The study of religion at the ‘multi-versity’: probing problems and possibilities

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ABSTRACT

Conditions constituting the university are in the process of changing. It is argued that an objectivistic philosophy of meaning constituted the modern university, whereas an interactional philosophy of meaning constitutes the ‘multi-versity’. The terminology that determines the study of religion has been received from an objectivistic tradition. This poses several problems for the study of religion within the ‘multi-versity’, where an interactional epistemology functions in the production of knowledge. Some of these problems are identified, such as the clash between competing terminologies, the notion of uniqueness, religious and biblical values, comparison and pluralism and the surrender to techno-economic rationality. From the perspective of the rhetoric of enquiry it is argued that if the rhetoricity of religious discourses is taken into consideration, various possibilities can be pursued within the ‘multi-versity’.

1 INTRODUCTION

The phrase: ‘The university is in a crisis’ has by now already become a cliché. Almost every article or book one reads on the university as such refers to this crisis. To a certain extent it is true, but perhaps it would be better to perceive the university as being in the process of a continuous transformation or change. Crisis evokes the impression of a moment of chaos, a moment of disorder and upheaval, which, once the crisis has been addressed, will disappear. However, in the case of the university, the crisis will never disappear, which also clarifies why the phrase ‘The university is in a crisis’ has achieved cliché status. For that reason, scholars engaged in the academic study of religion should rather see themselves as part of an oxymoronic process—that of permanent transformation. Perhaps the only permancy which we might still have at the university is that of change.

The question that infuses this paper is whether we are equipped to participate in this process of powerful, competing vocabularies in their consistent disequilibrium. What is the role that the scholar of religion, whether it be in theology, religious or biblical studies, should play? Who are we and why are we here? What is our obligation to the time and space we live in? What are our possibilities to participate in the process of transformation, to provide a different set of terminologies, to produce new worlds with our words. In this
process of transformation, we often fail to identify and resist totalising terminologies, detracting us from what we are supposed to do as members of theological and religious studies faculties or departments. It is, of course, important to take note of these totalising terminologies, they should not be ignored, but neither should they be allowed to detract us from the network of obligations in which we work.

I want to argue that an adherence to an objectivist philosophy of meaning, or foundationalism, inhibits participation in current competing terminologies of meaning and is detrimental to the continued existence of studies concerned with religion at the university. Remaining within a foundationalistic frame of reference makes it impossible to cope with the process of constant change in the 'multi-versity'. On the other hand, recognising and identifying the problem of current studies concerned with religion and introducing alternative theories of knowledge into this field opens new and alternative possibilities for the scholar of religion as a critical rhetor in the 'multi-versity'.

2 CHANGING FROM A UNIVERSITY TO A 'MULTI-VERSITY'

In this section I want to argue and indicate that the modern university which has originated and functioned within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning is changing, because its objectivistic paradigm is being replaced by a rhetorical or pragmatic philosophy of meaning.

2.1 Objectivism as the paradigm within which the modern university originated and developed

The name objectivism functions as an umbrella term and from other perspectives can also be known as foundationalism, essentialism, representationalism, formalism and modernism. During the course of its history, it manifested itself in different forms (cf Johnson 1974:xxv–xxxv). I will use these different names interchangeably. Although the identification and depiction of objectivism as objectivistic is fairly recent, an objectivistic philosophy of meaning has infused the modern university from its very inception.

Underlying objectivism is the belief in a structured reality, consisting of various objects and events and their relationships to each other. Each of these objects, events and relations has its own properties that can be known and categorised. Some of these properties constitute the objects, events or relations. These constitutive, essential properties make the thing what it in fact is

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1 This aspect has been more fully elaborated in Vorster 1998.
and open the possibility of categorisation, because wherever essential properties relate to each other a category or class may be discerned. These classes or categories are seen to be natural; they constitute reality and exist independent from human understanding.

From an epistemological perspective it can be seen as a philosophy of meaning that makes a clear distinction between the things or objects of a structured reality and their symbolic representation, and between the things of reality and the observers of those things. In such an epistemology, the things of reality can be objectively known by the dissection and analysis of their properties and the relationships in which these properties interact with each other. Knowledge is produced and progresses to the extent that the 'object' is more or deeply dissected. The movement of knowledge production is uni-directional; from a segment of structured reality to the observer. True or real knowledge is produced to the extent that independent reality is symbolically represented; as such it proceeds from the assumption that human systems of symbolisation can reflect or mirror the categories of reality. Symbols obtain their meaning, therefore, by virtue of their correspondence to the world. To ensure the production of pure and untainted 'objective' knowledge, the machinery designed for this purpose should be continuously improved upon. Methodology and its refinement, therefore, shifts into focus. The correct method ensures that the objects of reality are observed in a manner that produces untainted knowledge. Observers should therefore be disciplined into the rule-governed, 'logical' use of symbols.

Lakoff (1987:157) claims that the doctrines of the objectivistic paradigm have evolved over a period of two millennia. It would obviously need a very detailed historical account of their development to substantiate this claim, but there seems to be clear indications of their influence in the existence of the modern university. Both Readings (1995; 1996) and Miller (1995:136) indicate that the offering of an objective, unifying factor, external to the systems of human symbolisations, against which the relationships between State and society could be worked out, was the one primary condition for the institution of the modern university. Miller (1995:136) writes: 'the very word “university” names not only the totalising goal of the university, its purpose as rationalising everything, but also the singleness of the university, “turning everything into one”, as its etymology suggests (cf also Runcie 1988:14 and Teichler 1994:30). And Cabal (1993:23) again relates the notion of university to universality and writes that 'the university arose from agreement and consensus between teachers and students, who were united for the corporate management of universal knowledge'. He quotes the 1991 Director Mayor of Unesco who claims that this universality stems from the university’s concern with ‘universals’, ‘essentials’ or ‘first principles’, its scope which covers
'the whole spectrum of knowledge', its free access to knowledge for all and from its inherent internationalism (23–24). Despite the fact that some of the inferences drawn may be disputable, it is clear that the university has been associated with this all-encompassing truth against which all its activities are measured, 'a single regulatory idea...' (Readings 1996:14).

Driven from the perspective that something like truth or true reality must exist, the goal of scientific study is the disclosure or discovery of what is essential to objects of reality. Readings (1995) indicates that in the history of the modern university, this unifying, objective factor assumed three modes, namely the Kantian university of Reason, the Humboldtian university of culture and the technological university of Excellence. For Kant, institutionalised, autonomous reason, safeguarded by the delegation of the State's power to the university, functioned as the criterion by which all activities and functions of the university could be measured. The university serves to house the search for truth and to disseminate its results to the community (cf Hindness 1995:34). The Humboldtian university likewise regards the university as the place where truth should be discovered, where everything should be given its rationality, but also as the place of education, the place where male citizens should be cultivated and enculturated into the basic values of the national culture (Readings 1995:121).

Since the technological university of excellence has experienced significant changes and since this is the current mode in which the idea of the university manifests itself, we need to pay more attention to it.

2.2 The university of excellence as a continuation of objectivism

The Humboldtian university of culture which has significantly dominated and influenced tertiary education has now been replaced by the technological university of excellence. However the position of the university in its interaction with society has radically changed. The university no longer functions as the only institution where knowledge can be acquired and neither is its function determined by the search for truth and its dissemination to the nation through the education and cultivation of predominantly male citizens. Knowledge itself has become suspect. It does not necessarily lead to the liberation of the mind, or the emancipation of humankind, but it can in itself become a mode of regulation and imprisonment, a mode of control and mechanism to incarcerate in totalising terminologies (cf Lyotard 1984:37–41; also Bloland 1995:534).

Various factors contributed to the de-centering of the university. Although one should exercise extreme caution when generalising about the university, World War II introduced a different kind of State intervention into the relationship between State and university and it is possible to trace
the origins of the technological university of excellence to the post Second World War years. Before World War II, project research in the USA was carried out ‘by industrial and government scientists in industrial and government installations’ (Lewontin 1997:13). This situation changed immediately after the war, when the realisation dawned on politicians that the universities provided an excellent location for the socialisation of technological research. Universities provided the infra-structure within which it became possible for scientists to pursue technological research amply assisted by State funding (:17). It is important to note that at this stage, State assisted research was justified by an appeal to the prosperity and security of the nation (:13).\textsuperscript{2} In a similar vein an increase of student numbers was advocated by politicians during the fifties to stimulate technical, economic and social progress (Teichler 1994:38).\textsuperscript{3} However, Readings (1996:46–53) argues that it was globalisation and the concurrent emergence of the economically powerful transnational corporations that led to the decline of the nation-state and it was this decline that decisively changed the situation of the university. The university consequently no longer serves to educate the people of the nation into national citizenhood, and it no longer serves as an ideological arm of the state providing the people with national identity, but it has been pervaded to such an extent by economic rationality that it can be seen as a corporation. It would be possible to add to globalisation and the rise of transnational corporations as factors that decisively changed the situation of the university also the democratisation of nations, the information explosion owing to computerisation, the access given to a heterogeneity of peoples, the rise of postmodernism and the concurrent destabilisation of modernistic discourses, as well as the recognition of the powerful role of language. Weber (1998:20) emphasises two factors that have decisively changed the situation of the university. On the one hand, the globalisation of the economy has allowed the profit-driven system of an economic rationality to enter areas that have not until now been subjected to these constraints (1998:22). On the other hand, the virtualisation of reality has completely changed traditional sites of the university, such as the classroom, the library and the campus. The research and teaching functions of the university are no longer localisable to a specific space (1998:20).

It has become clear that the situation of the university has become extremely complex. The university no longer simply functions as the only

\textsuperscript{2} Lewontin’s research specifically concerns the situation in the USA. However, it would be possible to claim the same tendency of the State as patron of the academy in Europe and in South Africa.

\textsuperscript{3} Teichler’s concern is especially the history and situation of the German higher education system.
entrance into the culture of nationhood. It is no longer possible to describe the university as the only ‘structural and cultural lynchpin of a modern system’ (Lemmer 1998:19). But if the situation of the university has changed to such an extent that it has been de-centred from its position as the cultural lynchpin of modern society, to what extent does objectivism still haunt the corridors of the university?

To a certain extent the technological university of excellence can be seen as an anachronism, as an attempt to re-centre a de-centred university by means of a techno-economic rationality. It can be seen as an anachronism, because it relates to the Kantian and the Humboldtian university by posing the notion of ‘excellence’ as a unifying factor, despite the fact that the locus of the university has been changed (Readings 1996:22). Unlike the cases of the Kantian and Humboldtian universities, this unifying factor does not function from a position external to the university, but it develops within the university and functions to centre all the activities of the university. Although it might be argued that the notion of excellence neither resembles the Kantian Idea nor the Humboldtian culture as referential categories for the determination of truth, Weber has convincingly argued that Readings’ version of excellence is not as non-referential as he would have us believe.4

The term ‘excellence’, which features in almost every vision and mission of universities, functions as a highly abstracted principle, an ultimate hierarchical term with which all the disciplines of the university are invited to identify. Despite its neutral and innocent appearance, (which makes it seductively attractive) the term is, of course, also highly political, because it has

4 Readings (1996:22-43) argues that the term ‘excellence’ functions as a non-referential unit and its use as a unifying principle in the University allows the University to participate in a process of dereferentialisation. That means that the University no longer functions as a unit of reference to any ideology and furthermore, the ‘appeal to excellence marks the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University, or rather that the idea has now lost all content’ (39). The notion of excellence allows the University to understand itself ‘solely in terms of the structure of corporate administration’ (20). As such ‘the University is not just like a corporation; it is a corporation’ (22). It must be seen as ‘an autonomous bureaucratic corporation’ (40). Weber (1998:28-32) on the other hand, argues that the autonomous self-reference of the University granted by virtue of the notion ‘excellence’ is in itself a form of reference. Even though the University may be seen as a bureaucratic corporation, the objective of transnational corporations is to maximise profit over the short or medium term. Despite its self-interest it is therefore not autonomous. He indicates that the self-reference, initiated by the notion of ‘excellence’, is perhaps nothing but a very distinctive modern form of reference, similar and in continuation with the Cartesian cogito. Just as absolute certitude was sought by means of a process of universal doubt, certitude is now sought by means of the actualisation and realisation of profit, that is by the notion of value (35).
been imported\(^5\) from the world of business, thereby allowing the invasion of corporate terminology into the university. As such it functions to establish a totalisation of techno-economic rationality and in doing that it continues objectivism. Just as each discipline had to justify itself in terms of the Kantian Idea or Humboldtian culture, each discipline now has to justify itself in terms of techno-economic rationality. Its excellent research has to be measured according to the numerical standards laid down by techno-economic rationality. Lyotard (1984:48) has indicated that the highest goal of higher education is the achievement of the ‘best performativity of the social system; it has to supply the social system with the skills society needs (:48). The reason for the existence of the university becomes the extent to which it can contribute to the economic system. As such the university has to respond to the clarion call of ‘an order bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production’ (Bloland 1995:524).\(^6\) Although the term ‘excellence’ may develop within the university (as Readings 1996 would have us believe), it functions to express and symbolise the manner in which reality has become economised.

Objectivism continues itself therefore by means of techno-economic rationality. Techno-economic terminologies now structure our reality and determine what can be known and should be known. The delegitimation of the grand narrative has now been replaced by the excellent accountancy system. The totalisation of techno-economic rationality creates the impression of an objective system to which all disciplines at the university should comply. The ‘natural’ thing to do is to take our ‘markets’ into consideration, to see our students as our ‘clients’ or as ‘consumers’, to look upon ourselves (as lecturers) as ‘costs’ to the university, our departments as ‘cost units’, our essential university activities as ‘core business’, to view our tutorial material as marketable ‘products’. Furthermore, it has become ‘natural’ to ask ourselves whether we are ‘cost-effective’ and whether we should not perhaps ‘downsize’, ‘rationalise’ or even ‘re-engineer’ ourselves. Within the objective system established by such a totalisation of techno-economic rationality, vari-

\(^5\) ‘Import’ should be correctly understood. Readings (1996:22) is quite correct when he rejects the notion of ‘excellence’ as simply a metaphor from the business world. ‘Importing’ corporate terminology should consequently not be understood as using business terminology to present the University as resembling a business, but rather in a catalystic sense, namely that its importation makes the University into a business.

\(^6\) Bloland quotes Max Weber who indicated how the modern system within which we live has become an overorganised economic order imprisoning people with its demands and determining the lives of all who are born within it. The quote comes from M Weber 1958, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner Sons.
ous new hierarchies are accepted as ‘natural’, such as the importance of quantity over quality, fields of knowledge concerned with the numerical over fields of knowledge concerned with letters, the natural sciences over the humanities, economics and management over the rest of the social sciences, skills over critical thinking, teaching and training over research, management or administration over academy.

However, allowing a totalisation of techno-economic rationality disciplines the university into a terminology that does not allow other types of rationality to develop and prosper. It becomes questionable whether discourses concerned with morality, politics, history, religion, philosophy, as well as discourses concerned with the variety of cultures can find accommodation at the technological university of excellence. Although economic imperatives are here to stay and will determine all activities of the university, the totalisation of techno-economic rationality detracts from the possibilities other non-techno-economic rationalities have to offer in understanding the human condition. For that reason it has to be resisted and alternative ways of understanding the university need to be explored.

2.4 Changing from a ‘uni-versity’ to a ‘multi-versity’

This brings us to the notion of the ‘multi-versity’. The ‘multi-versity’ is simply another name for the university of dissensus (cf Readings 1995; Miller 1996). The idea of the ‘multi-versity’ should not create the impression of multiple-truths existing alongside each other. As a matter of fact, in the ‘multi-versity’ the notion of truth has disappeared altogether. Instead of truth and instead of foundational knowledge, questions concerning ‘respect’, ‘how we live together’, ‘justice’, democracy and the ‘social bond’ are at stake. The notion of a ‘multi-versity’ gives expression to the university as a locus where various rationalities may critically cooperate in the process of enquiry. Readings (1995:192) writes: ‘The University is where thought takes place beside thought, where thinking is a shared process without identity or unity. The University’s ruins offer us an institution in which the incomplete and interminable nature of the pedagogic relationship can remind us that “thinking together” is a dissensual process; it belongs to dialogism rather than dialogue’.

The ‘multi-versity’ does not function as a site for the storage of knowledge. Since it has no centre from which to operate, the question of value has to be raised consistently. Value should not be seen here in terms of techno-economic rationality, that is, by the calculation of the ‘efficiency of means towards comparable ends’ (Brown 1987a:73, 1987b:191). Although this might be the way in which value is accounted for by university administrators it would entail a confusion of the logic of accounting with the logic of account-
ability. It is the latter that applies in the ‘multi-versity’. The question of value, however, often assumes a central perspective. What is of value for the professor need not be of value for the student or for the administration or for that matter for society (cf Readings 1995:153). That implies a decentring of the teaching situation. Decentring of the teaching situation means a radical removal of autonomy. Neither the professor, the student nor the administrator has the autonomy to determine value. Instead value has to be determined within a network of obligations.

Related to the question of value is also the position of the ‘other’. The ‘other’ occupies a constitutive position in the ‘multi-versity’, because the production of rationalities depends on interaction with the ‘other’. Brown (1987b:193) indicates that rationality is not the point of departure, but is an achievement that comes into existence in the social interaction of people. Miller (1995:134) qualifies the interaction with the ‘other’ and specifies that the ‘other’ be given space to be the ‘entirely other’. From this radical notion of the ‘other’ emerges the idea of a university of dissensus as a locus where a variety of heterogenous groups may work together ‘within a horizon of goals and purposes that cannot be reconciled with the others in some overarching principle of reason or idea of universal culture’ (:136). As such the university becomes a locus for the realisation of radical democracy.

Finally, because there is no assumed structured reality and no foundation of knowledge, the disciplinary boundaries are flexible and subject to constant change. However, the undisciplining of disciplines does not mean an abandonment of disciplinarity, neither a vague interdisciplinariness. Readings (1995:176–177) requires that the university of dissensus adheres to a ‘certain rhythm of disciplinary attachment and detachment’, and that the question whether knowledge warrants disciplinary form be made a permanent question.

3 STUDIES CONCERNED WITH RELIGION IN THE ‘MULTI-VERSITY’

If context, constituted by a multi-dimensional configuration of meanings, determines the manner in which we interact and relate with each other, and if the assumptions on which the university as an act have been undermined, subverted or simply changed, are there possibilities to interpret these changes in a manner favourably disposed towards the teaching of religious studies? If the ‘university’ is seen to be in ruins and if the ‘multi-versity’ has become the site where a radical democracy can be cultivated through the notion of dissensus, what are the implications for studies that concern themselves with religion and religiosity?
I wish to argue that further marginalisation of studies concerning religion will take place if we remain within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning. As a matter of fact, our current marginalisation is to a large extent the result of our own doing and our refusal to move away from this paradigm. This marginalisation will continue because in a 'multi-versity' there can be no room for theological or religious studies that operate on objectivistic assumptions. The salvation of studies concerned with religion does not lie with an embracing of the techno-economic language that infuses our universities since its objectivistic categories lend themselves to a hierarchic taxonomy that ranks the more profitable higher on the scale of the legitimate. Unless scholars concerned with religion can convert to 'salespersonship' this is not really an option. Unfortunately, in an effort to retain studies concerned with religion at the technological university of excellence, knowledge, generated by an objectivistic epistemology, is often sold as the old, old tidings, wrapped in 'market-related' gift paper, oozing glimmering excellence.

What we need to look for are the possibilities which the academic study of religion provides for interaction. Via a commitment to interaction it may be possible to satisfy the network of obligations the teaching and study of religion requires. Critical cooperative enquiry (and both qualifications are of immense importance) fosters and cultivates an ethos of accountability. The criterion is no longer whether the work scholars of religion produce adheres to some kind of external truth or whether it corresponds to an assumed corpus of already existing and accepted knowledge. Neither should the total onslaught of the logic of accounting force the academic study of religion into questions concerning its own marketability and profitability. An objectivistic approach to the study of religion precludes the possibility of interaction or conversation.

I will therefore first indicate to what extent an objectivistic or foundationalist paradigm inhibits or even prevents participation in a 'multi-versity'; I will then explore possibilities of teaching issues concerned with religion at the 'multi-versity' if approached from the rhetoricity of religious discourses.

3.1 The teaching of studies concerned with religion in an objectivist frame of reference as restrictive to conversation

3.1.1 Objectivism and conversation

The purpose of this section is to argue and indicate that the objectivistic teaching of any study concerned with religion severely restricts conversation owing to the totalising terminologies employed and as such cannot be conducive for conversation. In fact, owing to its self-centredness the notion of accountability, so essential to a heterogeneous society, completely disappears.
from the scene. Inter-, multi-, trans- and cross-disciplinarity, just as inter- and multi-cultural studies, may be terminologies increasingly used within our changing situation, and although these terms may provide the terminological space within which new spheres of knowledge can be generated, very little will come of it and can be achieved if the totalising interpretative context of Objectivism is not forsaken.

Conversation within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning does not allow for conversation, because the conversation takes place within the parameters specified by an enquiring urge intent on its discovery of a unified, universal truth. I have earlier indicated that the legitimacy of knowledge in the university of dissensus need to be evaluated in terms of value. Obviously value will be assigned to a corpus of knowledge shared by people of the same value-system, but the question is whether it is possible for people who have identified a fixed set of knowledge as objective, as real, as truth, to enter into conversation with a group or community/society who adheres to a different value-system and whether it would be possible to engage in such a manner as to allow mutual influence and understanding.

Before arguing from the religious perspective one should perhaps use an analogy from a different discipline. The field of Law seems to struggle with the same problem. Basic to the South African criminal law system is the principle that no crime exists for which the law has not provided \( \textit{nullum crimen sine lege} \). According to this principle, criminal law determines which acts can be deemed criminal and which not. Legal authors favourably comment on this principle and indicate that it has been devised to protect society from the random abuse of power by institutionalised sources of power, such as the State and in times gone by, the Church (cf Burchell, Milton & Burchell 1983:53–62 and also Snyman 1989:24–38). Authority on what constitutes criminality has been located within the parameters of legal documents and only here. Despite the laudable attempt to prevent the tyranny of absolute power, within a foundationalist frame of reference, voices lamenting the ‘encriminalisation’ of certain crimes or pleading for the decriminalisation of particular actions can scarcely be heard. The assumption underlying this particular principle is that the flux of human experiences can be segmented into discrete components, which can be objectified and assigned a legal label, thereby convicting and incarcerating certain actions as criminal, while allowing others to roam free. The main topic of discussion becomes whether a specific act can be related to a specific law or legal requirement. The Law becomes the foundation for the establishment of what constitutes criminality; it provides objective knowledge and specifies the properties an action should have in order to be seen as a crime. Conversation is severely constrained and constricted by the vocabulary provided; it has to take place...
within an already established linguistic pattern. It would therefore be possible to formulate the problem with Objectivism as the constraints which the totalisation of a specific set of terms impose on any conversational possibilities.

To return to the field of religion and studies concerned with religion, few scholars of religion will today publicly denounce conversation with people on the other side of the fence, and for that very reason conversation is also encouraged across religious boundaries or denominational borders. The problem, however, is whether such a conversation is possible other than in the terms and vocabulary of the objectivist, because where a corpus of knowledge is seen as objective or foundational, knowledge functions to either support or elaborate on a particular core. Where studies concerned with religion are taught within an objectivist paradigm, other religions or the religions of other cultures will always be taught from the dominant, objectivist religious paradigm of the particular Faculty. To a certain extent there can simply be no other possibility, because of the objective nature of the specific terminology; it has become what can be called 'natural'. Consequently, the study of terminologies other than my own then simply functions to strengthen my own position. Conversation becomes a means to self-empowerment and is as such a 'ventriloquesting' of the other. Although the terms of other terminologies may be used, whether they may be from a different religious position or from a different academic discipline, the 'different' is infused and determined by the objective terminological context.' We need to look at a few forms in which Objectivism expresses itself in current religious scholarship.

3.1.2 'Ventriloquesting' the other

'Ventriloquesting' the other is concerned with the manner in which Objectivism may use an alternative terminology but continues with the same conceptual complexes. The alternative terminology serves a dominant terminology. At first hearing it may sound like the 'other', but the dominant vocabulary is left unchanged. Owing to the fact that no qualitative change occurs these academic discourses often frustrate with an abundance of contradictions. A few examples should suffice.

Neusner (1992) lodges an attack on the teaching of what he calls 'generic religion' at universities, complaining that it evades responsibility, contradicts the character of religion, is detrimental to the communal values of a particular religion and serves only to broaden the constituency of professorships. However, he does not reject the simultaneous existence of diverse religions on campus, because, according to him, the university is a place where these differences should be celebrated. Why specifically the university?...and it is
here that Objectivism again raises its head and the nagging suspicion that objectivistic conversations are nothing but 'ventriloquesting' operations again surfaces. I quote: 'The university claims to seek truth, so we can no longer claim that everybody is right about a mass of mutually contradictory and incoherent propositions concerning ultimate questions. The university claims to deal with facts, and we can no longer deny the facts of difference....I must not make the other over into my own image and after my own likeness, but I have to learn to see in the other another way to be in God's image and after God's likeness' (73). Now the problem is of course that we do not have God's image or God's likeness, as a matter of fact we do not know anything about God except by means of our own images and likeness, which means that Neusner will create his own image. The criterion determining the relationship with the other has been formulated from his own objectivistic terminological context. This becomes clear when he ends his article: 'Each of us, is after all,' in our image, after our likeness,' showing, from God's perspective in Scripture, just how things are meant to be. And that is, alas, precisely the way they are.' This seems to be a case of conversational hi-jacking for a particular religious orientation.

A second example may be encountered in the conversation between studies concerned with religion and Postmodernism. The inevitable encounter with postmodernism generated a host of studies concerned with the possibilities postmodernism has for the study of religion. However, the conversation with postmodernism provides an excellent example of the way in which studies concerned with religion use and abuse a different terminology without qualifying their own assumptions. In the context of the Christian Scholar's review8 a special issue (1996, #26) was dedicated towards the relationship between 'Christianity and Postmodernity'. Unfortunately, most of the contributions were apologetic in nature, attempting to justify the Christian belief system, not allowing a critique of its assumptions.9 Obje-

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7 For a more balanced and persuasive treatment of the same problem see Atkinson 1992.
8 In its 'Statement of Purpose' the Christian Scholar's review specifies its primary objective 'the integration of Christian faith and learning on both the intra- and interdisciplinary levels.' As a secondary purpose, this journal seeks to provide a forum for the discussion of theoretical issues of Christian higher education. The journal is well established, highly regarded and publishes respectable academics in the area of religion. It is important for our purposes to note its intention towards conversation.
9 Despite appeals to his audience to listen and address the postmodern 'attitude', Padgett (1996:132) maintains that 'Christians will also maintain their own thinking, grounded in God's own self-revelation in Scripture and tradition. Any philosophy which would undercut such a revelation will be looked at with suspicion. Christians, therefore, must develop their own theologically motivated and faith-full hermeneutics of suspicion to deconstruct differance and undo the negativity of French structuralism.'
tivistic categories function as principle of selection for terminologies from Postmodernism and these are then used to justify the Christian belief system. It is ironical that while Postmodernism's critique on the objectivistic assumptions and intentions of Modernism is easily adopted as what 'intelligent Christians (have) been saying...all along' (Moore 1996:135),\textsuperscript{10} the objectivistic assumptions from which the Christian belief system functions are not recognised at all.

Caution should be exercised not to generalise. In a completely different vein is the contribution by Heie (1996a:138–157; 1996b:168–176). Heie addresses a very real problem, namely the apparent inability of a heterogeneous Christianity to engage in conversation with each other and their inability to offer, by means of conversation their perspectives to the academic world. He finds in a moderate form of Postmodernism the opportunity to enter into a cross-perspectival conversation where knowledge will be constituted by the conversation itself, where a plurality of Christian voices can be orchestrated and where disagreements between Christians can be upheld by the teaching thereof. The proposal is a serious and courageous attempt to move away from an objectivistic philosophy of meaning and it is in itself a confirmation of the fact that objectivism functions to restrict conversation. The question is, however, whether Heie has succeeded in departing from his objectivistic moorings and whether a 'moderate Postmodernism' does not equal a 'moderate' objectivism? To understand his proposal as yet another example of 'ventriloquesting' we need to look more closely at the way he argues.\textsuperscript{11}

According to Heie, Postmodernism provides an opportunity for Christians to have their voices heard because everybody is allowed to bring their assumptions to the conversation. The exclusion of Christian voices on the basis of their inability to be 'religiously neutral' has therefore no validity. If Postmodernism is consistent with its own assumptions, namely that our knowing is contextual, local and particularistic, that is, perspectivistic, the particularity of the scholar of religion should not be shed, but her/his

\textsuperscript{10} This claim not only indicates ignorance of what Postmodernism entails, but its anachronistic and uniform reading of Christianity also indicates to what extent an objectivistic perspective provides a distorted account of reality.

\textsuperscript{11} The purpose is obviously not to offer Heie's argument in full, but rather to provide an insight into the objectivistic assumptions operating, despite the bold attempt to use Postmodernism as an opportunity for conversation.
scholarship should be informed by this very particularity (:145). This does not mean the rejection of standards for the evaluation of competing knowledge claims (:146), because the conversational process should be determined by common ground on the purpose of the conversation and by common ground in the beliefs about the immediate topic (:148). Furthermore, 'every human being is religious', because religion as a set of beliefs endeavours to answer the following questions: ' (1) What are (sic) the fundamental characteristic of human beings? (2) What are the characteristics of nonhuman reality that are of greatest significance for human life? (3) Given the nature of humanness and the universe how should humans try to live? (4) What methodologies should we use in seeking answers to the first three questions?' (Heie 1996:142-143).

Let us first address the problem of assumptions. Postmodernism obviously holds that everybody has assumptions. Besides the fact that the acceptance of assumptions is not unique to postmodernism, the question is whether those assumptions can be subjected to criticism. It is extremely difficult to generalise about postmodernism, but one should bear in mind that the 'delegitimation of grand narratives' functions not only to subvert the very discourses religions are made of, but also to subvert the discourses of which religious discourses, particularly Christianity, played a constitutive role. Postmodernism does not legitimate religious discourses, but it functions to expose the contingency and the politicality of these linguistically created discourses and it questions the assumption that these religious discourses refer us to anything more than the particular socio-historical contexts of human beings. Postmodernism also enquires as to whether the continuation of these discourses is desirable in the light of cross-cultural, multi-cultural and inter-cultural encounters made possible by globalisation. The problem, however, is that postmodernism is often seen within the academic study of religion as an opportunity for 'an anything goes' mentality, owing to its relativising tendencies. Where it is used to legitimate forms of Foundationalism, it is used to legitimate exactly what it wants to delegitimate. Although it may seem at a first reading that Heie does not use the 'anything goes' perception, this is exactly the vantage point from which the conversational process is entered. Once entry has been established via the right to particularity, legitimation is sought for a particular perspective to include 'certain universal truths'.

Heie (:146) rejects the position that no universal truths exist and claims the following: 'But I accept a moderate post-modernism characterized by my beliefs that my claims to knowledge, including my belief in certain universal truths, do unavoidably reflect my particular perspective and that my attempts to justify my beliefs are context dependent.'
Once entry has been established, standards, evaluating knowledge claims, have to be formulated. However, it is the right to universal truths that postmodernism disputes.

The second problem we need to address are the questions formulating Heie's definition of religion. It is via these questions that objectivism clearly emerges. Heie searches for the fundamental characteristics\(^\text{13}\) of human beings and one of these fundamental characteristics is seen in a human's religiosity. According to Heie (143) 'every human being is religious'. Both the question 'what are the fundamental characteristics of human beings' as well as the statement 'every human being is religious' are utterances from an objectivistic philosophy of meaning. The question tells us that human beings have foundational, essential properties; these properties can be known and knowledge of human beings can be constructed upon this knowledge. The assertive makes an ontological statement and in combination with the question we are led to believe that one of the essential, foundational properties of being human is to be religious. Legitimation for this assertive has not arisen from the conversational process; it simply comes from a totalising terminology that has reached such objectivistic dimensions as to assume it natural for human beings to be religious. Seen within the context of academic scholars of religion being marginalised within the academic world, the qualifier 'religious' is highly political. The totalising tendencies of objectivism emerge in the formulations 'fundamental', but also in the belief that being human is constituted by being religious and by the implied suggestion that non-religiosity belongs to the world of the nonhuman, a suggestion explicitised in the very next question. The same objectivistic tendencies can be discerned in the remaining questions, namely the assumption that there are characteristics which can be prioritised or hierarchalised in terms of more and less significance for all human beings, the underlying quest for a comprehensive way of understanding all human beings and the belief that methodologies will be able to secure that kind of knowledge. These grandiose projects are exactly what postmodernism has succeeded in subverting; yet it is presented here that postmodernism provides the opportunity for conversation on these issues. What has happened in this case is that an important postmodern

\(^\text{13}\) The grammatical error in this case is actually of significance, because the singular (fundamental characteristic) would make this an example of gross objectivism—the implication would be that 'being religious' constitutes a human being. In all fairness however, I think the plural was intended, indicating that being religious is one of the characteristics constituting a human being. But both claim religiosity as partially constituting a human being, and the assumption that the essential characteristics of a human being can be discovered and extrapolated seem to originate from objectivistic origins.
category, namely the notion of perspective, has been used to allow the entry and proliferation of objectivistic categories. Since objectivism functions in a totalising manner, the question is whether we are here dealing with conversation or with ventriloquesting?

3.1.3 Uniqueness of the self

Another example of objectivism within the field of studies concerned with religion is where the claim of distinctiveness or uniqueness are made. The notion of uniqueness or distinctiveness presupposes a process of comparison, yet also incorporates the illusionary possibility that the boundaries of comparison can be exceeded and that a 'beyond-position' can be reached. Smith (1990:36-53) correctly observes that uniqueness can be understood in two ways. On the one hand it may be understood as assigning superlative value to a specific entity. When understood thus the purpose is to mark its incomparability (cf also Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:245). On the other hand uniqueness may be understood as an affirmation of difference, a way of expressing individuality within the context of a class. It is as such a taxonomic category. Our concern (at this stage) is with the first of these distinctions, because it is in this case that objectivism again emerges and it is also this superlative notion of uniqueness that seems to be present in the self-image and presentation of religion and in its academic study. The notion of uniqueness in the sense where superlative value is assigned refers us to a situation where comparison serves only as a totalising terminology. Smith (1990:38) indicates that uniqueness becomes an ontological category, 'an assertion of a radical difference so absolute that it becomes “Wholly Other”'. Uniqueness moves the matter upon which uniqueness is conferred beyond the sphere of argument or debate, because the very basis on which uniqueness should have been established, namely comparison, has proved itself impossible. It can therefore only be claimed, not argued. As such the claim for uniqueness, in the sense of superlative value, is a totalising act. Despite

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14 Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:245) indicate how the use of the superlative, which can either be a matter of superiority or uniqueness, functions as an argument of comparison. Although the impression is created that a preceding process of comparison has occurred, this is not really the case; just as in the case with comparison itself, the illusion of an objective state is created owing to the assumption that measurement underlies comparison.

15 The use of uniqueness in a taxonomic sense should not be interpreted as essentialistic or objectivistic. Assigning uniqueness to something can function in an already established network of meaning. According to Smith (1990:51) 'It is the scholar who makes their (differences) cohabitation—their “sameness”—possible, not “natural” affinities or processes of history'.
the impression it evokes of a preceding comparative act, no such act could have taken place. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:246) indicate that such a claim for uniqueness may sometimes be enhanced by posing some kind of restriction, because it then creates the impression of ‘having truly made an effective comparison’. Yet uniqueness, in the superlative sense, precludes comparison; it simply refers us to a monistic, hierarchalised, structured reality in which the unique functions as the ultimate norm, the ultimate standard. It is therefore also completely at home in an objectivistic philosophy of meaning.

The notion of uniqueness, emerging from an objectivistic philosophy of meaning, had and has many effects and implications on the academic study of religion. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into all these various aspects. What concerns us is the role the uniqueness assumption plays in the academic study of religion; how it functions to legitimate the act of the self and regulate the academic activities of the self. In probing this problem it is important not to make a clear-cut distinction between the academic study of religious discourse on the one hand and a particular religion or phenomenon of a religion on the other hand. There seems to be a strategic interaction between religion(s) and the academic study of religion that blurs any strict demarcation. Since religion is concerned with what can be regarded as the non-negotiable, the assignment of ultimate meaning, uniqueness is usually assumed from the perspective of a particular religious tradition. However the academic study of religion seems to capitalise upon this assumption by its perpetuation, maintenance and re-conferral, so that the assumed uniqueness of the thing makes its study unique. Yet it would not be correct to see the superlative value assigned to the academic study of religion simply as a derived uniqueness, because religious scholarship creates a disciplinary space, a network of meaning in which tremendous power is assigned to religious experiences and traditions. As such, uniqueness can be bestowed upon a particular religion or religious tradition, but it bounces back enabling the scholar of religion to legitimise and regulate her/his activities. It is therefore both a legitimating and self-legitimating strategy. The problem is, however, that this consistent uniqueness trade-off results in a rigidified, self-enclosure in which accountability is reduced to the perpetuation of the process itself, while all other obligational relationships are neglected.

McCutcheon (1997) has indicated that the current marginalization theologians and scholars of religion experience, should be assigned less to political and economic factors than to our ‘misguided assumption that studying religion provides deep, essential, absolute, or otherworldly insights into the very nature of things’ (:447). Operating from a particular foundation, the common tendency was to probe deeper and deeper into our various fields
within the ambit of religion, driven by the belief that the results of our excavational excursions will eventually contribute to the improvement of humankind. McCutcheon (1997:447) however indicates that the presumption that our datum and our work have self-evident authority, relevance and value caused scholars of religion to evade their social responsibility by side-stepping rational argumentation and persuasion. By neglecting to question and expose the assumptions on which religion and religiosity as such has been constructed, we have manoeuvred ourselves out of public life and the experiences human beings have in a modern society.

Enforced by the disciplinary structures of the university, the misguided notion has developed that studies concerned with religion are sui generis, are unique and have to be treated in a unique manner. The religious experience has become divorced from human experience and has acquired the connotation of something special. Consequently, two different worlds originated, namely that of the sacred and of the profane, the secular and the divine. Studies of religion did not concern themselves with writings, but with ‘sacred writings'; not with the writings of ancient religions, but with sacred scriptures, not with the body of writings from ancient heterogeneous Judaeo-Christianity, but with Biblical Studies; they did not concern themselves with history, but with salvation-history or church history; not with the way in which discourses of power indoctrinate and propagate, but rather with catechism and practical theology; not with the politics of religious movements but with missiology. Furthermore, safely ensconced within disciplinary enclosures and away from the ‘world', infused by objectivism and its preference for the text, the search was on for the meaning of the text and for its applicability and translatibility to the problems of the world. This happened irrespective of reflection on the viability or desirability of these procedures. The problem, however, is that the moment the Foundation crumbles, the whole edifice tumbles and there is no way in which we can escape from our carefully constructed self-enclosures. To put it differently: the reason why the notion of interdisciplinariness just seems to be a floating fad and not something that has as yet been institutionally implemented is because of the idiosyncratic vocabularies that have been developed within our enclosures. On the one hand, it makes escape difficult, but on the other hand, there is also no way to get in.

Allow me to illustrate by means of a few examples how the uniqueness assumption operates. It needs to be emphasised that it often happens unintentionally; it also often occurs in discourses that intend to foster and cultivate conversation. The problem is that by virtue of the superlative value it assigns, it cannot but restrict and even prevent conversation. Since it has become of vital importance to the academic study of religions in South Africa to engage
in open conversation and to consciously and critically reflect on our role in a society that is in need of an alternative morality, examples from the South African situation will be discussed.

The socio-political changes in South Africa compelled the academic scholarship of religion to consider its own role and position in society. This is particularly so in the case of Biblical Studies. During the days of Apartheid, Biblical Studies could be taken as a subject on High School level and as such enjoyed a very privileged position. Since the majority of white Christians played a supportive role in upholding the Apartheid system, Biblical Studies was and is seen as role player assisting in the maintenance of the values pervading the Apartheid ideology. This is obviously a gross generalisation and it would be possible to point to some Biblical scholars who consistently attempted to subvert and undermine the Apartheid ideology. However, the contagious power of Apartheid was such that whatever it touched had to be contaminated with the same kind of mentality and whatever it touched was also immediately connotated. It stands to reason that the threatened position of Biblical Studies has become an issue of concern, necessitating reconsideration among Biblical Studies scholars. The ‘re-thinking’ of this discipline should not only take place because of dwindling student numbers, but should happen within the wider ambit of political and democratic accountability.

However, the apologetics for Biblical Studies seems to operate within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning, perpetuating the very values upon which the Apartheid system fed. As such, academic scholarship of the Bible does not really constructively deal with the challenges of a changing society, but seems rather to function as resistance to change, and as part of the problem, instead of as a solution to the problem as so often portrayed. Although objectivism is often denied, it is exactly by virtue of objectivism that the notion of uniqueness flourishes in the academic study of the Bible. It is the maintenance of the ‘unique-assumption’ that entrenches a totalising discourse, that defends separatist tendencies and coerces to compliance. The ‘unique-assumption’ functions prominently in various manifestations in such an apologetics. But I need to be more specific.

Despite an awareness of society’s changing situation and despite a sensitivity that previously erected walls will have to be demolished, thereby engaging Biblical Studies in inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary studies, Joubert (1995) pleads for Biblical Studies as a distinctive (eiesoortige) theological discipline. To what extent does distinctive relate to ‘uniqueness?’ Does distinctiveness refer to uniqueness in the superlative sense of the word? The distinctiveness of Biblical Studies is derived from its study of the Bible as ‘primary’ (primère), ‘document of faith’ (geloofsdokument) of Christianity. But even more important, Biblical Studies is seen as a theological discipline and
its identity as a theological discipline is derived from the ‘transcendent reality of God’ and the ‘event of the crucifixion’ (:69). Biblical Studies, according to Joubert, makes a conscious decision for faith as its basis (:69). That Biblical Studies derives its distinctive identity from the theological runs like a golden thread throughout the article. Although the distinctiveness of Biblical Studies is also seen in its academic nature and context (:70, 71, 80), superlative value is assigned via the specific theological paradigm in which it is located. Objectivism functions as the context within which superlative value can be assigned. The Bible provides some kind of link with Truth, here personified as ‘the transcendent reality of God’ (:69); it seems to function as a means of confirming and maintaining what can be called the ‘faith foundation’ (geloofsbasis) (:69); and it is part of Biblical Studies’ obligation to have students participate in the ‘great Biblical dialogue between God and humankind’ (die groot Bybelse dialoog tussen God en mens :77). Students have to be provided with a thorough theoretical foundation (deeglike teoretiese onderbou) in order to understand the Bible as primary study-object (primère studie-objek) and the skills acquired should enable them to discard their own presuppositions (:78); furthermore, since Christians use the Bible as ‘source’ for ethical decisions, students should be ‘exposed to primary Biblical value-systems’, eventually to be able to communicate ‘Biblical values’ in a legitimate way (:79). All these formulas stem from an objectivistic philosophy of meaning despite disclaimers (cf :68, 72) to this effect.

16 It can be seen in the warning that critical reflection on the Bible should not take place in isolation from the church (:69); the insistence that even historical questions should not be seen in isolation from a theological understanding (:73); ‘academic-theological’ (akademies-teologies) vantage points should be indicated; exegetical methods on the ‘theological market’ should be offered to students (:74); the voice of Africa’s experiences of God must be heard in Biblical Studies (:75); students need to be actively equipped to participate in the Biblical dialogue between God and humankind (:77).

17 The conditions for the formulation ‘Biblical Studies made a conscious choice for a faith foundation’ (Bybelkunde se doelbewuste keuse vir ’n geloofsbasis...:69) are very confusing. What is probably meant is that certain scholars of the Bible prefer to study the Bible as primary study-object of meaning. Further examples of objectivism can be seen in the reference to the Bible which is seen to be in essence (na sy wese) a book of religion, legitimating a theological understanding of the Bible (:73); cf also the possibility that the ‘basic values...of the ancient world can be known’; the requirement of an ‘expanded’ hermeneutic point of departure; the necessity for a reconsideration of Biblical Studies is interestingly formulated as a ‘new cloak for Biblical Studies’ (’n nuwe gewaad vir Bybelkunde, :77); the emphasis on a ‘thorough theoretical foundation’ (deeglike teoretiese onderbou); the Protestant Bible as ‘basis’ (:78; cf again the structural or building language used); the need to expose students to ‘primary Biblical systems of value’ (primère Bybelse waardestelsels :79), and again the possibility that the ‘basic persuasions, codes, group regulations, social customs...’ can be known.
Although it is sufficient to indicate that distinctiveness should here be seen in terms of uniqueness, it also clearly manifests in invitations made for conversation. One should bear in mind that a claim for uniqueness forms part of totalising discourse. As such conversation serves self-empowerment and is not intent on the cultivation of difference and/or the understanding of the 'other'. This totalising tendency can be seen in the allegation that a phenomenological description of a particular religion or studies solely concerned with the historical and social aspects of the Bible is nothing but a 'reductionistic explanation' (reduksionistiese verklaring) (:69). The implication seems to be that the theological interpretation is the only valid description. But even within the circle of theologians conversation is restricted. A warning is issued that critical reflection should not take place in isolation from the church, albeit not a particular denomination. As such, the church as a foundationalist institution of power has to lend authority to this particular way in which the Biblical Studies conversation has to take place. Finally, since it has to be recognised that our context has now become multi-cultural and multi-religious, it is recommended (in an aside) that 'descriptions (beskrywings) of...the more important African religions, Islam and Hinduism can in this way be described (sic) from a phenomenological point of departure' (:80). But why is a phenomenological description of the Bible seen as reductionistic, while other religions have to put up with this 'reductionistic explanation'? Could it be that they are not as unique as the Christian tradition, that they do not have the same superlative value?

Another example illustrating the problem of uniqueness is concerned with the propagation of 'biblical values'. Owing to a perceived crisis in South African morality, various possibilities are explored for the construction of a civil morality. Biblical scholars and scholars of religion want to and should also participate in this process. As a matter of fact, the participation of Biblical scholars in the construction of morality via public discourse satisfies one aspect of the network of obligations in which scholars of religion operate. But in order to legitimise the self and claim its uniqueness, superla-

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19 The answer obviously cannot not be that Biblical Studies caters only for Christians, because its wider scope is seen as one of the aspects that distinguish Biblical Studies from a pure theological training. 'Therefore, the concern here is the transmission of Biblical contents and values specifically to undergraduate students, belonging to different cultural groups and religious denominations with a diversity of professional prospects and anticipations. As a matter of fact, the faith preferences of students play no role in the admission requirements for the study of this subject' (:70—my translation).

20 The perception is not entirely unfounded; however, one should not overlook the definite political overtones in the way the crisis is constructed.
tive value is assigned to the Bible. In some cases the Bible is portrayed as a container, as a spiritual reservoir or source that can be tapped for the construction of values in a modern society. In other cases it is portrayed as a force of energy, a potential, a power, an enabling force that could intervene in the chaotic processes of modern day society and establish a value-system that benefits humankind. Irrespective of the manner in which it is portrayed, its superlative value for the construction of values is emphasised. However, its uniqueness and superlative value has to be orchestrated, and has to be managed by the expert and it is in this instance that the Biblical Studies scholar has to play a unique role.

Jan Botha's (1996) concern is the construction of a human rights culture in South Africa and he confronts the biblical scholar with the challenge to use the Bible as a means to this end. By means of an analogy between mass action gone astray in 1992 and a representationalist interpretation of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, he illustrates how the biblical scholar can make a contribution to the substantiation of the right to resistance. It is to Botha's credit that the academic study of religion is in itself seen as a political strategy. But the ironical problem with Botha's contribution is that it cannot function within a 'multi-versity', where dissensus and difference have to be cultivated and fostered. The problem is ironical, because Botha's intention is to contribute to a human rights culture, but the role assigned to the Bible and the biblical scholar stems from an objectivistic philosophy of meaning where the uniqueness of the Bible and its use occupied and occupies a totalising position, thereby minimising the right of the 'other'. The Bible as a powerful, unique, problem-solving source and the biblical scholar's responsibility and skills to manage its energy can readily be seen in the following.

Despite an introductory disclaimer,21 Botha (1996) finds in the Bible 'a powerful means of promoting a culture of human rights and democracy in South Africa' (:330). Although Botha makes occasional reference to the Bible as a 'stumbling block' in the process of value-construction (cf :329, 341, 342), the Bible is seen as 'one of the most significant bases for values-persuasion and the shaping of the ethos of the South African population' (:329). That uniqueness is the assumption on which these claims for the Bible are made can be seen firstly in the quantitative evidence used.22 The numbers provided

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21 ‘The Bible itself is a possible stumbling block for social transformation and the advancement of a human rights culture in South Africa’ (Botha 1996:329). Quite correctly, reference is furthermore made to the different social values to which the ancients adhered.

22 Botha (:239), following Müller (1995) identifies Christianity as the majority religion of the South African population, with 100 000 matriculating pupils taking Biblical Studies as examination subject and 10 000 university students, enrolling for Biblical Studies in 1994.
function to simulate measurement and to assert the authority of the 'majority' religion. Quoting the quantitative substantiates significance, thereby assigning value. But there is a problem with this argument. In the 'multi-versity', difference, dissensus and diversity will function in critical cooperation with each other. Cooperation replaces competition, conversation coercion. Whether a religion constitutes a 'majority' simply does not matter; as a matter of fact, the right of 'minority' religions should be protected. Where a discipline is legitimated by virtue of its numbers, the ugly face of objectivism with its logic of accounting and its love for hierarchicalisation emerges. There is yet another problem with this argument. One should bear in mind that the reason why so many pupils and students registered for Biblical Studies can be directly related to the Apartheid ideology with its insistence on Christian National Education. The fact that the Bible does not seem to enjoy the esteem Botha suggests can be seen in the significant drop in student numbers since the dismantling of Apartheid has ensued and since it has become clear that the current Government will not provide the same concrete framework for religious education at schools as the previous one. As such, Botha's quantitative argument actually indicates that the Bible is not such a unique source for the construction of values.

Furthermore, superlative value emerges in the manner in which the Bible (according to Botha) functioned in the development of 'fundamental values associated with human rights (e.g. human dignity, justice, freedom, equality, etc)... (330). Unfortunately Botha does not elaborate on this claim; unfortunate, because it would be possible to argue that history tells us something quite the opposite. Historically it would be possible to argue that it was the development of Humanism that fortunately became an interpretative context for more humane interpretations of the Bible. Historically it would be possible to argue that contextual interpretations of the Bible attempted to thwart every development of a human rights culture, as we have seen in our own country. But it is the assumption of uniqueness that makes us think that the Bible can function as a generator for values in a post-modern era and this assumption develops from an objectivistic philosophy of meaning within which the study of the Bible has been enveloped. Within the environment of the 'multi-versity', the question why scholars of the Bible would also be able to contribute to conversations on the construction of values cannot be answered with an appeal to the rather tardy and tainted role the Bible and its use played in the development of human rights.

One does not need to stretch the imagination too far to find behind this kind of legitimation the requirements of the technological university of excellence with its insistence on 'market forces'.
Finally, the uniqueness assumption emerges in the way Botha uses incidental incidents to substantiate the claim for the Bible as a values reservoir. Excerpts from a statement by the Institute for Contextual Theology, as well as remarks by politicians in which reference is made to the applicability of the Bible on the protest march disaster (:331), function as justification for the Bible's use in legitimating the right to resistance and actually also as example for biblical scholars as to how the Bible can be interpreted. The problem is, however, that this justification emerges from contexts where the uniqueness assumption already operates. Botha's claim for the Bible in value-construction seems to presuppose that if some people in society take recourse to the Bible it justifies its use in the construction of values. To phrase it a bit differently (at the risk of misinterpreting Botha): If some sectors of a society assign superlative value to the Bible, the Bible is of sufficient uniqueness (that is, ontological difference) to infer values for the whole of society. But is this not exactly the way in which our predecessors have argued in their construction of separatism? And should a developing democratic society not also invite and encourage the right to resist the various religious traditions that are consistently posing threats to human dignity, justice, equality and freedom? And instead of capitalising on the assumed uniqueness of the Bible, is it not the obligation of the biblical scholar to identify totalising terminologies and resist these by exposing them? Instead of capitalising on the assumed uniqueness the Bible is assigned by the public, should the biblical scholar not, in critical cooperation with other disciplines, expose the inflationary value of a collection of writings, thereby preventing a perpetuation and maintenance of various superstitions and practices that infringe upon human dignity?24

The same problem emerges in the contribution of Du Rand, but he takes it one step further and engages another discipline in the process. Du Rand facilitates a conversation between theology and the law—in itself the type of activity that should be encouraged. However, the uniqueness assumption emerging from a foundationalist frame of reference25 claims a determinative

24 The argument should be clearly understood. The purpose is not to curb religious freedom in any way but to extend it and to emphasise freedom in its relationality. Religious freedom is no absolute freedom and therefore the right to resist should also apply to the resistance of offensive religious traditions, practices, and even biblical values, where these are in conflict with general human rights.

25 Foundationalist formulations can be seen in the notion of 'fundamental values and principles', the need to have 'unifying symbols', a statement that can be 'theologically founded', the 'placing of values and structures in position' (87), the notion of 'real life values', the 'building (built) upon new values', the cooperation of law and theology to provide to society a 'life-giving sense of order and purpose', the law provides 'structure', theology provides direction to 'god's goal', the notion of spiritual transformation that should function as a 'foundation' for a framework of justice, a 'realistic interpretation of man (sic)' (88), etcetera. It is also important to see that the New Testa-
function for theology in its relationship to the law. Theology should provide the framework within which the law should function. ‘The law helps society to gain structure and theology helps society to have faith to move towards god’s goal for his people on earth, the recognition of his kingship on earth as it is in heaven’ (:88). The superlative value assigned to theology and the Bible is here pushed to its extremes with theological values infusing the legal system. According to Du Rand the given potential of the human being, realised by God in Christ, should be the ‘theological framework of mind in which the promulgation of laws are drawn’ (:88). And this ‘theological framework of mind’ is constituted by the terminology of the New Testament (cf .:88-89). The totalising tendency is clear; the legal system of a heterogeneous, multi-religious South Africa, has to function within the discursive environment of a particular interpretation of Christianity!26

The uniqueness assumption is differently actualised in the contributions of Punt. Where Du Rand actualises the uniqueness assumption by claiming regulative power for perspectives from the Bible, Punt’s point is the ‘retaining of Biblical Studies courses in South African education’ (1997b:24). The point of departure is that of a threatened and marginalised discipline. Punt correctly argues that various factors contributed to the devaluation of the status of the Bible and consequently also of biblical studies itself. He identifies factors such as ‘political correctness’ (1997a:2), postmodernism (:3), pluralism (:5), survival ethic and market-place philosophy (:5), Western theological oppression (:6), as well as suspicion towards its popularity among students and the style in which it is taught (:7). He also correctly indicates that the humanities will have to play an important role in the restoration of ‘the human face of society’ (:10) and his concern that the scientific, technological and economical are overemphasised is justified (:11). Punt retaliates by insisting on the potential and the formative power of Biblical Studies within the context of an Arts curriculum, because it is within this environment that the notion of biblical values may be actualised (1997a:8-11). That

26 Just as one may agree with Botha that human rights should include the right to resistance, it would also be possible to agree with Du Rand that the abolishment of capital punishment is indeed a more humane measure. But it is not the Bible which has provided us with these ‘Christian’ values; as a matter of fact, a strong argument can be conducted that it is the Bible which has constrained society to recognise human dignity. Let us not forget that many authors of biblical writings condemn their opponents, who have not even murdered other people but simply disagreed with them, to eternal suffering!
the context of the Arts could enhance the survival of Biblical Studies seems a viable suggestion, but then it would have to be a ‘Biblical Studies’ which is not entrenched in an objectivistic philosophy of meaning. This is a problem in the contribution of Punt as can be seen in his insistence on the foundational nature of the Bible,\(^\text{27}\) as well as in the superlative value assigned to biblical studies.\(^\text{28}\) That the uniqueness functions as restrictive to the possibility of conversation can already be seen in Punt’s presentation of the various voices clamouring vociferously for a devaluation of the Bible and Biblical Studies. For example, he would sensitively outline the political aversion there might be for a subject such as Biblical Studies owing to its Christian National Education contaminations. But instead of addressing the Bible and Biblical Studies as a problem, the suggestion is made that the current political climate is conducive to poor judgement in the evaluation of Biblical Studies’ value. Criticism on the value of Biblical Studies is therefore to be seen as a political ploy, an attempt to be ‘politically correct’. Besides the fact that these claims on the Bible have not really been elaborated in an argument, Punt’s objectivistic tendencies prevent him from acknowledging that every educational act is political in nature; there is no such thing as pure, untainted education. Furthermore, instead of weighing the allegations made against Biblical Studies and investigating its tainted history, the current political climate is vilified for obscuring the ‘potentially and’ proven’ enriching qualities’, the ‘continuing critical and proven liberating potential of biblical studies’ (1997a:3). Despite valid criticism against Biblical Studies and its role within the context of Christian National Education, the uniqueness assumption carries the day.

\(^{27}\) According to Punt the ‘enduring power of the Christian gospel’ has to be acknowledged in Africa, ‘especially...the foundational nature of Scripture’ (1997b:16); the Bible is quoted as the ‘foundation document’ of the church and an ‘African Theology should be rooted in it’ (:16); it is seen to occupy a central place in the homes of Africa (:16) and also functions as a ‘foundational document’ of a particular religion (:17). Although it is not elaborated, the Bible seems to be taken as an interpretation of the ‘revelational experiences by early believers’ and sets the tone for further interpretations.

\(^{28}\) That superlative value is assigned to Biblical Studies can be seen in the following: It is seen as unique by virtue of ‘its relatedness to biblical and systematic treatments of theology’ (:1997a:8); words and phrases, such as ‘(full) potential’ (:8, 12, 13), its influential, ‘creative and formative potential’ (:8, 9; 1997b:16, 22), its ‘ethical formative value’ (:11) assigned to biblical studies function repeatedly throughout the two studies. But besides these, the legitimation of biblical studies is established by virtue of the uniqueness of the Bible.
3.1.4 Theoretical safeguards and religious pluralism

In an attempt not to elevate the ‘self’, or at least constrain the ‘self’, the academic study of religion often finds recourse in the theoretical. Acknowledging the fact that no particular religion can provide access to the ultimate truth and in an attempt to be fair, religious pluralism is encouraged. The claim is then made that a diversity of religions can be placed next to each other, can be compared and can be objectively described. The teacher is simply the observer, pointing the students to certain aspects, usually those that are seen to be essential, of a variety of religious traditions. Since content is the focus, the approach is characterised by being informative. To safeguard the particularity of the various religious traditions, the necessity of a sound theory is advocated, because a theory is seen as a filter protecting the object from being contaminated by the observer.

Despite the good intentions, the problem is however that there is no such thing as an objective description; encoded in the words we use to describe these diverse religions are our own commitments, our prejudices, our preferences and our disapprovals, the values and norms of our time and our society. Atkinson (1991:11) puts it aptly: ‘...one must seriously question the possibility of being objective about anything, and especially religion, which, in dealing with that which is without condition, purports to touch us in some sort of ultimately transforming way. Simply put, there is nothing we think or say, religious or otherwise, that can be separated from the cultural and social subtext from which it originates’. Instead of being able to create distance between the object and the subject, as objectivism claims, the agent, object and so-called descriptive language are all transformations of one another (cf Fish 1989:144). To rely on theory to safeguard the practice of religious education is equally problematic and often serves only to secure the teaching practice, under the control of scholarship, as the only community which really knows. Whatever kind of theorising is proposed, theorising itself is simply a function of human symbolic action. The kind of symbolic action that characterises theory is argumentation. But arguments are not neutral; they are context specific, they are linguistic devices that have been selected from a contextually determined reservoir of arguments and values; as such they are simply another set of arguments and as arguments they are not to be elevated above and beyond practice, but they arise out of practice. As such they are value-laden, perspectival and persuasory—they should rather be seen as strategic rules, sometimes requesting, sometimes enforcing the use of a specific, specialised terminology from a specific value-system.

No amount of theorising can therefore ensure objective and neutral or impartial knowledge of a diversity of religions and neither can it safeguard their treatment on equal terms. As a matter of fact, elevating theory as a
safeguard within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning could have the consequence of creating boundaries between those who know and those who do not, those who are part of the in-group and those who are not acquainted with a specific terminology. That means that an overemphasis on theory could seriously inhibit the interdisciplinary debate and also serve to erect a wall between the academy and the public.

3.1.5 Selling religion

How does a technological university of excellence, steeped in an objectivistic philosophy of meaning, impact upon studies concerning religion? The totalisation of a techno-economic rationality is concerned with one question only, namely whether the knowledge we produce will sell. The value of studies concerned with religion is therefore measured in terms of their profitability. Strangely, however, the technological university of excellence may provide an excellent habitat for studies concerned with religion to flourish within an objectivistic paradigm. As a matter of fact, the approaches to the academic study of religion discussed especially under 'ventriloquesting the other' and the 'uniqueness of the self' can be explained because of the market driven orientation created by the technological university of excellence. Adhering to an objectivistic philosophy of meaning, a qualitative and consistent change of knowledge is no necessity. Consequently knowledge produced within an objectivistic or foundationalist epistemology can be continued, as long as the packaging can seduce the customer to buy. To transmit ready-made knowledge is far cheaper than the production and creation of appropriate knowledge. The technological university of excellence is therefore also quite willing to accommodate 'fast food' religious studies programmes. If knowledge concerning religion, produced from an objectivistic epistemology, can be packaged within post-modernistic terminology to make it appear attractive and to retain both the religious and the public 'market', so be it. And if the socio-political environment demands that the teaching of 'values' becomes part and parcel of the educational curriculum, it becomes of vital importance to supply the 'market' with, for example, biblical values. Whether those biblical values have been produced within the same objectivistic philosophy of meaning that resulted in totalising systems of thought and that resisted change, does not really matter, as long as it can be sold. In such an environment, knowledge concerning religion that matters, does not really matter, because what matters is how efficiently this type of knowledge can be reproduced. There is therefore no real possibility for a changed curriculum, because there is no need to do that. Neither the 'what', nor the 'why' of knowledge about religion is addressed, simply the 'how'.
For that reason, religious skills (whatever that may mean) are shifted into focus.

It is important that we pay closer attention to this ‘newborn’ phrase ‘religious skills’, because it contains in itself the seeds for religious self-destruction. Religious skills (even Bible skills) are usually advertised within the context of a better understanding of religion, leadership or a deeper spiritual experience. However, the acquisition of a skill is nothing but a form of brainwashing; it happens within a process of incorporation; that means a skill is acquired when the body is so consistently subjected to a series of techniques or exercises that thinking about what you are doing becomes unnecessary. As a matter of fact, thinking about what you are doing may result in a decrease of effectiveness. If a swimmer, for example, has to think about how to cup her hands, when to lift her arms from the water, when to kick and when to breathe, she would undoubtedly not be able to perform the act of swimming as effectively as the person for whom it has become second nature. A skill is therefore concerned with the bodily incorporation of what were once extrinsic rules or regulations. The interesting irony is that in the acquisition of skills, the bodily experiential actually disappears, because the skill has been incorporated; it now belongs to the sensorimotor powers of the body; there is no need to think any longer about what is happening. I cannot imagine that those who are now advertising ‘religious skills’ are actually intent on the replacement of cognitive activity. It seems then that the phrase ‘religious skills’ has been born to satisfy the requirements of the administrative priests in the technological university of excellence; however, in the process we are sacrificing what we are here for, namely to stimulate and inculcate thought and we are restricting a process of curriculum transformation by teaching foundational knowledge effectively. The notion of ‘religious skills’ or ‘bible skills’ simply perpetuates existing knowledge and offers as such resistance to change.

Despite its profitability, the problem with the ‘quick-religious-satisfaction’ franchise, accommodated within the university, is its neglect of its accountability. On the one hand certain of these outlets simply function to exploit and foster superstition, the only motive being profitability and a

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29 A distinction must be made between ‘skills’ and what have become known as ‘critical outcomes’. Without going into detail, ‘critical outcomes’ obviously incorporate the teaching of skills, but also presuppose a radical change in which knowledge is produced and disseminated; as a matter of fact, it can be seen as an attempt to move beyond objectivism, whereas the notion of ‘skills’ can function to perpetuate objectivism.

30 Leder (1990:30-32) provides valuable insights on skills acquisition within the ambit of bodily incorporation.
secure position at the university. On the other hand, it may be argued that some forms of these religious franchises are accountable and specifically accountable to their adherents, the believers. We have all become acquainted with how the churches have in recent years transformed into becoming 'our market'. Besides the fact that religious knowledge sold to our market, satisfies only one node of the obligational networks in which the study of religion takes place, it is an obviously valid appeal that the believing public benefits from the academic study of religion. But the question remains as to whether the knowledge produced within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning is appropriate, and is beneficial for the believing public, because they find themselves in a radically changed environment. In which way is the objectivistic knowledge produced and acceptably packaged within the university of excellence of benefit for the believing public? How do programmes in forms of religious skills benefit either the believing public or the public as such? Does the scholar of religion produce and disseminate knowledge that matters?

Interdisciplinariness is yet another word thrown around in the technological University of excellence. However, where such a university is steeped upon foundationalism, the interdisciplinary debate cannot but diminish because the various disciplines become administrative units that are in constant competition with each other and the question becomes the effective management of information. Furthermore, since the measurable functions as ultimate criterion in the university of excellence, those disciplines that are indeed market related will have superior power to dictate the manner in which the conversation should be conducted.

Finally, since the technological university of excellence is driven by a foundational impetus, and since the focus is on efficiency, not necessarily the 'what' and the 'why', critical thinking within the field of religion is discouraged. The requirement for studies concerned with religion is that existing traditional religions be taught in such a manner that market forces can be satisfied. And the market for the scholar of religion is assumed to be the adherents of particular religious traditions. Students are consequently taught within the parameters of a particular system of beliefs. The focus is then on maintenance, on preservation with very little hope for transformation. Existing structures of authority are perpetuated without any critical challenge. Despite the claims of 'religious or Christian leadership', satisfying the excellence criterion, knowledge produced within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning does not equip students with the material to conduct a conversation in public. Neither does it equip students with a framework in which to conduct a conversation with their fellow students.
3.2 The rhetoricity of religious discourses

I have indicated that programmes concerning the study of religion embedded within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning can actually be detrimental to the teaching of religion at the university, despite the adoption of terminologies that could render it attractive for techno-economic rationality. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether there are still alternative possibilities for the teaching of religious concerns; to what extent is it possible to contribute to the production of knowledge at the university if the idea of the university has crumbled and if we find ourselves now in a ‘multi-versity’, in a university of dissensus, at a site where the possibility of a radical democracy can be realised. Where do we position ourselves? Is it possible to teach knowledge that matters, that is of value and if it is, of what kind of value would that be?

I want to argue that if the rhetoricity of religious discourses is acknowledged, we may provide ourselves with a new forum from which alternative avenues can be sought. What is meant by the rhetoricity of religious discourses? The rhetoricity of discourses refers to the way in which human beings construct discourses by means of processes of symbolisation to make their reality meaningful. Religious discourses are one mode in which processes of symbolisation are actualised in the interaction of human beings. However, these religious discourses should not be seen as expressive of a prior religious experience; on the contrary, the processes of human symbolisation operate so powerfully that human experiences are created which assume the appearance of reality. For example: there was no way in which a late first or second century Christian would have been persuaded that the body of an ascetic was actually a disgusting, pitiful, stinking experience. As a matter of fact, the self-inflicted sufferings of the ascetic were seen as a ‘feast for the eyes’. Why? Because processes in which the body has been symbolised created the experience that this suffering body simply foreshadows a body of plenitude, a dazzling body (cf Miller 1994:138). The fact that human processes of symbolisation function to create human experiences should not be seen in uni-directional manner as if a specific experience reflects or represents a direct relationship with a particular process of symbolisation. Processes of symbolisation are multi-directional, multi-dimensional, ambiguous, open ended, diverse and prone to multiple interpretation.

How does the acknowledgement of religion’s rhetoricity help us in the multi-versity? Firstly, if religious experience is created, generated, formed and shaped by processes of human symbolisation, it loses its position of sui generis. But in losing its status as sui generis, it gains its position as one of the various configurations of discursive practices operating in and constituting a society and as such is open to study to anyone interested in the mechanisms
by which a society is constructed. Furthermore, if these processes of symbolisation are ambiguous and open-ended, the notion of a universal religious experience, or differently labeled 'religiosity', disappears, because what one community may call religiosity may be something totally different in another community. One reason why it has become so difficult to define religion, religiosity or religious studies is actually because there is no longer any basis, no longer any assumed religious experience to define them from. The moment the ambiguity of our processes of symbolisation is realised it becomes almost impossible to incarcerate and rigidify, define, demarcate or delineate that particular thing. The destabilisation of religiosity’s boundaries implies that the question of religiosity is treated as a problem and not simply assumed. Since it functions as one of society’s discursive practices, its study becomes accessible not only to initiates or believers, but to everyone interested in the processes of human symbolisation.

However, the destabilisation of religion’s boundaries also makes it possible to extend our field of study to those non-negotiable values at work in communities. Religion has always been associated with ultimacy, absoluteness or permanency. This can, for example, be seen in expressions such as 'unique experience', 'the inner core of experience', 'the ultimate context', 'engagement of the whole person', a concern with the 'whole human situation', 'expressing the deepest emotions', 'universal values', 'ultimate power', 'ultimate meaning', 'framework for life', 'fundamental truths'. All these expressions serve to describe what religion is about. For this very reason the category 'god' also serves to indicate ultimacy. However, the notion of ultimacy need not necessarily be associated with 'religion'. Although the notion of ultimacy can be destabilised, the competition between various configurations of discursive practices may result in a totalisation of a certain terminological set which is regarded as ultimate by the particular community. But that means that a name other than 'religion' can be assigned to such a totalisation of a terminological set. Yet, the symbolic totalisations usually associated with religion offer us a whole new field of study which extends beyond the study of traditional religions and cultic communities. Since ultimate or non-negotiable values function in a religious-like manner they could be incorporated in studies concerned with religious discourses (cf Vorster 1998:22).

An example can be seen in the study by David Loy (1997). He is concerned with the way in which techno-economic rationality has been totalised to assume the role of religion. We are all acquainted with the saying of Jesus that you cannot serve God and Mammon. However, Loy investigates the way in which Mammon has become god in modern capitalist society! His objective is to study the 'Religion of the Market'. After lamenting the diffic-
faculty of defining religion, he argues that the traditional religions as powerful belief-systems have been replaced by a more powerful explanation of the world, namely science, but also by a more attractive belief-system, namely consumerism. The religion of the market can be seen as the first religion that can truly claim its status as world religion. Loy (275) writes: 'The discipline of economics is less a science than the theology of that religion, and its god, the Market, has become a vicious circle of ever-increasing production and consumption by pretending to offer a secular salvation'. He indicates how the theology of economics operates on two widely accepted propositions, namely that the market is 'right and just' and 'that value can be adequately signaled by prices'. The market assumes therefore a kind of determinism, and what can be regarded as morally indefensible can be justified by appeal to the market 'who made me do it'. Furthermore, it has led, not only to a commodification of human life, but also to a commodification of the environment, thereby not only destroying communal values, but also creating ecological dangers. One may not agree with everything Loy claims, but his recognition of the totalisation of market terminology and the possibilities it creates for the scholar of religion to function as social critic, should be taken seriously.

In a similar vein it would be possible to study the cult of the body as it is manifested by the emergence of various gymnasiums and the worlds of sport and modelling, or it would be possible to study the 'religiosity' of certain monopolising computer companies. Chidester (1996) for example, analyses three forms of American popular culture, namely Rock 'n Roll, Coca-Cola and baseball and asks why these cultural forms should not be regarded as forms of religious expression. In a different vein, it would also be possible to investigate human rights cultures and the extent to which (or if) these have replaced the symbolic function of religious discourses. And it would indeed be possible to determine if and how religious traditions, such as Christianity, interacted in the construction of cultures where human rights flourish.

The rhetoricity of religious discourses requires that Gender-criticism within the field of religious studies be taken far more seriously than is the case at the moment. It is interesting to note in curriculum development how Gender studies are often seen as just another approach, thereby infusing them with 'phase-status'. However, what is not realised is that the embodiment of discourses, including academic discourses, radically changes the nature of those discourses. It is necessary to return for a moment to objectivism.

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31 The difference with studies operating from the uniqueness assumption is that neither a genealogical, nor an analogical interaction is assumed, and furthermore the possibility of religion as a site of resistance to human rights is considered.
Objectivism regards the body as defect and therefore excludes the body in the process of knowledge production and to a large extent the academic discourses we have received in the field of religion have done exactly that. However, where the rhetoricity of religious discourses is taken into account, the ‘en-genderedness’ and ‘em-bodiness’ of our symbolic interaction shift into focus. As such, Gender-criticism has already exposed religious terminologies as patriarchal and biased towards the male perspective. This applies not only to the material studied, but also to its institutional context, the disciplinary terminology of studies concerned with religion, the so-called expertise involved, as well as the mechanisms enabling these studies. Our histories of religion and our histories of the investigations of religions have until very recently only been understood in terms of what is non-negotiable for men. Whether there is a difference between the non-negotiables for men and women, what these differences may be, why they are there and how they have been constructed, have not really been incorporated within studies concerned with religion. The possibilities for the construction of different and alternative moralities via discursive ‘in-corporation’ are endless (Vorster 1998:23).

Acknowledging the rhetoricity of discourses also entails however, that we consider the rhetoricity of our own discourses and the implications involved for the teaching of religion. From the rhetoric of enquiry it has become clear that no educational process is neutral or simply informative. The discourses we create as lecturers are subject to the same processes of symbolisation that the formation of any other discourse undergoes. We also need to invent, select, arrange, compose and present, and during this process our context, with its configurations of discursive practices, consistently dictates what should be lectured. Whether we like it or not, what crystallises in the end as a lecture is nothing but a rhetorical act.

For that reason, the question ‘why’ should always accompany the process of teaching, because it is via the question ‘why’, that value can be assigned to what we are doing. It is via the question ‘why’ that knowledge that matters can be produced. We have seen that the question of value is accompanied by accountability and by the decentering of the teaching situation within the ‘multi-versity’. We have also seen that the abdication of autonomy implies the recoginiton of a network of obligations. When these contextual coor­dinates are mentioned, the scholar of religion almost mechanically thinks in terms of various denominations and the adherents of religious traditions. However, if we concede that religion is not sui generis, that it forms part and parcel of a society’s configuration of discursive practices, the question becomes extremely complex, because accountability is then extended to include the whole of society. Where the rhetoricity of religion is recognised,
it becomes a public issue and the value of our discourses has to be established by the public. Believers within religious traditions are obviously included in the public, but the obligation of the scholar of religion is not that of translation, it is not that of reproduction, it is not that of the defense and the maintenance of religious traditions. The obligation of the scholar of religion is to be that of critical rhetor. It is in this respect that we need to consider McCutcheon's plea that the scholar of religion has a crucial role to play in matters of public concern (455). He writes (458): '...I am recommending that scholars of religion as public intellectuals should not simply repeat or merely translate uncritically religious claims; instead they are the ones who accept the challenge of generating critical, scholarly theories about normative discourses;... Our scholarship is not constrained by whether or not devotees recognize its value; it is not intended to celebrate or enhance normative, dehistoricized discourses, but, rather, to contextualize and explain them as human constructs'.

4 IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

The scholar of religion finds herself in a very difficult situation at this point in time. Our role has changed from being tradents to that of agents of change. Effecting change has become part of our job description. The crucial question is how we are going to effect change in the context of tertiary educational institutions, while frantically clinging to objectivism in its most recent form of the technological university of excellence. Marginalised, tired, impoverished, and over-administrated, the temptation lures to join in the chorus of techno-economic rationality. After all, we all know religion, like sex, sells, and will it really be such a humiliation if we have to sell Jesus jerseys and Peter pots?

This reminds me of a story by Roald Dahl (1992:592-608), called the 'The Great Automatic Grammatizator' which tells of a young computer engineer who succeeded in typically technologically excellent style to manufacture a computer capable of producing short stories and later even novels. Simply by pressing a button that coordinates the 'plot-memory section' with the 'word-memory' section, this young lad was capable of producing a five thousand word story in thirty seconds. Having, of course, taken note of the market, he realised a lot of money could be made. Eventually he and his boss contracted successful writers for the use of their names on condition that they never wrote another word. Slowly but surely one writer after another succumbed to the temptation of techno-economic rationality. However, it is in his conclusion that I sense the plight of the scholar of religion who wants to be critical rhetor, agent of change, but definitely not salesperson. He writes:
The very moment, as I sit here listening to the howling of my nine starving children in the other room, I can feel my own hand creeping closer and closer to that golden contract that lies over on the other side of the desk.

Give us strength, Oh Lord, to let our children starve.

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