Why opt for a rhetorical approach?

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ABSTRACT
When rhetoric is informed by the sophistic tradition, it becomes dislodged from foundationalistic moorings. It is argued that a rhetorical approach, using categories such as human motivation, language as symbolic action and context, creates a sensitivity for the historical moment.

1 INTRODUCTION
This paper has more than one objective. It is first of all an attempt to provide some insight into what is meant by a rhetorical approach. Owing to its long tradition and to its subordination to philosophy a lot of confusion surrounds the notion rhetoric. However, a more important objective is to provide reasons why a rhetorical approach could, yes even should be followed in our studies on early Christianity. Although rhetorical criticism of the New Testament has been revived since the seventies, the main emphasis has been in the sphere of what can be called the 'traditional perspective' (cf Brock, Scott & Chesebro 1989). The insights that studies within this paradigm have brought us, should by no means be underestimated. Yet, restricting oneself to this perspective only deprives one of the potential rhetoric has for creating a new, critical discourse, thereby actively and consciously contributing to the formation of culture. Scholars of religion have been pushed into a marginalised position by a network of multiple forces, but to a certain extent our position can be assigned to the kind of foundationalistic discourse we have appropriated and decided to continue. The language we use, is a language not only foreign to the ears of the contemporary world, but to a certain extent irrelevant and even dangerous. Perhaps I could express myself better making use of George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945).

Studies of the New Testament often remind me of the marginalised role given to the raven, Moses, in Orwell's work. Through all the tumultuous upheavals and piggery, Moses the raven plays a totally marginalised role. The most remarkable feature of this raven is that it is out of touch with reality. On first presentation to the reader the raven’s absence is mentioned. The one ‘animal’ not present when old Major the revelatory founder Pig of Animal Farm made his speech about the nature of animal life, was the 'tame raven'
who was privileged to sleep on the perch of the human beings' back door. So while the first few sparks of the animal revolution were kindled, the raven was asleep. And in the heat of the revolution it flapped away after Mrs Jones, to return only after several years of absence and resume its irrelevant message as if nothing in between had happened. Irrespective of the powers in control, whether those be human beings or pigs, its message remains the same, namely the ‘existence of a mysterious country called Sugarcandy Mountain, to which all animals went when they died’ (1945:18). Whether during the build up to the revolution, or several years after the revolution had been accomplished, this message never changed. The raven is not depicted as particularly beloved. From the perspective of the porcine authorities, its message was obviously seen as ‘opium for the animals’. The animals as such were also not particularly fond of the raven, simply because he did not work. Yet he had to be tolerated by the authorities because some of the animals believed him.

It is this ‘out of touch with reality’ quality that reminds me of our activities. Slowly but surely, an awareness of this estrangement is growing among the members of our guild. However, instead of accepting the challenge of bringing the study of antiquity ‘in touch with reality’, the ‘uselessness’ of our work is legitimised by virtue of postmodernism (albeit misunderstood) and the right of conducting ‘useless’ activities at Universities. By privileging and barricading ourselves under the banner of the right to be ‘useless’, we are simply entrenching ourselves deeper into a discourse that does not and cannot exploit ancient religions’ potential for contemporary conversations. Besides the fact that an acknowledgment of our uselessness threatens the opportunity of cultivating a historical consciousness in a society that sorely needs it, we also run the risk of negating the tradition by which we as persons have been formed, thereby failing to understand ourselves.

The underlying assumption of this article is that we are working or talking ourselves into uselessness by adhering to a foundationalist discourse. Owing to certain categories that have been maintained within the rhetorical tradition, opting for a rhetorical approach can liberate us from an ivory tower existence. Not only does it have a liberating function, but it also prompts us to contribute actively to the formation of culture. ‘Coming into touch with reality’ should be correctly understood. It does not refer to an objective, knowable reality with which we have to align ourselves. It refers to those discursive practices which have linguistically been created and have become to such an extent part and parcel of our daily lives that they appear as reality and have a profound effect on our behaviour. Within the context of this article, ‘being in touch with reality’ will therefore refer to an understanding of and attitude towards those practices. It stands to reason that
a selection of rhetorical categories has to be made and that the selected categories have to be presented only in terms of the problem at hand. Various aspects, such as the notion of ‘person’, argumentation, the role of persuasion, strategies, et cetera have to remain unexplored.

The rhetorical tradition spans several centuries. Its diversity and history require that a position claiming a concern for reality be specified. This will be addressed in the section entitled ‘attempts to define rhetoric’. As will be seen, the attempts at defining will lead to differentiation. In a following section three rhetorical categories will be selected of which the objective is to indicate that rhetoric compels one to an awareness of reality. In a final part, possibilities generated by a rhetorical approach for the critic of early Christianity, will be discussed.

2 ATTEMPTS AT DEFINING RHETORIC

Rhetoric defies definition. Although it recognises that human beings entitle their environment and therefore also their activities with what can be called definitions, it also exposes the unbearable lightness of converting being to words. The numerical equation ‘=’ between any aspect of reality and the world of words frightens the rhetorician just as the attempts to reduce something to its essence, its fundamental or principal aspects cause a feeling of anxiety. This fearful feeling owes its origins less to psychological than to epistemological problems.

There is then a general hesitancy among rhetoricians to define rhetorical activity. Scott (1975:439) explicitly discourages looking for a definition. He argues for the contingency of definitions of rhetoric and insists that even in such cases its ambiguities should be made clear (440). At the same time he acknowledges that

a pluralistic attitude does not suggest that one need not worry about making any definition at all or that any definition will do. A pluralistic attitude does suggest that the reality of rhetoric will be shaped differently by the demands of different peoples in different circumstances and that any complex activity will involve a skein of tacit assumptions not all of which can be made explicit simultaneously.

More or less the same has (of course) already been said by Burke (1945:24). He also emphasises the contextual contingency and reference of definitions and indicates that while we try to de-termine (that is, set the boundaries of the thing or activity), it somehow always escapes linguistic incarceration. It is therefore also not strange that the first attempt at definition came, not from a self-acclaimed rhetorician, but from Plato.

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1 See Scott’s (1975:439) slighting of Burke.
In the genesis of the term 'rhetoric' lies a significant irony. Contrary to popular opinion, Schiappa (1992) has argued that the term 'rhetoric' has neither been coined, nor used by the sophists. The term probably originated in the fourth century and was most probably coined by Plato himself. Sophists seem to have called their philosophical activities logos. The skills associated with logos seem to have been of a more comprehensive nature than those Plato and Aristotle later subsumed under the title 'rhetoric'. The term 'omnicompentence' illustrates aptly how logos was associated with the skills to produce true and appropriate discourse in any situation. However, with Plato and Aristotle, the holistic perspective of logos is fragmented and the term 'rhetoric' is used to focus only on persuasive political and public speaking. Plato seems to have categorised the activity of public speaking as 'rhetoric', thereby attempting to vilify his rival Isocrates and to give a negative connotation to the activities of the sophists. Following in the footsteps of Foucault and Burke, Schiappa (1992:8-11) argues that this entitlement not only gave occasion to the well known distinction between philosophy and rhetoric, but by its 'nounification' also provided an intellectual space within which theorizing and further elaboration could take place. The irony lies in the fact that Plato was therefore most probably responsible for the birth of rhetoric as a discipline next to philosophy. Instead of philosophising it out of existence he rhetoricised a discipline into existence.

However, despite the ironical twist of events, he succeeded in the 'disciplining' of rhetoric. The unhappy and probably politically motivated differentiation quickly led to a dichotomy prevailing right into the twentieth century, casting rhetoric in the role of the 'great pretender'. Leff (1987:19) writes: 'No other humanistic pursuit so firmly entrenched in classical precedent has suffered such potent attack or such prolonged disdain'. Rhetoric became associated with untruth, probability, subjectivity, the passions, the illusionary, the peripheral, the contingent, words, opinions and practice whereas philosophy dealt with truths, certainties, objectivity, rationality, reality, the necessary, the universal, facts, propositions and the theoretical—in short philosophy constituted content, whereas rhetoric favoured form (cf Fish 1989:474). Although it would be an oversimplification to assign this rigid dichotomy to all philosophers and rhetoricians, the differentiation between Philosophy and Rhetoric caused an independent development within the respective disciplines, with the result that even rhetoricians acknowledged their platonic-ordained position and kept themselves busy at certain stages in the history of Rhetoric with stylistic

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Schiappa (1992:8) quotes this term from Robinson's depiction of the skills described in Dialektes.
intricacies and the ornamental use of language without raising the question of truth.

Both philosophy and rhetoric operated on the same so-called foundationalistic assumptions, namely the existence of an independent, universal and central truth, transcendent of the particular situation, whether that be in spatial or temporal sense, in some kind of idealistic or physical sense. If it is true that such an independent truth exists, it must also be true that a person can acquire knowledge of it, or to put it differently, humankind must be able to possess it (cf also Scott 1967:10). This truth can be disclosed or discovered by means of rigid logical thought, that is, logical rationality, from which the passions (the emotional) have to be excluded. Both the depositing of an independent truth, as well as the insistence on logical rationality presuppose that human beings are basically defective. Truth must be external to human beings and passions as part of people's experience must not pollute rigid, neutral thinking. In the Aristotelian approach to rhetoric this type of assumption crystallised itself into the well-known distinction between logos, ethos and pathos, with an approving eye blinking towards logos, the appeal of the logical argument. Control as means to ensure the discovery of truth is yet another operating assumption. In order to achieve truth, the defective human being has to be disciplined; s/he has to be trained under the supervising eye of someone who really knows, someone whose role and whose discipline have clearly been demarcated by institutions based and founded upon truth. Language, again, is assumed to give expression to reality. As such it functions to represent or correspond to reality; its function is to serve. To achieve clarity of meaning the mode of communication has to be at least the propositional. However, as language is something unique to human beings, it is also defect and has to be purified, sanitised and neutralised—the less polluted the language, the clearer the truth, the closer to the neutrality of numbers, the greater the objectivity and clarity of our knowledge. For that very reason, clear abstract theories and neutral methodologies have to be constructed to acquire true knowledge. Owing to their generality and neutrality, these theories and methodologies would be applicable to a wide range of human experiences.

Within such a context rhetoric's function was to ensure the efficient conveyance of truth. As such it is of limited value. Even Plato was willing to grant this inferior function to rhetoric. Kennedy (1963:78) writes: 'The theory Plato expounds is that an art of rhetoric is conceivable for use in advancing the truth, which must, however, be known by the author first'. Miller (1993:229) indicates how Plato turns rhetoric into a neutral techne, subordinated to a 'higher art, dialectic'. Although Aristotle recognises the need for rhetoric its purpose is to render an independent truth effective; he agrees
that speech can be used for the bad and unjust, but owing to the natural superiority of the true and just it can be more easily proved by speech (Rhett 1.1.12). Although Aristotle asserts that the orator must be able to prove opposites (Rhett 1.1.12), Fish (1989:479) exposes his assumption of 'an independent reality', an independent truth which has to be defended. Since the legacy of Plato and Aristotle has dominated the world of rhetorical interest, it is generally accepted that Rhetoric as a discipline has usually and most often concerned itself with truth. However, its self-image was schizophrenic. On the one hand, it acknowledged its depiction as deceptive, exploitative and seductive, capable of leading humankind astray; on the other hand, it thankfully accepted its role as servant to a prior, immutable and transcendent truth.

As the foundationalistic hegemony with its insistence on independent, objective truth disintegrates and the end of rhetoric's subservience dawns, the sophistic origins of rhetoric are slowly but surely being excavated and dusted off. Although it would be naive and a decontextualisation to pretend that the sophism in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE can be applied to the 'sophisticated' deliberations within rhetorical theory in the twentieth century, the sophists touched upon several issues that are currently again being addressed. It is specifically these issues that provide rhetoric with the potential to bring us in touch with reality.

Firstly, a keen sense of the problematic relationship between language and reality is displayed by Gorgias. With Gorgias language loses its literalistic meaning; it does not represent or correspond to reality; it does not represent anything at all since it functions autonomously (cf Cascardi 1983:220). There is no external criterion to language that could verify the veracity of the representation made. As a matter of fact, to the extent that language pretends to represent reality, or 'things as they are' deception forms part of language. Jarratt (1990:91) expresses it aptly: 'Gorgias calls that emotional experience in the space between reality and language "deception" (apate)'. As such deception is a function of all kinds of discourses (cf also Lyons 1994:433). Language

Miller (1993:230-235) provides an illuminating perspective on the relationship between Plato and Aristotle's views on the polis and rhetoric. Although Aristotle was influenced by the sophists in his support for participation and diversity, he remains the student of Plato in adhering to a rigid hierarchical structure of the community dictated to by an external standard of truth.

Cf the debate between Poulakos (1992) and Jarratt (1992) in which Poulakos criticises Jarratt for not respecting the 'otherness' of the sophists. Although a discussion of the problem of commensurability or non-commensurability will take us too far afield, Jarratt's response provides a few directives with the potential of further elaboration.
thus prevents from observing reality, prevents from knowledge of 'what is'. For that very reason Gorgias claims that nothing exists and if it exists it is unknowable. Knowledge as such is therefore unattainable.

Secondly, in open opposition to the notion of a universalised, globalised truth, the sophists made the human being the criterion for truth. Well known is the assertion of Protagoras quoted by Plato that 'Man is the measure of all things: of things that are, that they are; of things that are not, that they are not' (cf. Caskan 1983:221; Fish 1989:480). As a human being determines truth, it is fragmented, particularised and contingent to the moment. Gorgias' view on truth links with his views on language. No independent and external criterion functions to verify whether substances and existing things have been correctly or truthfully represented; what is disclosed to the audience is disclosed in and through discourse. Consigny (1992:287) writes: '...Gorgias seeks to abolish...the “criterion,” a putative standard existing outside all discourse by which the meaning and truth of statements may be determined....For rather than replicating reality, discourse merely communicates those “truths” fabricated with its own arbitrary apparatus.'

Thirdly, if truth is not to be found in some Idea or Being external to human beings, an alternative would be to locate its fabrication in the plurality of experiences, or to put it somewhat differently in the praxis of everyday life. Miller (1993:224) argues that the notion of humans as measure of truth does not lead to solipsism, but is rather an attempt to 'base discussion on the plurality of experience'. He locates the need to search for truth in the plurality of experiences historically in the development of the polis from a tribal to a residential culture (217). The polis as locus of power for the aristocracy, becomes locus of power for the labourers, resulting in several kinds of social and political problems. From the praxis of human interaction, from the desire to conduct human affairs in an orderly manner, the notion of sophistic rhetoric crystallises. It follows that rhetoric is to be closely associated with the notion of civilised society. Jarratt (1990:89) writes: 'Rhetoric can be closely linked with nomos as a process of articulating codes, explicitly understood to be controlled by groups of people...' (cf. also Miller 1993:217-224; Barrett 1991). 

Several concerns originating from the sophistic tradition currently pervade rhetorical practice and illustrate rhetoric's concern to come to grips

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5 Although Barrett (1991:1) briefly refers to the origin of civility within the polis, his emphasis on the earlier days of rhetoric is more on Aristotle. His study is valuable in extending the relationship of rhetoric and civility by means of psychoanalysis and modern rhetoric.
with reality. From the disappearance of external criteria, originate the notions of immediacy, the opportune moment, appropriateness and timeliness. Problems or needs are situated in the praxis of everyday life and are sorted out among human beings by means of symbolic interaction. These aspects stand in close relationship with the emphasis on situation and context. From the debate on the relationship between language and reality, originate the problems concerning representationalism and the potential human beings have for symbolic action. The loss of language’s literalistic tendencies emphasises its deceptiveness and in the sphere of human affairs requires a study of human motivation. The constructive power of language also finds its origins in the sophistic debate. Cooperation, persuasion and identification are often hailed as the objectives of rhetoric. However, cooperation can only be an objective where brutal coercion in the name of totalising truth has been ousted. Argumentation replaces violent action. Conversation substitutes militant confrontation. However, cooperation, persuasion and conversation are all activities assuming a concern with the praxis of life. It seems then that a rhetoric that wishes to orient itself within the sophistic tradition, operates with the categories of context, more specifically the praxis of living, persuasion, symbolic action, specifically language as symbolic action and motivation.

3 RHETORIC'S CONCERN WITH REALITY

If a definition of rhetoric is not simply restricted to the Aristotelian or Neo-Aristotelian approaches, but extended to include its own sophistic moorings, and if rhetoric is liberated from foundationalistic incarceration, it could provide us with the categories to make some sense of the realities in which we find ourselves. In this section I will give an indication of these categories and provide reasons why they validate the claim of rhetoric as concerned or involved with reality.

3.1 The search for human motivation

As a critical activity, rhetoric is concerned with why; prompting all the various criticisms is the question: ‘Why?’ Why do people interact in the way they do? Why have they chosen or selected some elements from the reservoir of human symbols to present and not others? Why have some possibilities been realised, while others have been omitted?

The question ‘why’ is a question concerned with human motivation. Rhetorical criticism’s insistence that human motivation should be the objective, should not be confused with what has become known as ‘intentional fallacy’, that means the notion that the specific concrete intention of a rhetor
can be determined. 'Intentional fallacy' has usually been associated with the 'psychologising' of meaning and is rejected on the basis of the impossibility of penetrating the psyche of an author or speaker. The belief is that determinacy in meaning cannot be established by bringing psychological factors into play. The search for intention threatens the widespread consensus that language as a system of signs functions to a certain extent autonomously. Meaning can be determined from the interrelationship of linguistic signs.

However, owing to rhetoric's insistence on the question 'why', it provides fresh impetus to the re-inclusion of intention in the interpretive act. Fish (1989:25) presents 'the relocation of interpretive constraint in intention' as one of the first activities on the way down the anti-formalist road and the way down the anti-formalist road assumes a recognition of the rhetoricity of the world we live in. He argues that meaning cannot be constituted without paying attention to intention. No non-intentional reading is possible (199).

Fish should be correctly understood. His insistence on intention does not imply a return to what has been indicated as 'intentional fallacy'. Whereas the latter locates intention in the psyche of a rhetor and establishes with certainty a direct correspondence between linguistic element and the ontological psyche, his recognition of intention happens within a non-foundationalistic paradigm. That means that an utterance may reflect a multiplicity of intentions, implying indeterminacy of meaning. Instead of fearfully scampering into foundationalist attitude threatened by the destructive deconstruction of meaning, he faces the problem of intention and the indeterminacy of meaning head-on (cf Fish 1989:37-67). Intention becomes an interpretive constraint functioning in conjunction with various others. Although various problems concerning intention still exist, the point is that rhetoric requests the recognition of intention.

Human motivation within rhetorical criticism is seen as the lynchpin of a network of multiple relations in which human beings find themselves. Owing to the variety of interrelations in the drama of human existence and the ever-changing shapes they assume, the determination of motivation is extremely complex and open-ended. Burke (1945) uses the drama as point of departure and expresses the complexity to determine motivations in the design of the pentad.6 The pentad is a terminology consisting of ever-

6 The pentad consists of the following terms: act, agent, agency, scene and purpose. He later extended the pentad to the hexad, adding attitude. The terminology of the pentad has been derived from the drama. The act functions as the centre of the pentad and stands for all symbolic actions of human beings. The shifting interrelations between these 'terms' are expressed by the notion of ratio. Human motivation has to be determined by taking the ratios between these terms into consideration. Since all these terms simultaneously function together each term has to be related to another term of the pentad. For example: scene relates to act, to agent, to agency and to pur-
changing interrelational 'terms' thereby giving expression to human motivation as a configuration of possibilities. Since human motivation grows from a configuration of possibilities, its determination will always be open-ended, uncertain.

However, despite the problems in establishing what motivates people, the process of determining motivation requires that the rhetorician has to come into touch with the reality of the rhetorical process, both her/his own and that of the discourses s/he investigates. The mere question of human motivation necessitates that a multi-dimensional configuration of various factors surrounding a symbolic act be taken seriously. That would imply *inter alia* that in the interpretive act, not only the motivation behind a discourse, but also the motivation behind the interpreter has to be taken into consideration. Self-reflection has become part of the interpretive process. Within academic circles motivation is often seen in an ideational sense, that is, certain problems of 'academic concern' have had to be solved. However, the question concerning human motivation spurs one to ask why certain problems are regarded as problems, how they relate to their environment, why certain people, or groups of people address these problems, but seem to ignore or simply be unaware of others, why certain problems are addressed in a specific manner, to what extent the *praxis* of everyday life has an impact on the type of issues seen as important—the list of questions become endless, yet unavoidable and challenging when understanding the human condition becomes our focus. In its insistence on human motivation, rhetoric illustrates a concern not only for the so-called art of persuasion, but also for an understanding of the nature of humanity as such and the conditions pertaining to their interaction.

3.2 Language

Whichever kind of rhetoric, language and its relationship to reality have always been prominent. Even though language may often not be explicitly mentioned in definitions of rhetoric, it is always assumed as of primary importance. Although rhetorical criticism's concern is not only with verbal action, but with all processes of symbolisation, language is by definition a symbolic process. In its insistence on language as symbolic action, echoes of the sophistic debate referred to earlier can be heard. One should not assign the sophisticated twentieth century views on language to those in the classical pose. Although the claim of all-inclusiveness is problematic, the flexibility of the pentad, as well as its insistence on human symbolic action makes it a worthwhile point of departure.
period. However, it is important to recognise rhetoric's acknowledgement of language as action from the earliest approaches.

Rhetoric judges negatively views of language that makes it into an abstract system and divorces it from its use by human beings in contexts (cf Fish 1989:6). The differentiation between language as a formalised, abstract system of rules and language in use, corresponds with a differentiation between language 'not-contaminated' or sanitised and language contaminated, between normal language and deviant language. According to this viewpoint language possesses certain formal properties, that can be extrapolated from the particularity of their contexts and can be incorporated into an abstract system applicable to numerous situations. 'Normal language' becomes a language purified of values, intentions, and judgements, in short 'normal language' becomes 'normative language'. It is the kind of language that corresponds to an objective reality (Fish 1980:97). It stands to reason that such a view of language would entail a literalistic or representational view of meaning. Language free from human values and intentions provides clear access to the reality it represents. However, by restricting language to its formal properties and excluding values and intentions, language becomes dehumanised and decontextualised. When language becomes bereft of humanity and context, it is deprived of the very conditions that constitute language as such. Rejecting the notion of 'ordinary language', Fish (1980:106) writes: 'The alternative view would be one in which the purposes and needs of human communication inform language and are constituent of its structure....' According to him Speech Act Theory is such an alternative view because human commitments, intentions, attitudes and values, appropriate to specific contexts, are seen as included in linguistic structure (:107).

Rhetoric insists upon a view of language as a function of symbolic action. Symbols are used to interact with reality. With symbols we express our needs, our purposes, our ways of interacting and engaging with our environment. As symbols reference may be made to reality, but they do not represent reality. With the use of symbols we bring into existence 'what-is-not', or to put it differently, we create reality with the symbols we use. While the symbols we use establish a relationship with reality, they simultaneously create a different reality. The reality creating function of language as symbolic action can be assigned to the 'value-ladenness' of the symbols used.

Language is not a neutral agency by means of which knowledge can be filtered through, but is a value-laden act (cf also Degenaar 1992:4). As a value-laden act the use of a symbol evokes the attitudes and the values of the society in which they are used. Both the structure of the reservoir from which symbols are selected in the use of language, as well as the process of
selection are determined by the value-system of a society. The use of a word should therefore not be seen in a one-dimensional sense as happens in representational theories of language, but rather in a multi-dimensional sense; human values and attitudes are essential elements of a society’s linguistic structure and with every word human beings use the attitudes, values and relationships of their society are evoked. Owing to the ‘value-ladenness’ of the symbols we use, language is inherently political. Even when so-called informational language is used, the political dimension cannot be excluded. Feminism, for example, has made us acutely aware of the political dimensions of the pronoun ‘he’ and the ways in which this word has been embedded within power structures.

Owing to rhetoric’s insistence on language as a function of symbolic action, the critic may develop a linguistic sensitivity for the understanding of the human condition through language. Taking the other’s use of language seriously may provide an insight into the attitudes towards societal relationships, their power-relations, politics, what is regarded as assumptions and what as ‘what-is’ in societies. Answers to questions such as why certain symbols have been chosen in interaction with reality and not others and why certain symbols have been used in a specific manner can provide the critic with a glimpse into the value systems of the other and can help to understand why social realities have been constructed, to address a situation.

Not only does a linguistic sensitivity prompt the critic to understand ‘between the lines’, but it also creates an awareness of the critic’s own culturally creative language use. The realisation that language does not represent, does not function as vehicle for truth, but is actively creating realities, imposes upon the critic the responsibility to use language not only in the sense of ‘whence’, but also in the sense of ‘whereto’. If the language critics use should no longer be seen as neutral, but rather as ‘value-laden’, criticism becomes a political activity. The linguistic choices a critic makes are by no means innocent reflections on a situation, but are rather indications of a disapproving or approving attitude and as such the motivation is to influence the ‘other’ politically. Since the demise of a literalistic meaning of language, since the disappearance of ‘normal language’, the political dimension has been aptly illustrated even in the so-called informational language of economics and natural science (cf McCloskey 1993; Gross 1991). Rhetoric’s emphasis on a linguistic sensitivity casts the critic in the role of constructor of social realities.

3.3 Context

Also called rhetorical situation or scene, context has always been an inevitable rhetorical category. Hardly a definition of rhetoric exists that does
not in one way or the other refer to context.\(^7\) The importance of context for rhetoric lies in the denial of an absolute or universal truth. Where truth or true knowledge functions as fixed point of orientation, situation need not necessarily play such an important role, since truth may then simply be applied to a variety of situations. In such a paradigm truth has to be imposed upon the situation and rhetoric is seen as the medium through which truth can be made effective in several situations. Various assumptions play a role, namely the assumption that a demarcated context or situation exists, that its properties, such as the ‘exigence’ can be identified and known, which again presupposes that the rhetor has some kind of superior knowledge, that various contexts have more or less the same underlying value-systems, that rhetoric as a technique can more or less in the same manner address these problems, et cetera.

Where truth is dislodged, the historical moment shifts into focus. In each situation the ‘truth’ has to be formulated. For rhetoric it provokes the *kairos* principle, that is the problem of time in relation to communication (Poulakos 1983:38). Since there are no external criteria valid for all times, the question becomes whether ‘now is the time to speak’ (:40). What is the opportune moment to interact? The *kairos* principle requires that the timing or ‘timeliness’ of interaction must happen at the right time (:41). Functioning complementary to the *kairos* principle is the principle of appropriateness, expressed by *to prepon* (:41). According to this principle what is said, what is communicated must be appropriate to the occasion. Poulakos (1983:41) formulates the relationship between these two principles as follows: ‘In distinction to *kairos*, which focuses on man’s sense of time, *to prepon* emphasizes his sense of propriety’.

However, where truth has become dislodged both these principles have to be reformulated. The problem is to establish the historical moment as such, because with the dislocation of truth, the historical moment as something ‘out there’, distinct and knowable, has also disappeared. As presented, these two principles function on the assumption that the historical moment is ‘something out there’, something at a distance, separate from the rhetor, a situation consisting of unfolding, knowable ‘contingent elements’, a situation consisting of formal properties to which can be responded. Seen in this way,

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\(^7\) Eve: Aristotle, who (as we have seen) should strictly speaking be located within a foundationalist paradigm, defines rhetoric in the following manner: “*Εστω δὴ ὁ ντορικὴ δύναμις περὶ ἐκαστοῦ τοῦ θεωρήσας τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν* (Rhet 1.2.1). Depending on how *περὶ ἐκαστοῦ* is translated a case could be made that Aristotle vaguely referred to context. The phrase *περὶ ἐκαστοῦ* could be translated as ‘in every case’, which would render the following translation: ‘the ability (even potential) to detect in every case the possibility of persuasion’.
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the historical moment corresponds to the earlier Bitzer's formulation of the rhetorical situation (cf Bitzer 1968:6). However, when the true knowledge of Foundationalism crumbles, the notion of a rhetorical situation 'out there', complete, demarcated, knowable with objective, factual, properties such as exigence and audience, also crumbles. Reality distintegrates into an infinite, fragmented number of situations. The implication is then also that if the rhetorical situation cannot be established, neither can the timeliness or the appropriateness of the response be evaluated. If we agree that the demise of objective truth implies a demise of objective knowledge of a situation, the notion of rhetorical situation (or for that matter knowledge about any kind of situation) becomes problematic. Lacking external criteria with which to approach reality, life becomes a multi-dimensional, nebulous, fuzziness. In such a frame of reference, the principles of timeliness and appropriateness themselves become questionable and debatable.

The heart of the problem lies in locating the historical moment 'out there'. For the rhetorician, the historical moment is never 'out there', but the rhetor is always part of the historical moment. There is simply no way in which the rhetor can elude or escape being part of the historical moment. As a matter of fact there would not be any 'historical moments' if it were not for rhetors. The historical moment is shaped, formed and created by the assumptions of the rhetor. So even if the objective is the construction of a historical situation 2000 years ago, the assumptions and interpretive strategies are located within the historical moment of the rhetor. Whatever kind of terminological screen is used in understanding 'other historical situations', the terms are terms current within the historical moment of the rhetor. From the praxis of her/his situation a context is constructed. The assumptions of the rhetor, crystallised into interpretive strategies bring a context into existence. The 'formal properties' a rhetor 'observes' in a context, is nothing

8 Bitzer (1986:6) defines rhetorical situation as follows: 'Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring significant modification of the exigence'. For a thorough going criticism of this definition, see Vatz (1973). Bitzer's definition has had widespread influence within the circles of New Testament rhetorical critics owing to George Kennedy (1984, cf esp 34-35). For a discussion of the problem in terms of the Romans Letter, cf Vorster (1994, esp 138-142).

9 The intention is not to reject the notion of 'rhetorical situation', but rather to search for ways in which we could express the 'open-endedness' of life's continuous flow of multi-dimensional and multi-perspectival situations.

10 What Fish (1980:167-173) says concerning the interpretation of texts can analogically be used to understand how the historical moment is shaped by the rhetor. Fish claims that the reading process is the actualisation of interpretive strategies. These strategies write the text. Texts do not exist as such, but are created through interp-
but properties that have been constituted by the interpretive strategies employed. As such ‘historical moments out there’ are incorporated, integrated, drawn into the ‘historical moment’ of the rhetor.

Before returning to the problem of timeliness and appropriateness the perception of the ‘historical moment’ has to be further explored. I have indicated (qua Fish) that the assumptions and the interpretive strategies of a rhetor are constitutive in the formation of the ‘historical moment’. However, assumptions and strategies are nothing but the result of human linguistic interaction; they derive from the desire to cooperate in our understanding of and interaction with reality. In constructing a context, they form the ‘context’ of the context or as Burke expresses it, the ‘context of situation’ (cf Burke 1941:110-112; 1966:359-379). Context of situation refers to those discursive practices in a community that have assumed the appearance of reality by virtue of the power they have gained within a society. As ‘discursive’ they are linguistic in nature and embody therefore also the values of a community. Not only are they responsible for the constitution of a community, but they also provide a community with an integrated system of meaning and function as such in motivating human behaviour. Not only do the things of nature acquire meaning, but these discursive practices also determine social interaction.

At a given moment in time, several discursive practices within a community are simultaneously at work. They do not however, all function on the same level, but are in consistent competition and tension with each other. As such they function in a relationship of power to each other. Some of the discursive practices enjoy more legitimacy than others at a specific moment in time and will therefore also exert more persuasive influence (cf Fourie 1992:23). Therefore, the context from which the ‘historical moment’ is constructed, is multi-dimensional consisting of competing discursive practices arranged in a loosely hierarchical structure. How the historical moment is constructed will depend on the configuration of discursive practices. Since a plurality of configurations may exist, various historical moments may at the same time be constructed. In a society in which capitalism functions pre-

tive strategies. Depending on the set of interpretive strategies used, different texts can be written. Stability in interpretation is achieved through the notion of interpretive communities.

Burke (1966:44-62) expresses it in a different context somewhat differently, by the notion of ‘terministic screen’. Terministic screen, however, can be confusing. Although it indicates that a verbal grid is put on to reality in interpretation, it may suggest that reality is still filtering through. Nothing, however, filters through—what we see are what our terms allow us to see.
dominantly, the configuration of discursive practices will be dominated by discourses on the calculable, whereas discursive practices relating to the arts, humanities, et cetera, will either be infiltrated by the terms of the dominant, or relegated to backstage operations. It stands to reason that the historical moment will, in such a case, be determined by economic terminology. If the conditions of the society change and war becomes imminent, the configuration of discursive practices may change and military terminology may become dominant. Economic discourses could function in service of the military. The point is to see that a context consists of a configuration of discursive practices, that these discursive practices co-exist in relationships of power, consistently influencing each other and that though they shape the praxis of everyday life and are assumed to be the ‘factualities’ within which a society conducts its existence, they are adaptable.

The notion of contexts as competing discursive practices co-existing in relationships of power to each other, creates problems for the kairos and to prepon principles. If the historical moment is shaped by the interpretive strategies of the rhetor, derived from the discursive practices of the community to which the rhetor belongs, what happens to the kairos and to prepon principles? How can timeliness and appropriateness be determined when context is seen as ever-changing, ever-shifting, competing discursive practices? How will appropriateness be determined when there is no correspondence, no fit between the properties of a situation and the response of a rhetor? How can timeliness and appropriateness be determined when several historical moments, relative to the variety of discursive practices, are simultaneously in operation?

What becomes clear is that timeliness and appropriateness cannot be measured against prescriptions external to the historical moment, but are measured in terms of a configuration of the discursive practices of the community. They cannot be measured against external prescriptions, because these prescriptions would themselves originate from a specific historical moment; they are interpretive strategies linked to the situation of an interpretive community. Whether discourse is timely or appropriate is a value judgment relative to the value-laden discourses operating at a certain moment in time. What ‘good timing’ is and whether discourse is appropriate are determined by the discursive practices of a community. Timeliness and appropriateness presuppose some kind of normalised or conventionalised condition, and this can be found in the notion of discursive practices. Formed over a period of time discursive practices provide with the necessary durability needed for the operation of appropriateness and timeliness. Timeliness and appropriateness, furthermore presuppose that an ‘other’, such as an audience shares in the validity of these discursive practices. The tensions
between discursive practices owing to inequality in power, will also be reflected in opposing versions of what will be seen as timely and appropriate. What the opportune moment is, can at the same moment, be seen in oppositional tension. What is judged appropriate in terms of one set of discursive practices validated by one community, may be judged inappropriate by the next. Farrell (1991:193) describes the situation aptly: ‘...contemporary life exposes us to a range of propriety where possible rhetorical audiences are concerned, to variable and disputable conceptions of social problems, definitions of the public good, even norms for the attribution of responsibility and judgment’.

Although the multiple possibilities of appropriateness and timeliness are often overlooked in discussions of the *kairos* and *to prepon* principles, the want of prescriptions prompt rhetoricians to speak of these principles in magical or artistic terms. Cahn 1993:68 writes: ‘...*kairos* designates the magic of timing, of catching the right moment. It is the anti-disciplinary principle of rhetoric; it represents an unanalysable capacity for success....Its [the ‘art of rhetoric’] dignity came to depend upon the difficulty of mastering the moment, an ability which is not obtainable by means of rules’. Where the notion of context has been liberated from its Foundationalistic moorings, the rhetorical critic cannot but become sensitive for the historical moment. Instead of adhering to external prescriptions that cause detachment from one’s immediate context, the absence of such prescriptions enforces an awareness of the configuration of discursive practices and their interaction with the immediate context. It is in this respect that Consigny’s study on the style of Gorgias can serve as an example. According to Consigny the styles of Gorgias should be seen as a hermeneutic project of discursive adaptation (1992b:50). Abolishing the criterion that lies outside all discourse, Gorgias adapts his style to the conventionalities of the discourses of his day. The rhetor has to adhere to the ‘operative protocols of reasoning and speaking of specific discourses’ (1992b:286). Understanding happens when one moves ‘beyond one’s familiar discourse by adapting to unfamiliar ways of speaking and thinking’ (1992a:49). Appropriateness and timeliness accordingly are determined from the language practices that have shaped the audiences. Being ‘out of touch with reality’ can therefore be cured by rhetoric’s very literal understanding of ‘coming to terms with reality’!

If we relate timeliness and appropriateness to the discursive practices active in a community, do we thereby subject the rhetor to the approval by the community? If timeliness and appropriateness are subject to value-judgements would it be possible to question and criticise the discursive practices a community adheres to? Does the link with the discursive practices of a community forever condemn the critical rhetor to the value systems of the moment?
There is very little doubt that the community to which one belongs, the tradition whence a person comes, or the culture in which a human lives, will be a determinative factor in the judgement on context and whether discourse is appropriate or not. However, the rhetor her/himself also contributes to determining what timeliness and appropriateness are. Farrell (1991:200) asserts: "Instead of presupposing the appropriate as an a priori validity claim in advance of speech, rhetorical practice enacts the norms of propriety collaboratively with interested collective others". Various implications follow. Firstly, just as discursive practices are created, shaped and formed by language, the 'norms of propriety' also come into existence by means of language. Secondly, discursive practices are not the only constraints in the determination of timeliness and appropriateness, but the rhetorical practice ensuing from the rhetor also contributes to what is regarded as appropriate and timely. Thirdly, the so-called 'norms of propriety' are not external criteria, but are intrinsic to the discursive practices of the historical moment. They are therefore, flexible, adaptable, changeable; they can be resisted, rejected, renewed or reformed. Fourthly, determining timeliness and appropriateness is not an individual activity, but an act of cooperation.

It is in this dialectic of 'coming to terms with reality' and shaping the reality of discursive practices that the rhetorical critic contributes to the formation of culture. Culture is constituted by comprehensive processes of symbolisation.12 Degenaar (1992:4) provides us with various interpretations of the word 'culture'. His description of culture as 'a dynamic system of knowledge, values, actions, artefacts and articulations of a community in specific historical contexts' seems to correspond to the notion of configurations of discursive practices constituting historical moments. Farrell (1991:193) again suggests 'an understanding of culture as “cultivation,” a durable symbolic home with valued traditions and ways of acting’. Although the metaphoric 'home' reminds of stability, the word cultivation expresses the dynamic, moving nature of culture. Scott (1989:138) likewise highlights the dynamic nature of culture, by requiring that culture must be 'lived' to be a culture. Change, transformation, modification are therefore always part and parcel of culture. Although it has to be conceded that the culture a human being inherits functions so forcefully as to form his/her 'person', culture can be resisted, can be modified and adapted. Enclosed in the power of the discursive practices shaping the person of a human being, lies also the power of

12 Cf also Degenaar (1992:4-5) and Bertelsen (1993:298-300). Both emphasise the way in which the media technologically construct culture. Bertelsen (300) denies that a revival of the sophistic emphasis on debate will serve the political environment in the context of the electronic age.
resistance, because both the power of discursive practices, as well as their resistance originate from the potential of human beings to symbolise.

Rhetoric provides the space in which these discursive practices can be understood. However, by exposing, explaining, undermining and subverting the configurations of discursive practices a creative process is unleashed, because alternative ways to the creation of meaning are prepared. By making people aware of the assumptions and conditions within a particular historical situation, the ‘context’ of their situation, experienced as absolute, universally logical and factual, is exposed as the product of human linguistic activity. As such, it is subject to adaptation, modification or rejection. Contexts of situations, configurations of discursive practices, sometimes bordering on the archaic, inclusive, anti-humane could in this way be brought to the sphere of conversation and adaptation. Brummett (1981:294) emphasises the negotiability of communal values. He indicates that they are created by communication and are subject to change and discussion. The critic can therefore open new possibilities for the creation of systems of meaning within communities.

4 EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND A RHETORICAL APPROACH

How can we approach the writings of early Christianity in such a manner as to get into touch with our own reality? What are our possibilities of contributing to the culture of our society? How can we study the writings of early Christianity in a way that moulds us and those that study with us into civilised human beings? What are the implications of rhetoric’s view of context, language and human motivations for the study of early Christianity? I will briefly pay attention to the notions of ‘motivation’ and ‘historical moment’ in this section, the remarks on ‘language’ being integrated.

Our concern should firstly be to reach for the human motivations from which these writings originated. Burke’s volcanic metaphor can aptly be applied to describe the process. The various writings of early Christianity are but ‘distinctions’ that arose ‘out of a great central moltenness, where all is merged’. They have been thrown from a ‘liquid center to the surface, where they have congealed’ (Burke 1969:xix). It means that interpretation should not be arrested after a surface reading, but it should penetrate to the drama of human consciousness that gave rise to these writings (O’Banion 1991:28). I have indicated that these human motivations originate from a network of multiple relations. Instead of making these separate writings as such our point of departure, the search for that stream of human consciousness giving rise to and lying behind our writings should be our objective.

Constructing the human motivations that were responsible for the writings of early Christianity, implies that the ‘context of situation’ should be
taken seriously; it implies that language should not be seen in a representa­tional sense, but as a function of the symbolic actions of human beings and it implies that role players within the situation receive their due attention. In short, addressing the questions ‘why’ these writings originated, what effects they hoped to achieve, how they could have functioned and contributed to the creation of systems of meaning, requires a historical approach that could help us in constructing the discursive practices lying behind these writings. The outlines of human motivation become visible if a multi-dimensional configuration of factors are taken into account.

However, the critical process does not stop at taking ‘things seriously’. Burke (1969:xix) writes: ‘Let one of these crusted distinctions return to its source, and in this alchemic center it may be remade, again becoming molting liquid, and may enter into new combinations, wherat it may again be thrown forth as a new crust, a different distinction. So that A may become non-A’. One may differ with Burke’s little metaphor and with the modernistic sounding to-and-fro throwing of an object called a ‘distinction’ and also with the feeling of distance between the thrower and the receiver. However, what is of significance for New Testament scholars prompted by rhetorical criticism, is the possibility that ‘A may become non-A’ through a process of interpretation. To put it differently: rhetoric prompts us to write the various stories of early Christianity in such a manner as to shed light on the human condition, and this could mean, no, will mean that different stories will be created in the process of criticism. Rhetorical criticism does not require us to say what the text said, but it demands the appropriateness of our criticism to the pluralities of our existences.

Understanding rhetorical-critically has certain implications. Firstly, it consciously rejects the tyranny of the text. Its objective is not to be located in the text, neither in some kind of development of the text, but in those human beings behind the text interacting, coping with their realities by the process of symbolisation, constructing new realities and creating new possibilities. The text is an act prompted by discursive practices; it stands in an interactional relationship; it is an act struggling for a position among other acts. It is this interactional relationship that has become important and should receive attention. When New Testament rhetorical criticism still clings to the ‘meaning’ of the text and the determination of its structure, albeit its argumentative structure, it actually contradicts the rhetorical tradition of humanisation and contextualisation. As such it is doubtful whether it should be called ‘rhetorical criticism’.

Secondly, making human motivations our objective will quickly open the scene on a drama where the powerful role players have effectively murdered any partners threatening to steal their limelight. The stories of early
Christianity from the point of human motivations do not only consist of twenty-seven texts. Various other written texts constitute the world of early Christianity and should be integrated in our historical understanding. Besides the fact that numerous other written texts constitute the early world of Christianity and must be seen as part of the discursive practices of this world, the rhetorical critic cannot but hear the whispering voices of various other parties, such as those that have opposed the authors of New Testament texts, those that have tried to help, those that have been not of the same sex, race or religious inclination, and...those that have dared to point out the possibility of mistaken routes.

Thirdly, the notion of ‘historical moment’ considerably expands the scope of the New Testament rhetorical critic. Instead of restricting the rhetorical critic to the rhetoricity of the early Christian writings only, the rhetoricity of discourses concerning early Christianity also appears on the scene. Rhetorical criticism acquires a critical role concerning the praxis of the profession concerned with early Christianity. Besides a critical role academically, it also fulfils a critical function towards the everyday contemporary religious practices in which the writings of early Christianity are used. This implies that all theories, methodological inquiries, approaches or religious practices that are in some way or the other concerned with early Christianity fall within the domain of rhetorical criticism. What is at stake is not primarily the meaning of these writings, or whether correct or incorrect exegesis has been done, but rather how the discursive practices accommodating these religious discourses relate to the construction of culture and to the establishment of a moral, civilised society.

Introducing the notion of ‘historical moment’ into the praxis of research on early Christianity, compels the critic to ‘come to terms with reality’ and requires that an answer be given to the question why we keep ourselves busy with research on early Christianity at this point in time? As such it carries studies on early Christianity into the spheres of cultural relativity and relationality, social responsibility and moral accountability. Unfortunately very little attention has been paid to this aspect even by New Testament rhetorical critical scholars. For the sake of convenience I would distinguish between the synchronic and diachronic nature of the historical moment.

Whatever the kind of approach a critic adopts the historical moment is always the present, the current, contemporary situation for the rhetorical critic. The situation ‘now’ functions at least as point of departure. The denial of a contemporary point of departure is ironic, since whether consciously or subconsciously, there is simply no way in which a distance with the own situation can be established. If we concede to the power of the discursive practices that have formed our theories, our interpretive strategies, even our
'persons', understanding always takes place 'in terms' of a particular community. Or to put it differently: Within each interpretive community, the writings of the New Testament are assigned a specific role according to certain strategies in operation. For that very reason it is better to take the own historical moment seriously and realise to what extent the discursive practices of the communities to which critics belong have constituted particular interpretive strategies.

Rhetoric requires that our theories, methodological enquiries or approaches be seen as strategies. Owing to rhetoric's insistence on language as symbolic action, our methodological enquiries can be seen as sophisticated processes of symbolisation. As strategies they are not neutral or value-free, but are value-laden activities or practices. They disclose an attitude towards the writings of the New Testament and can be seen as articulations of certain power-structures. As such, the strategies with which we read these writings can be seen as political. The rhetorical critic is interested in understanding the agendas by virtue of which specific options are selected, while others are excluded. Even if a strategy specifies its goal as the understanding of the past, rhetoric requires that account be given why an understanding of the past is deemed important within the 'now' of the historical moment and why these texts have been selected to provide an understanding of the past.

Although we reformulated the principles of timeliness and appropriateness we can see that they still apply to rhetorical practice. These two principles cannot be ignored in rhetorical practice and for that reason the rhetorical critic needs to determine the timeliness and appropriateness of the critical activities of New Testament scholars. The problem is, of course, extremely complex and pervaded with political elements. On the one hand, New Testament scholars in their various fields of interest are compelled by the tradition of the specific field to continue a tradition moulded by specific terminologies. On the other hand, the principles of timeliness and appropriateness require us to give account of the function of our research in our time and environment. Where the terminologies of fields of studies are deemed inappropriate and out of date, rhetoric prompts that new terminologies be devised and various conversations be engaged into.

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13 A detailed exposition lies outside the scope of this article, but a good case in point would be the 'Jewish Christians versus Gentile Christians' debate. From the very rigid distinction between these two groups in first century Christianity, research has moved towards a completely diverse Judaism and first century Christianity has been firmly located within the Jewish family. The question would be: to what extent have ecumenical incentives and political correctness contributed to a different perspective on early Christianity?
For example: within conventional research on the synoptic tradition the origins of the Synoptics will probably always be a problem and discussions cannot but be permeated by terms, like 'sources', 'oral', 'scribal', 'transmission', 'Form-criticism', 'Q', et cetera. The rhetorical critic needs to know how timely and appropriate these discourses are for the historical moment. One could argue, that the historical moment is constituted by specific discursive practices and that these discourses appropriately fit that moment. It has been indicated, however, that discursive practices also exist in a configuration relative to an inequal proportion to power and that these discursive practices are adaptable. There is therefore also a wider context of which account has to be given and where that is ignored, the power of a discourse is simply gradually and naturally diminished. To extend the argument a little further, the rhetorical critic in a multi-cultural South Africa needs to prompt those interested in the synoptic tradition about the timeliness and appropriateness of a discourse with a long European tradition.14

Besides the plurality and diversity of strategic agendas with the writings of early Christianity within the scholarly world, the rhetorical critic is also interested in the way in which religious practices assign a role to some of the writings of early Christianity. Rhetoric is concerned with the praxis of everyday life, with the solving of social and political problems. Despite the complexity of modern social problems, the writings of a segment of early Christianity, namely the New Testament, are consistently used by believing communities as a means to approach these problems coherently. Their use becomes a powerful instrument in the launching and maintenance of political agendas. They are integrated into discourses intent on the construction of morality.15

Various interesting questions confront the rhetorical critic of which the most important is the tense relationship between the academy and the public. The relationship is part of a wider context in which political aspects such as the tension between elitism and non-elitism, increasing public accessibility to the halls of learning, increasing empowering of social classes and emerging

14 I have to clarify myself. I do not wish to discredit or in any measure defame the European tradition. If it were not for the European tradition we would not have had a system of universities in South Africa. Neither do I wish to tarnish the proud heritage of scholarship on the Synoptics. However, where appropriateness is not brought into consideration, discourse has no meaning and the terministic screen of traditional research into the origins of the Synoptics does somehow not seem suitable in South Africa.
15 Within the South African situation, reference can be made to the recent public discussions about the legalisation of abortion and pornography.
democracies have to be dealt with.\textsuperscript{16} However, if rhetoric is concerned with the \textit{praxis} of contexts and if rhetoric favours a recognition of the situatedness of problems, is there any urgency for the rhetorical critic in the academic environment to become involved in the \textit{praxis} of everyday life? On the basis of a distinction between the \textit{praxis} of academic and public life, Leff (1987) disputes the necessity of collapsing academic discourse into public discourse. He correctly indicates that the development of styles of academic discourse can be directly associated with the practicalities of academic life. On the other hand, he concedes the rhetoricity of both academic and public discourses. For that reason different critical models for these different discourses are suggested, as well as continued critical conversation (cf also the suggestion of Smit 1994:281).

A discussion on whether the solution suggested by Leff is viable or not, would take us beyond the scope of this article. However, various problems and questions still remain to be answered. For example: is a conversation possible when different discourses are used; is a conversation generated from different value-systems, from discursive practices a viability? Just as the theories and methods with which we approach the writings of early Christianity should be seen as value-laden and as means of political vying for positions of power, the notion of conversation is not always that innocent and may be simply another technique of retaining the powerbase of one of the parties. Conversation is always subject to various conditions.

Finally, I have mentioned that the historical moment is also diachronical. While the historical moment of the rhetorical critic is synchronical, it also functions simply as one moment in a line of moments extending both into the past and the future. That implies that any moment in time, in which the writings of early Christianity function, can be rhetorical critically analysed. For example: what is traditionally treated as the history of the investigation of the New Testament can become subject of rhetorical criticism. The history of the investigation of the New Testament is usually conducted in an ideational frame of reference. However, a rhetorical approach to the history of investigation could bring us into contact with the multi-dimensional world from which research originated; it could help us understand the way in which these writings were used in different times to establish a morality or were abused to encourage immorality. Owing to certain conceptions of rationality, critics of the writings of early Christianity direct attention only to the academic spheres in which these writings function. Rhetorical criticism, however, is also interested in the function of these writings in the wider society as

\textsuperscript{16} Cf Good & Roberts (1993:11) where reference is also made to the tense relationship in Great Britain between academics and the public. Cf also Reynolds (1990:3-18).
reflected in newspapers, diaries, posters, political debates, literature, letters, et cetera.

The extreme point of the rhetorical critic's historical moment are the origins of early Christianity. The rhetorical critic can opt for a historical understanding of early Christianity as has been indicated earlier in the discussion of human motivation. This would entail constructing the discursive practices, the *praxis* of their lives that generated the writings we have available.

5 BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION

Rhetoric's concern with reality, with, inter alia, the historical moment, with appropriateness and timeliness, with the interaction between language and reality and with human motivation, cannot but compel the rhetorical critic to become involved with her/his own reality. The awareness that the apparently immutable, universal truth, the ostensibly objective, unchangeable situation, is often nothing but the products of our linguistic capabilities, paradoxically challenges the rhetorical critic. Such an awareness challenges the critic to be constructive via destructiveness. Destroying our foundations of objective reality, absolute Truth, external criteria, creates a sense of responsibility, a will to tolerate and an awareness of possibilities.

Who knows what could have happened if the raven were perhaps less concerned with tales about 'Sugarcandy Mountain' and more with a bird's eye view of the situation?

WORKS CONSULTED


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