutero-Pauline and trito-Pauline letters, affirming the cultural constructiveness of marriage in this literature.

A second focus of this programme is the study of sexuality in the NT, especially what the OT and NT say about homosexuality. In the South African context, it is clear that the so-called 'seven texts' on homosexuality (Gn 19:5; Jdg 19:22; Lv 18:22, 20:13; Rm 1:24-7; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tm 1:10) are read in the light of two different views of Scripture. These are a literal reading (the 'plain sense of Scripture') and a more critical (non-fundamentalist) reading which also takes into account recent studies on the socio-cultural world of the texts and other possible translations of the original Hebrew and Greek languages. To find a way forward in the debate on homosexuality, both ways of interpreting the texts (and the consequences of each reading) are discussed. The reading of the 'seven texts' concludes that:

- Modern readers of the Bible (theologians and non-theologians) should not project their modern frame of reference onto Scriptures or other ancient texts. The biblical authors, most importantly, did not share our knowledge about sexual orientation.
- The real reason for the division between Christians about homosexuality is that we have different views on the use and authority of the Bible.

This project, finally, also focuses on the understanding of masculinity in the NT and related texts. In this regard, Stewart (2015:1-9) has investigated hegemonic masculinity and the masculinity of Jesus as a 'boy' in Acts as well as the understanding of masculinity in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

## **■ Reading the New Testament and related texts using different hermeneutical approaches and exegetical methods**

This research project focuses on the reading of biblical and related texts by using the four traditional hermeneutical



approaches (historical-critical, synchronic, reader response and social-scientific criticism).

Using historical criticism, Van Eck (2000:973–1008) proposes a provenance for Mark, the gospel that is the focus of a narratological reading of the Gospel narratives as part of this research project (see below). With regard to historical Jesus studies, Van Eck (2015a:1–10) argues that current memory studies used in historical Jesus research seems to be, in fact, *Formgeschichte* in a new dress. It is very theoretical in approach and has thus far yielded no substantial results in this research field. The approach, Crook (2014:1–11) argues, can in fact lead to a New No Quest phase in historical Jesus studies. This, however, does not mean that memory studies have no contribution to make to historical Jesus research, especially being a new and upcoming approach.

Narratology, an exegetical method that falls in the text-immanent hermeneutical approach, is one of the main foci of this research project. Initially, the focus was on the ideological function of space in narratives (with as focus Mark; see Van Eck 1986:339–349, 1988:139–163, 1991a:1–24). As the project developed, the focus turned to a narratological analysis of Mark as narrative (see Van Eck & Van Aarde 1989:778–800), the use of story time and narrated time in Mark as it relates to Mark's eschatology (Van Eck 2012a:64–90), characterisation in Luke (Nyiaung & Van Eck 2013:1–12) and Mark's point of view (ideological perspective) in presenting Jesus as Son of God (MacDonald & Van Eck 2016:1–10).

Using reader-response criticism as approach, this programme also engages in reading biblical texts from an African perspective (see Van Eck 2005:679–701). Several masters and doctoral students in the Department of NTS who reside in Africa have contributed to this focus of the programme. Nyiaung and Van Eck (2013:1–9) present an African hermeneutic reading of Luke 9:18–22 in relation to conflict and leadership in the pastoral ministry in the Cameroonian context. Van Eck and Ekyarikunda (2016:1–8), in turn, compare the traditional understanding of the Law by Luther with the understanding of the Law in the Lutheran Church of Uganda. Furthermore, Siame (2015) interprets the Jubilee year in Luke 4:16–30 amidst poverty in Zambia 50 years

after its independence. Currently, the following research topics are being pursued:

- Jesus' ethics as a basis of peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.
- An Akan perspective on Jesus Christ as depicted in Hebrews.
- The understanding of the Lord's Prayer in an Ewe-Ghanaian context.
- An analysis of Mark 6:14-29 in the light of civic societies' struggle against labour injustices in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Linking with work done on narratology and the parables, the reading of ancient texts using social-scientific criticism is also part of this research project. The first project in this programme is a combination of a narratological and social-scientific reading of Mark (Van Eck 1995a). This publication lays the foundation and draws the broad contours of the project, especially with regard to the anthropological models and social-scientific theories to be employed. This programme attends to the following social aspects (cultural scripts) of the 1st-century Mediterranean world:

- Meals as ceremonies in Mark (Van Eck 1995b:1114-1126).
- The baptism of Jesus as status transformation ritual (Van Eck 1996:187-216).
- The 'office' of the elder in early Christianity from a social-scientific perspective (Jones & Van Eck 2010:1-10; Van Eck 1991b:656-684).
- Sickness and healing in Mark (Van Eck 2010:1-8; Van Eck & Van Aarde 1993:27-54).
- Patronage in Mark (Van Eck 2014a:101-132).
- A social-scientific reading of fasting in Luke 18:9-14 (Mathews & Van Eck 2013:1-9).
- The role of ethnicity as it relates to community formation in 1 Thessalonians (Cho, Van Eck & Wepener 2015:1-7).
- Jesus' inclusive message (Van Eck 2014b:57-88).

## ■ Side impact on the field

This programme, finally, also developed two social-scientific theories, namely a theory on how to understand social memory

as creating identity (Van Eck 2011b:201–212) and a theory on how to read ancient texts that relate to the social game of gossip (Van Eck 2012b:1–10).

## ■ Identity formation and social transformation in early Christianity

The continuing aim of this project is the establishment of the ethical and missiological principles which directed early Christian societies (Kok 2011, 2012a, 2015b, 2016; Kok & Maqoma 2016; Kok & Niemandt 2009; Kok et al. 2014a, 2014b). The project centres on themes such as identity, ethics and ethos, reconciliation, the transcendence of boundaries and sensitivity (i.e. inclusivity) towards the outsider (Kok 2010, 2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2015a). This focus on identity formation leads to the involvement of various social-scientific theories (e.g. social identity, dialogical self and ethnicity theory; see Dube 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2014a; Kok 2014). With these aims, the project aligns with the Faculty of Theology's current theme - '*Oikodome* - Life in its fullness'. Work in this project continues, among others with the publication of *New perspectives on healing, restoration and reconciliation in John's gospel* by Kok (2016).

## ■ Biblical hermeneutics in the context of African societies

This project aims to establish responsible socio-religious mechanisms for the use and application of biblical texts in the contexts of African societies (Speckman 2007, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d).

## □ Embodied hermeneutics

This research area seeks a fresh approach to African hermeneutics, one which is cognisant of the negative effects of globalisation and multiculturalism. Theoretically, it develops the ubuntu philosophy further by using Gabriel Marcel's ideas of non-objectification and

participation (see Louis 1976:34). As major contribution, the two principles of nonobjectification and participation provide a fresh redescription of the activities of Jesus of Nazareth. They also provide a theological-constructive postmodern space that engages with the negative effects of globalisation and multiculturalism. Embodied hermeneutics, as a research project, emerged from noticing a void in current research in Africa that takes further the ideas of ubuntu as a unique perspective to re-describe Jesus. Major African hermeneutical perspectives – that is liberation, Black, B intercultural, womanism, *bosadi*, vulnerability and many other theologies – while relevant in their raising of local issues do not dialogue with global challenges, especially the negative effects of globalisation and multiculturalism (Dube 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2013a, 2013c, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d). Globalisation refers to the interconnectedness of the world through media and trade, so much so that an event that happens in one part of the globe sends shock waves through the rest of the world (Held 1996:55). As globalisation spreads, it consequently spreads economic inequalities, which trigger exponential levels of migration and other concomitant issues like xenophobia and violence (Giddens 1990:15).

Embodied hermeneutics acknowledges the contribution of proponents of African hermeneutics but finds them retreating from the rest of the world by cultivating an Afrocentric and regional voice. Thus, as Africa meets the world, there is a tendency among most approaches to African biblical hermeneutics to cultivate a parochial epistemology. In most cases, such stance results in a rebuttal of everything that is seen as ‘un-African’, which is true for most contextual African approaches. One example of such an Afrocentric approach is John Mbiti (1986:20) who, in most of his books, sought to show a distinct and/or parallel African epistemology where issues such as Christology, eschatology and anthropology are concerned. Recently, using a decolonial approach, Masenya and Ramatswana (2015:2) also warned fellow African biblical scholars not to forget their unique contextual experiences. There is nothing against interpreting

the world based on one's locale, but the emphasis created by Masenya and Ramatswana's (2015:3) does not account for the interplay between the African continent and the outside world. In their words (Masenya & Ramatswana 2015), African biblical scholars should consider the following:

[B]e wary of running away from their African selves or identities and relying heavily on Western paradigms. If their scholarship is to impact positively on grassroots communities, African biblical scholars have to take seriously their own African epistemologies, philosophies and frameworks. In a nutshell, African context(s) need(s) to occupy centre stage in their scholarship. (p. 3)

They (Masenya & Ramatswana 2015) further say that the first step to start a conversation regarding African biblical hermeneutics is to assert our Africaness, for the following reasons:

[D]ecolonisation cannot be complete whilst Africans continue to depend on Western paradigms at the neglect of their rich heritage. The development of an African mind-set is a process in which those who were objects of Western paradigms revisit their knowledge systems and cultures to extract lessons for the current moment in a bid to become participants and producers of knowledge in a global context. (p. 3)

The statements made by Masenya and Ramatswana are representative of several similar approaches by most African scholars, who do not account for the dialogue between African and global issues. In this way, they are retreating from the world and cultivating a narrow assumption that African problems need a uniquely African remedy. Similar critique can be brought against Black Theology, the 'womanhood approach' of Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001), 'sociological hermeneutics' by Farisani (2010:507), 'contextual Bible reading' by Gerald West (2011:431) and the 'hermeneutics of vulnerability' by Gerrie Snyman (2011:16). Embodied hermeneutics, which is influenced by the idea of ubuntu, builds on the ideas of Gabriel Marcel to argue that Africa and the globe are at a juncture where they need a hermeneutic that reminds them of their interconnectedness and oneness rather than their strangeness or distinctiveness. They

need a hermeneutics that reaffirms the cardinal teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and reminds us of our collective human race.

What hermeneutical interjection reminds us of our collective humanness? It seems that the negative effects of globalisation and multiculturalism – as evidenced by rising numbers of people who migrate (or are displaced), combined with rising ethnic and racial attacks – are that the human race is self-destructing because of their inability to feel each other's pain. We live in a world where the human body has been reduced to a mere instrument in pursuit of materiality. The much lauded triumph of global capitalism did not translate into global peace. Instead, as global capitalism engulfs the globe, inequality spreads (Fukuyama 1989:3). We live in a world of disjuncture and fragmentation, which Anthony Giddens (1990:13) rightly characterised as spaces of contradictions. An example of this phenomenon is industrialisation which, while advancing technology, affects the ecology and displaces people from their land. Similarly, militarism, while reinforcing security, affects global peace. Further, instead of global welfare, we live with global inequalities and a false sense of progress. Global capitalism, with its hype towards individual success, has little to offer towards welfare. Commenting on this, Jean Baudrillard (1983:20) further notes that capitalism, far from helping the poor, rather presents a libidinal economy where participants are lured into the pursuit of pleasure. Arguably, the contemporary world, due to pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification, has lost sight of the value of human interconnectedness and coexistence. People value material goods more than their fellow humans (Dube 2016a:1). The question this research project seeks to answer is the following: What hermeneutical lens can bring people together as interconnected beings and as one human family?

Embodied hermeneutics is anchored on Gabriel Marcel's ideas (Louis 1976:34) of non-objectification and participation. Marcel, from a phenomenological perspective, says that the contemporary world is dictated to by the rational epistemology of objectification, the distancing and manufacturing of 'alienation between subjects and objects' (Louis 1976:34). The epistemology of Marcel builds on the earlier views of Kant and Kierkegaard who argue for the limit of reason. Thus, an epistemological shift,

replacing reason, is required – the world should be understood based on the experiences of the human body. For Marcel, rationality produces chaos and an objectification of human experiences and reality. As solution and as a shift in epistemology, being or existence should be understood as assimilated and inseparable from reality (De Lacoste 1995:69). Thus being ‘is that which resists any exhaustible analysis of the mere “facts of experience”’ (Louis 1976:37). Marcel explains this as follows (Louis 1976):

[7]he more I objectify the world, the more I weaken its ties ... the more impenetrable it becomes to me, yet the less significance this impenetrability has; life becomes more an experience which is lived in fullness rather than questioned in detail. (p. 39)

If reality is treated as assimilated to being, then chances are fewer that it can be treated as a problem or an object that exists apart from ourselves. The notion that the body is interpenetrated by reality – inseparable – makes useful to our context of globalisation and multiculturalism the concepts of non-objectification and participation from the work of Marcel by understanding being as intertwined, as common humanness (not rapture or distinctiveness). From an African perspective, the epistemology of Marcel elaborates further on the tenets of ubuntu – I am because we are. By using these ideas of non-objectification and participation, we are able to explain what it means to be human in a globalising and multicultural context. In this way, embodied hermeneutics aims to provide a fresh view, re-describing Jesus of Nazareth as well as providing a constructive postmodern space that critiques the evils of globalisation and multiculturalism.

Embodied hermeneutics has two major contributions:

- It moves from the narrow contextual approaches that have dominated African hermeneutics to viewing the body as global and a participant. Instead of reacting against globalisation and multiculturalism, embodied hermeneutics offers a constructive postmodern space where the body is

described as a microspace of the collective humanity. Being human is thus embracing the collective – the body is extended, which has implications for phenomena like ‘racism’ and ‘ethnicity’. Being is participating and assimilating (De Lacoste 1995:69). From this perspective, embodied hermeneutics offers a constructive postmodern critique of current global social evils such as xenophobia, racism and ethnicity since these come from a discursive epistemology that the body is unique and distinct. If the body is a participant, as Marcel argues, it does not see other bodies as problems but rather as part of its own existence and reality. This fact may help as a starting point concerning coexistence.

- Textually, embodied hermeneutics provides a fresh platform to understand the activities of Jesus of Nazareth, which were geared towards new households characterised by inclusivity and assimilation.

This project, though still in its infancy stages, is set for collaboration with similar research identified in the Young Research Leadership Program at the UP. Further, the 72nd General Meeting of the Society for New Testament Studies – to be held at the UP from the 8th to the 11th of August 2017 – concurrently hosts a seminar on African hermeneutics, which will serve as a crucial platform to showcase the ideas of this research.

## ■ *Quo vadis?*

When thinking about how the NT Department at the UP should move forward, it is important to bear in mind that its present discussion takes place at a time when – contrary to the confident expectations of classical secularisations theory – it is witnessing the growth of religion and religiosity on an unprecedented scale (see for example Graf 2004; Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2009; Taylor 2007). Furthermore, even though the implications of this global phenomenon are still not clear, it would be a serious mistake to assume that it is now back to ‘business as usual’ and that doing theology and training a new generation of scholars



can continue uninterrupted in the traditional way. Views on religion and religious discourse have changed substantially, making the continuous rethinking of NT studies as a discipline an urgent task (Lategan 2009:30). As Craffert (2007:196) has so eloquently pointed out, mainstream Western NT studies are very easily 'trapped between orthodoxy, the necessity to be contextually relevant, and the ethnocentric heritage of the scientific world view'. As a NT department in SA, its task is complicated even further by the tendency of African NT studies to become trapped in the belief that the exegesis (and even readings) of ordinary people are sufficient when addressing contemporary experiences. Like its Western counterpart, it can lack a sensitivity to historical consciousness with a proper sense of the 'otherness' of the texts. In order to avoid these 'traps', NT studies should 'more fully explore the interdisciplinary and dialogical space in the human sciences' (Craffert 2007:197), as Clines (2005) puts it:

To be truly academic, and worthy of its place in the Academy, biblical studies has to be truly critical, critical not just of lower order questions like the authorship of the biblical books or the historicity of the biblical narratives, but critical about the Bible's contents, its theology, its ideology. And that is what biblical studies has notoriously not been critical about at all. To be critical, you have to take up a standard of reference outside the material you are critiquing. (p. 25)

As was stated in the 'Point of departure' and has been made clear by the discussion of the variety of research projects currently pursued by the Department of NTS, the Department embraces a methodology which holds the diachronic and synchronous approaches in dialogue, thus pursuing a holistic approach. Although the one – diachronic – can be described as more 'classic' than the other – synchronous – both methods are of equal importance. Practically, this means that the Department's priority must, both at present and in future, always be the application of both methods when doing research. As Lategan (2009:31) says, '[t]he more instruments we learn to play, the richer the music will hopefully be that is produced'. The NT itself,

accepted as master narrative in both the partner churches and the society as a whole, is far too important to neglect or abandon. Barton and Muddiman (2001) make this case as follows:

Biblical criticism, sometimes known as historical criticism of the Bible or as the historical-critical method, is the attempt to understand the Bible by setting it in the context of its time of writing, and by asking how it came into existence and what were the purposes of its authors. The term ‘historical’ is [*used*] because biblical books are being studied as anchored in their own time, not as freely floating texts that we can read as though they were contemporary with us ... Biblical Criticism uses all available means of access to information about the text and its context, in order to discover what it may have meant when it or its component parts were written. (p. 1)

To understand these ‘ancient texts’, interpreters need knowledge of their languages and of their manuscripts. They must also take account of sources or redactors and their ‘social settings’. It is important that certain insights about the texts no longer be sidelined for these texts are human creations – they are the product of human text-critical construction, translation and interpretation (Craffert 2007:198). Continuing to make the study of the original languages a priority grants us access to a proper understanding of how the message of the NT is structured as well as access to the world of the NT itself (Lategan 2009:31). Without this thorough knowledge, responsible exegesis becomes almost impossible. Without access to the text *corpus* of the 1st century (of which the NT forms an integral part), the theological, social, economic and political context – so essential for the understanding of the NT – becomes almost impossible to grasp. One of the enduring problems of the biblical message is its ‘overfamiliarisation’ – through endless repetition, combined with centuries of interpretation, reinterpretation and translation, the message has become almost completely domesticated. The attempt to let Scripture speak ‘here and now’ has – ironically – rendered the message, in many respects, almost indistinguishable within our context. We will always remain in urgent need of ‘the experience of alienation’ (Lategan 2009:32) that working with the original languages provides us as this helps us to understand

again how ‘strange’ the Palestine of the 1st century really was, how different the world and NT message was, in order to rediscover its true contours for ourselves and for new contexts. Yet the field of our study is not only the exegesis of 2727 books for the database of early Christian sacred documents has already been increased and cannot be disregarded. The books that would later form the NT, like other Christian literature of the period, originated in a literary context that reveals relationships not only to other Christian writings but also to Greco-Roman and Jewish works. Of singular importance is the extensive use of, and interaction with, the Jewish Bible (MT and LXX). Both implicit and explicit citations as well as countless allusions appear throughout the books of the NT – from the Gospels and Acts to the Epistles and the Apocalypse. Studying this ‘related literature’ enables a better understanding of the people, the ways they created their Christian identity and their sense-making struggles within the confines of their faith and cultural world. By way of this ‘historical consciousness’, we are able to confront real people, our ancestors in faith, which protects us from misusing them for our own ends (Craffert 2007:198). In this confrontation with our ancestors, orthodox creeds and dogmas cannot and should not be removed from this field of study for tradition and prejudice shape who and what we are. Bernstein (1991) puts it in the following words:

Gadamer has sought to challenge the prejudice against prejudice. He has defended the centrality of tradition and rightful authority of all human understanding. We are beings thrown into the world who are always shaped by and shaping the traditions that form us. (p. 24)

The implication is that these orthodox traditions should themselves and in their own right be (and remain) part of our dialogue with the past. Although the importance of making use of an expanded (and ever expanding) corpus when conducting research is already evident in the Department’s different research projects, this commitment will be ‘made official’ in 2018 when the Department’s name will change to ‘New Testament Studies and Related Literature’. This kind of appreciation of the historicity of

the NT can assist in overcoming the fears associated with change but also in moving beyond the restrictions of a positivistic understanding of history as it creates a space to explore both the strengths and weaknesses of alternative strategies of interpretation and promotes a better grasp of diversity and pluriformity (Lategan 2009:34).

However, 'pure' exegesis has, by means of the ethics-of-interpretation debate, been expanded into a dialogical interpretive process which looks not only at what texts *say* and *mean* but also at what they *do*. This realisation – that all interpretations and historical constructions are preliminary – creates the space for continuous (re)search (Craffert 2007:199). Meeks (2005) says it as follows:

The task of constructing a more fair and honest picture of the past never ends. There are always new discoveries to be assimilated, unconsidered factors to be evaluated, fresh comparisons to be weighed, novel perspectives to challenge our assumptions, blind spots in our seeing that will become evident only when new pairs of eyes join the search. (p. 164)

Both impulses on the ethics of interpretation – what interpretations *do* as well as the considerate engagement with others – are implicated in this dialogical model and kept in balance because both are considered to be of equal importance (Meeks 2005:161).

Of course, within a university context, it is impossible to escape the implications of the Enlightenment and the scientific world view. However, within an interdisciplinary framework – one with a changed view of knowledge and the systematic study of meaning – it is precisely the understanding of meaning that is at the centre of research (Craffert 1998). The biggest benefit of continuing with this model is its potential to embody – within the discipline of NT studies – an *ethos of dialogue*.

Within this framework of historical consciousness, dialogical engagement with the writings of early Christianity implies a sensitivity to and respect for culture and its otherness (Craffert 2007:199). In place of the normative use of the NT, it can now be

appreciated for its formative value (Meeks 2005:166). Reading and respecting these texts thus means to go and do likewise, not the same; it is the challenge of doing something ‘culturally similar, not identical’ (Pilch 1989:26). A dialogical engagement also implies sometimes not doing as they did. In a world of growing consumerism, it is not unexpected but nevertheless surprising that the NT is so often still used as a mere list of truths to be ‘raided’ while in actual fact it contains such a wealth of wisdom *when treated as a discussion partner* (Craffert 2007:199).

This framework thus not only offers new options for existing research questions (such as historical Jesus research or ethical questions) but rather an alternative *style* of scholarship. This model embodies the tools for continued critical engagement with multiple readings and divergent voices in its own midst. Today we understand enough about interpretation to know that the premium placed on dialogical truth is totally different from the *claim to be right* or the *right to claim the truth*. As Murray, quoted by Bernstein (1991:339), says ‘[b]arbarism ... threatens when men [*and women*] cease to talk together according to reasonable laws ... Civility dies with the death of dialogue’.

In word and deed, Jesus personifies an alternative possibility to deal with injustice et cetera, and developing such a critical consciousness and the ability to interpret our current situation in terms of these alternative values should remain an important goal in theological education. We need a critical consciousness – a ‘hermeneutics of the alternative’ – that does not lead to resignation but to the discovery of new possibilities and the appreciation of complementary perspectives (Lategan 2009:34). We must ensure a focus on the distinctive contribution that the NT offers – a better understanding of the *dialectic* between theological conceptualisations and historical reality for, in this sense, the NT implies an ‘ethics of the deed’ (Lategan 2009:36). It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for the Department of NTS to keep on consciously asserting and demonstrating dialogue as its highest ideal within the contexts of the church, the university and the world as it ventures into the future.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 3

In lieu of the centenary celebrations of the FT at the UP, this chapter takes a closer look at the Department of NTS. It does not only want to serve as a reflection on people and events that have led to the department's present. Making use of introspective examination focused on the Department's current position, task and impact, the chapter aspires to allow for the generation and evaluation of mental representations of possible futures. It thus anticipates exploring the history, work and impact of the Department of NTS at the UP, briefly by focusing on the variety of methods used by current members of the Department in their various research projects as well as the impact that these projects have and can continue to have. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates that the Department embraces a methodology which holds the diachronic and synchronous approaches in dialogue, thus pursuing a holistic approach. Through this continual pursuit of a holistic approach, the Department of NTS ensures a focus on the distinctive contribution that the NT offers – a better understanding of the dialectic between theological conceptualisations and historical reality.

## Chapter 3

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