(E)mpersonating the bodies of early Christianity*

Johannes N Vorster

ABSTRACT
From a rhetoric of enquiry it is argued that the manner in which Biblical critics construct personhood from the biblical writings obfuscates the differences between contemporary and ancient society. Approaching the notion of person from a rhetoric of the body simultaneously exposes contemporary prescriptive impersonations and functions as an analytical category for the interpretation of bodily interaction in antiquity.

1 INTRODUCTION
This article has several objectives. Firstly, I would like to give an indication of what is meant by the category 'person' and the complexities involved in its construction. This is necessary because the notion of personhood functions catalytically in a very powerful way. The way we understand personhood extends beyond the person itself and lends itself to the creation of further terminologies. In this respect, we have to recognise the way in which the Cartesian person has structured various terminologies and influenced us until this very moment in time.

Secondly, the paper intends to contribute to the 'how' of person construction. Rhetoric has made us aware of the necessity to take the notion of person into account, to empersonate or enhumanise the discourses we create and to take cognizance of the personal element in the discourses we study. We now have to pay more attention to 'how' we do things, to understand the mechanisms by which categories come into existence in order to use these categories in a more accountable and responsible manner. The rhetoric of enquiry insists that we consider why we do things and how we do them. Not only does this require an expansion of textual analysis also to include the texts produced by fellow biblical scholars, but it also complicates the process of analysis and removes us from mere description or simply listening to native informants.

Thirdly, but related to the previous objective, is to argue that personhood should be constructed from a rhetoric of the body. This may not be the only aspect to bear in mind, but as a first step in establishing the 'how' of person construction it is also conditional. Personhood has always been drawn into the sphere of the political and the body always played some or other role in the situation.

* The (E) in brackets evokes the conventional 'i' as in impersonate, but the point is to express how the appeal to impersonate happens under the guise of person construction.
Fourthly, the underlying motif that has prompted the article is the problem of the tension between sameness and difference. The temptation to create the impression of sameness in a country where the illusion of essentialistic difference has reigned supreme often compels interpretation to strategise according to fear and anxiety in order to effect survival. What is suspected of difference should be moved away from and what has in any case been removed owing to the passing of time, has to be proven of some value and appropriateness for this situation. It is in this regard then that an appeal on biblical values is often made and that the origins of human rights are sought in an ethos which is presumed to be biblical. The Bible is seen to be a source that has given rise to values which are fundamentally to be associated with human rights, such as human dignity, freedom, justice and equality (cf Joubert 1995:79; Botha 1996:330; Vorster 1998:219–229). In a different context the given potential of the human being, realised by God in Christ, should—it is claimed—constitute a theological framework in which a conversation between theology and the law faculties should take place (Du Rand 1997:88). In a certificate programme at Unisa it has even become possible to find leadership skills in the Bible. There is therefore an assumed sameness with the persons of early Christianity.

I will not take issue with South African biblical scholars on these issues at this occasion, since we have sufficient problems as it is, but I want to argue that a decisive difference between us and the ancients exists. We undoubtedly have to be appropriate to our situation, but we need to incorporate the problem of difference instead of consistently assuming a position of sameness. To put it differently: we often empersonate the bodies of early Christianity with values similar to our own and once these role models have been constructed, they then function to legitimate certain types of moral behaviour. Empersonation inevitably leads to an appeal to impersonate.

In the first section of the paper attention will be paid to moments in the development of personhood as a category. This will be followed by an attempt to fuse personhood and a rhetoric of the body. In a third and final section, attention will be paid to examples of biblical criticism where a process of empersonation has taken place.

2 FROM THE PERSON AS SUBSTANCE TO THE PERSON AS CONSTRUCT

Because the word ‘person’ is clothed with substantial meaning, it creates the impression of the ‘real’. After all I surely cannot doubt the substance of the person to which the first person deictic ‘I’ refers (cf Winquist 1998:225). However, Winquist narrates how the problem of the person has been differently dealt with in terms of a succession of philosophies of being, philosophies of consciousness and philosophies of language. During the third to fifth centuries of Christianity personhood is theologically understood, the primary problem being the manifestation of a Being or reality through the personhood of the person. ‘The finite person...is not a self-sufficient reality’ and a person could be described as a ‘metaphysical I’ (226).
This changes in the Reformation and the age of reason—individual consciousness appears on the scene. Within the Reformation itself this consciousness amounts to a consciousness of guilt. Descartes, however, radicalises person as a consciousness of the self, a consciousness in which all appeal to anything beyond the self has been removed via the heuristic of doubt (227). Whereas the Reformation reflected upon the self within a 'soteriological' framework, Descartes maps the person within epistemology. Being no longer functions as point of reference for the determination of personhood, but has been replaced by consciousness as it crystallises in the thinking person. From the priority which consciousness receives in determining the meaning of 'person', Cartesian dualism arises. To remain loyal to his faith and create room for the existence of God, the essence of a human being is located in the consciousness, which can be substantially distinguished from the body. A hierarchic dichotomy is established between 'mind' and 'body'. Both are seen as separate substances, with their unique essentialities, properties and modifications. However, it is consciousness, the mind, that determines the essence of personhood. Descartes concludes (1641:88) 'I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is a mind' and again (1:132) '...because... I do not observe that aught necessarily belongs to my nature or essence beyond my being a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists only in my being a thinking thing [or a substance whose whole essence or nature is merely thinking]'. The body is seen as 'only an extended and unthinking thing' and the possibility exists for the mind to exist without the body (1:133).

It is important at this stage to take note of the following: firstly, personhood is defined in terms of substantiality—it is something real; secondly, the possibility of determining and discovering the essence of personhood is assumed and articulated; thirdly, but related—if something can be substantial and if that substance can be identified as its essence, what is excluded or bracketed is obviously of less value and determined by its essence; fourthly, despite the diminished valorisation of the body, the body has not been excluded from the problematisation of personhood; fifthly, unlike the philosophies of being which opened the possibility for personhood to extend itself beyond time, 'the two substances are united in human beings while they are alive' (Sorell 1986:xx).

Despite the influence Descartes has had on the notion of personhood, the first to provide a detailed theory of person and who situated it within the field of law, is John Locke. He also identifies the self with a consciousness, which is stable, permanent and unique to the individual during his/her life (cf Lock & Schepers-Hughes 1990:56; also Locke 1690:212, 217-220) Although influenced by Descartes only by disagreement (cf Woozley 1964:11), the identity of an idea of person is here also found in the consciousness. Locke argues (:212): 'For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that that makes everyone to what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended back-
wards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person.' The continued consciousness may combine and pervade various substances, but its essential unity constitutes what can be seen as the 'person'.

We need to emphasise a few aspects concerning the manner in which 'person' is constructed by the philosophies of being and consciousness. Firstly, Cartesian dualism not only continues a foundationalistic philosophy of meaning but most probably gives it significant impetus, with its insistence on consciousness or the mind as the essence of a person and the only real faculty that can produce certitude concerning knowledge. The rigour of thought processes and the capacity of the mind for accuracy will in future produce objectivity and truth in the discovery of reality. Within the foundationalist philosophy of meaning a shift has occurred in which the transcendental has been 'reinscribed as a formulation of immanence' (Winquist 1998:227). Secondly, granting absolute epistemic status to the mind, underlined, favoured and promoted the ideational at the cost of the bodily. Added to this the dichotomy between the body and ideas often emerges in rather concealed ways as can be found in even contemporary examples. For example: in describing ascetic behaviour from a psychological perspective, Malina (1995:163) divides the 'self' into an individual and a social self. It quickly becomes clear that the individual relates to sensory and motor activities which can be subsumed under the self as 'body, the psychophysical self', whereas the social refers to the way in which culturally specific meanings are invested, through the process of socialisation into the self. Thirdly, the dichotomy mind versus body, not only joins a world of already existing dichotomies, such as essential versus peripheral, real versus illusionary, necessary versus contingent, but it also functions as catalyst in creating dichotomies such as rational versus emotional, reason versus passion. From the Feminist perspective it is alleged (I think correctly) that it enhances the dichotomy culture versus nature, public versus private; functioning as a metaphor to hierarchically dichotomise man versus woman. From a medical perspective Lock and Scheper-Hughes (1990:52-53) indicate that it promotes (in an ironical manner) the liberation of biology to pursue a kind of radical materialism further dichotomising the organic versus the psychological, the physical versus the mental, the biological versus the psychosocial and its consequences lead to a biological reductionism. They write (53) 'Ironically, conscious attempts to temper the materialism and reductionism of biomedical science often end up inadvertently recreating the mind-body opposition in a new form'. Fourthly, clothing the 'person' with substantial meaning, isolates and separates the human entity as an individual. Although the possibility is considered that substances may change, that which makes it a person, in this case, the consciousness, is immutable, does not change, is stable and permanent and has reached closure. Its

1 Cf also their reference to a case study in which a young medical student, after listening to a patient suffering from headaches probably caused by her domestic circumstances, enquired from the professor to know the 'real cause' of the headaches, thereby dichotomising functions as a technique to remove what is deemed as the 'mask' to reveal the 'real'. 
identity is not constituted from outside, from external factors, but from something intrinsic and inherent. As an object of reality, with an essence that determines its personhood and provides it with closure, the person is an individual. Finally, despite the insistence on consciousness in the construction of person, the body in each instance forms part of the problematisation whence these constructions derive. Despite the fact that the ironical may occur in a reversal of roles as has been indicated in the case of the medical sciences, the body always occupies an inferior role. The point is, that the body always functions as a component in the construction of person, albeit then in an essentialistic manner.

Treating the problem of person within philosophies of language and communication heralds the final shift. Winquist (1998:230) claims that the hermeneutics of suspicion that accompanies this shift 'announces a new sensibility that alters what we can mean by person'. As a matter of fact, the notion of person as a reality, as a thing, as a subject becomes problematic and the question is whether one should not rather speak of a disappearance of person. The 'real' behind the mask, has been unmasked or at least has been suspected of being unreal, of being probably only an assumption. The power of communal processes of symbolisation opens the possibility that what has been regarded as a free-acting and willing person, is simply nothing more than a product of society. 'Person' has become a social construct and it acquires its meaning only within context.

It is against the background of this emerging problematisation of a disappearing person that the New Rhetoric makes its contribution to the construction of person. In the epoch making study of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca the shimmerings of this change can be discerned. Although not always in the sophisticated formulations of postmodern philosophers, the tension between essentialism and an emerging philosophy of interaction can clearly be detected in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. Their 'person' is obviously a rhetorical construction—their objective is to study 'person' within the process of argumentation. Yet they derive their views on person from what they see as an existential model. On the one hand person is constructed by connecting two 'realities', one more 'basic' and more explanatory than the other. The relation between a person and her/his acts should be seen as a prototype of the connection between 'the essence and its manifestations' (1969:293); they express their amazement at the refusal of existentialism to find in the relationship between an object and its properties also an analogy to the relationship between a person and his/her acts. In the search for that which constitutes 'person' we have seen how a certain substantiality has been evoked and how this substantiality has been associated with durability, with permanency, how a certain closure has been imposed upon the individual person. Analogous to an object and its properties the construction of the

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2 Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) refers only and consistently to 'The Person and His Acts', thereby confirming why the notion of person should not be constructed from an objectivistic perspective.
relationship between a person and his/her the person is seen as 'a durable being, around whom is grouped a whole series of phenomena to which he gives cohesion and significance' (295). From a tradition that has conferred upon person substantial meaning, providing it with ontological status, the notion of person conveys stability. Seen from this perspective authority and power safely reside within the structure of person. For that reason also the person can be seen as a 'free subject', as an agent of transformation and change, as someone who can persuade but also resist persuasion. This view on person locates the person and his/acts in the field of morality and it ensures that the person can be held accountable.

Thus far the influence of an objectivistic philosophy can be quite readily discerned, but the tension is more visible when the person is discussed in terms of the interaction between act and person. As in any dichotomy the second term does not occupy the same status, but in the interaction between person and act, the act has the potential to modify the person, thereby destabilising the assumption of stability. Furthermore, 'the construction of person is never finished, not even at his death'. The actions of an agent have the potential for self-destruction, to destabilise as they construct. Receding into the past of history allows for a certain rigidity in the construction of person, but death does not remove the threat of change and transformation or a modification of the person. The discovery of a new document, a change in social attitudes or ideologies all may contribute to the construction of a modified historical person (cf Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:297). The interaction between person and acts should not be seen in a one-dimensional sense, but the acts of a person are all value-laden which implies that the transformation or modifications they effect in the construction of person will not be of equal value, thereby further undermining the assumed stability of personhood.

What is not fully realised at this stage is the fact that it is not the person who emanates certain values and who creates them; to be able to make a person accountable communal values establish what a person ought to be and the stability associated with person is stable because of a reification of communal values—stability does not seem to reside within the individual person. To put it a bit differently: the stability of a person is limited or restricted by the dictates and censureship, the taboos, the morality of the community. Hence it would be possible to speak of the social construction of

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3 Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:294) claims that the concept of 'person' introduces an element of stability. 'Any argument about the person has to do with this stability'.

4 Thus the conclusion can be made: '...morality and law need the concepts of person and act in their relationship and in their relative independence. Morality and law judge both the act and the agent: they could not merely consider one of these two elements. By the very fact that one judges the individual and not his acts, there is an admission that and his acts are solidary. However, if one is concerned with him, it is because of his acts, which can be qualified independently of his person. While the notions of responsibility and guilt or merit are related to the person, the notions of norm and of rule are primarily concerned with the act. However, this disassociation of act and the person is never more than partial and precarious' (296).
person. Person as such does not exist, but is someone constructed by society. Instead of thinking of person, as an individual who is conscious, senses, knows and feels, as someone whence action proceeds, person has become an invented category—it has become a social construct. There is therefore nothing behind the mask; how we cope with each other, how we interact, how we censure each other are all activities enabled by the donning of our masks. Personhood can be seen as the product of a rhetorical act, of inventing a mask to cope with the chaos we are. ‘Know thyself’ does not mean, cannot mean knowledge about my essence and its properties, but it can mean the invention of the appropriate mask for a specific time and space; it may mean the production of a persona that would enable me to cope with the chaos which is life, with the absurdity of being surrendered to a self-destructing body, surrounded by bodies sharing the same plight.

If personhood is constructed in order to interact with our environment and if we engage our world through our bodily surfaces as Leder (1990:11) would have it, personhood seems to be constructed by a rhetoric of the body. The rhetoricisation of the body masks the body in order for it to cope with its environment; it infuses, invades, pervades, and constructs the body to enable the body to know which mask it ought to use. It would be possible to think of person as a socio-linguistic category creating a space where communal values are hierarchical arranged and embodied. As such, the notion of person is concerned with the ‘rhetoric of the body’.

Person as such does not exist; it should rather be seen a category similar to race, gender and class, but unlike these categories it also establishes a field of power for the self. Like ‘religion’ and like ‘gender’ person is a category created by philosophers and theologians with contextual bound purposes in mind. It should not and can not be objectified as an object with properties as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca would have it. It should be seen as a category, but not a category in the objective sense of the word. Bock (1998:29) in a determination of the category ‘gender’ reminds us of the Greek origin of the word, namely that of a ‘public objection and indictment, of debate, protest, process and trial’ and it would even be possible to add that of ‘accusation’. Irrespective of etymological legitimacy, the use of category is by no means a neutral and innocent device, but is inherently political. Person as ‘category’ establishes a field of power that enables us to gaze at bodies as products of symbolisation—it enables us to expose the hierarchical arrangements of the body, bodily parts, processes and movements by analysing the distribution of power in communities—it is a field of power that is capable of resistance via the construction of strategies designed to change or transform the symbolic processes of societies. Owing to this non-neutrality and its political nature, it should not be seen as a static entity, because it is in itself subject to constant change.

3 PERSON AS A RHETORIC OF THE BODY

We need to further explore the construction of person via a rhetoric of the body. In
which way does a rhetoric of the body make the person? If personhood is constructed by a rhetoricization of the body, how does it take place? Or put a bit differently: what do we mean by a rhetoric of the body?

We experience few things as objective as the body: as a matter of fact, we experience the body as natural. As a sensory centre the body is the site from where we perceive, feel, act, know, will and intend, but even more, there seems to be a kind of automaticity to the body which makes it often a power beyond my control and it manifests itself in hunger, the sexual drive, tiredness, disease, but also the day-to-day so-called normal functioning of the body. There is therefore an impact from my body, a way of making itself felt that I simply cannot deny. We are conscious of the fact that we are bodies. A discipline, named 'biology' has been called into existence lending credibility to the separate and objective existence of the body.

However, the felt experience of the living body does not entitle it an independent and objective status. It is in this respect that attention should be paid to Foucault. He argues that the human body should not be seen as a point of departure for the socio-medical sciences, an object from which a body of knowledge has been and can be constructed. On the contrary, the human body is rather the product, the result of the socio-medical sciences (Butchart 1998:14). It should be seen as something that has been produced within a configuration of meanings, desires and powers. Instead of understanding medical history as a continuity with a progressory thrust, the history of anatomy should rather be seen as one of interruptions and discontinuities. What made knowledge of the human body possible in phases of history, were differing conditions of possibility, different epistemes. The result of these underlying, generating conditions of possibility is different anatomies of the human body. He argues that these anatomies do not emanate or emerge from the body itself, but come into existence as a result of an ensemble of related practices. The anatomical atlas at the end of the eighteenth century was changed as a result of different conditions, such as a shift to the space of the hospital and its concomitant variation in clinical observa-

5 Foucault's writings are numerous, but applicable in this context are: The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences, The history of sexuality (vols 1–3) and Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison.

6 Foucault (1971:xx-xxii) distinguishes between 'fundamental codes of culture' on the one hand, and 'scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order in general exists' on the other hand. There is, however, another 'region' by means of which culture enquires into the empirical and scientific orders and which could function as a liberating medium. It could bring a culture to the recognition that the orders by which it lives, are perhaps not the only ones. He writes: 'this culture then finds itself faced with the stark fact that there exists, below the level of its spontaneous orders, things that are in themselves capable of being ordered, that belong to a certain unspoken order; the fact, in short, that order exists' (xxx). It is this which is seen as episteme, an epistemological field in which the history of knowledge is not seen as an account of its 'growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility' (xxxi).
tion, bedside teaching and physical examination. Disease became localised in specific organs, directing the attention to the body and its parts.

What happens is that the patient's role in the diagnosis of illness disappears and the 'sick man' is replaced by the 'clinical case' (Williams & Bendelow 1998:29; cf also Butchart 1998:21). Despite the fact that we all are bodies, the knowledge we have of the human body is constructed knowledge, it is part of a discourse and it is formed by discourses taking place within different locations and situations. We therefore need to qualify the 'body' and one way of doing this, is to speak of the 'discursive body'.

The point is not to devalue modern science or all the achievements reached, but simply to point out that the human body is constructed by language and this construction takes place, even within socio-biological sciences according to the discursive practices which exist at a certain time. Words help us to produce bodies; naming the body, its parts and functions produce a specific body; the conditions under which this naming takes place regulate the type of body that will be manufactured. Naming the body means to put the body into the configurations of meaning that are formed in order to make sense to a community. Kenneth Burke used the term 'context of situation' to illustrate how terms become to such an extent solidified in their meaning that they appear to be objective; in typically Burkeian manner he inverts the usual 'words are the signs of things' into 'things are the signs of words' and argues that via the process of entitlement the tribe's attitude becomes so invested in words that they appear to be natural, representative or objective (1969:359-379). Processes of communal symbolisation function so powerfully that they determine the way in which things are perceived. As a matter of fact, even bodily experiences are subjected to the discursive practices that the body has been drawn into. It is by how the body exists in language that the body can be seen as a product of society.

By inscribing the body into the discursive practices of a community, it is compelled to adopt a position within the hierarchies, the structures and loci of powers that are already present in a community. To put it a bit differently: the discursive practices of a community function to persuade the body to subject itself to social control. As such the discursive body functions as a site for political meaning. Putting the body into discourse means that bodies are to such an extent infused with the value-laden terminologies of a society, that the roles, hierarchies and social codes are experienced as real. Terms and practices concerning the body that may appear to be neutral, need not necessarily be.

It is for that reason that feminists protest the use of the term 'biological'. According to Bock (1998:29-32) this category was coined by male German and French scholars during the early nineteenth century. Although it is used in various contexts with a variety of meanings it carries a clear gender bias, 'since it is regularly used in speaking about the female sex, but not about the male sex'. Biology is seen as a modern metaphor for the assumption that men are 'ungendered and women are gendered beings, that men are the "one" and women the "other sex"...' (30). Apparently a quite
neutral, scientific term, becomes a metaphor that not only designates physical difference (as in: 'there is a biological difference between men and women), but it also justifies ‘social and political inequality' on the basis of physical difference. Women are associated with nature, with reproduction, with child bearing and child care, with the domestic and private, all in some way or the other related to the biological, while men are related to culture and the public. The realm introduced by the term biological serves then to justify a hierarchical differentiation among bodies and its persuasive power lies in the illusion of scientific proximity. However, Bock writes: 'It is not anatomy that brings inferior rewards to those women, but culture in the form of biology, of biological value judgements' (31). She also indicates how this term functions to map further inequalities concerning physical differences into a social hierarchy. In the same manner, the feeble-minded, the aged, those with permanent illnesses, as well as the ethnically different are given inferior positions in societies.

How social control is exerted upon bodies by their inscription into the value-system of a society differs from context to context. However, all bodies come into existence within social relations. From the day of our birth we exist in relationship to others. Jung (1986:159) describes it as follows: 'Others in fact give us to ourselves'. By various mechanisms of formation, the tribal idiom is inscribed into our bodies. To put it a bit differently: from the day of our birth, the history, practices, customs and habits of our society are incorporated. These social constructs are given with embodiment, but it is through these social processes that the person is constituted (cf Vorster 1997:456).

We have thus far argued that the rhetorisation of the body functions constitutively of personhood. As such rhetorising the body exerts social control and effects order. However, if the rhetorising of the body is not understood in a dialectic sense, personhood has indeed disappeared and only a social body has remained. Furthermore, no social change would have been possible since the agents of change have been completely absorbed by the power of societal processes of symbolisation. And yet, history teaches us that change indeed takes place. It is by the very same processes of symbolisation that forms the body into a person that a person can also offer resistance. In an inverse manner the rhetoricised body acts to symbolise her/his symbolic world using the body as a locus of power to structure, name and control its realities. There is therefore a kind of paradoxicality involved with personhood; on the one hand the person is constructed by processes of symbolisation; on the other hand, the person extends itself and empowers itself by the very same processes of symbolisation.

4 BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND A RHETORIC OF PERSON

The objective of this section is to investigate the ways and means biblical criticism has availed itself of the possibilities that the notion of 'person' could provide in the process of interpretation. No bird's eye view is claimed and neither is the pretention that all discourses produced by biblical critics concerned with the body or person have
been taken into consideration. This is in any case impossible, because a distinction should be made between those biblical critics whose specific concern is the body or person industry and those biblical critics who assume a certain type of personhood for their studies. One should bear in mind that every single utterance of the texts we study has been made from the perspective of 'person'—in whichever way we deal with the discourse of early Christianity, personhood does not hover only between the lines, but every single line and the spaces between them have been pervaded by the notion of person. After all every writing has been written by a 'person', whom we often analyse with the assistance of the linguistic, analytical tool 'personal deictics'.

What makes such an endeavour even more complicated is the fact that the manner in which biblical critics empersonate the bodies of early Christianity, whether that be from the perspective of the body industry or in general, is no neutral procedure in itself, but is also political and rhetorical. Rhetorically the body into personhood has not evaded the person of the critic. As such the person of the critic is also a construction, subjected and formed by the powerful configurations of meaning of the community, academic discourses and academic institutions. Although we (at least some of us) like to think of ourselves as agents for social change, none has escaped the societal configurations of meaning that have shaped our selves as moral subjects (cf also McKerrow 1993:51). To a certain extent the person of the critic has become displaced, has been de-centred, has been formed via contingent historical circumstances. "Thoroughly historicised, the subject that acts does so as being already interpellated within a set of social practices" writes McKerrow (56). I have already indicated that 'person' should be seen as a category and that it functions as a political category. However, how we empersonate the bodies of early Christianity often reflects how we define ourselves; the construction of the person in early Christianity may disclose more about the one who constructs than the one who is constructed. Yet the return of the body, its acknowledged incorporation also in disciplinary discourses, albeit a rhetoricised body, has created the possibility of resistance and therefore also of change. Within a range of discursive practices within which the critic is formed, there is also a certain individual appropriation, determined by the purpose of the critic.

The primary objective of this section is exemplary; on the one hand I want to indicate how the person's biblical critics have constructed function to support contemporary configurations of meaning. On the other hand, I want to argue by way of example that a rhetoric of the body enables a more accountable interpretation.

4.1 Gender studies as an example

Despite claims of objective historical research and the purpose to determine 'wie es im Anfang war' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985:47) the person constructed emerged as exclusively male. Via a gradual emergence of a rhetoric of the body that could perhaps best be signalled by the use of the term 'patriarchy', feminists indicate that not only the sources of biblical criticism, the writings of the Bible and their formation into a
canon, but also the processes by which so-called objective research has been done, are patriarchal. The so-called objective research of historical critics rendered an early Christianity that was almost without females. It was indeed his-story, written by him and not her. A person from early Christianity was always a 'him'.

However, it is a question to what extent a rhetoric of the body infuses feminist notions of person. Initially bodies, also of women, are seen as objects with essential biological properties, clearly differentiating between men and women. The first phase of feminism recognised the importance of the body, but not yet the body as cultural construct, with the consequence that the persons constructed within the parameters of feminism of the first phase, exhibits male characteristics. Especially in the first phase of feminism,\(^7\) the objective was to inscribe women into history, was to locate a role and function for women in the construction of history. The goal was to indicate the essential similarity and equality between women and men. However, this inscription happened within terminologies designed by males and was meant to show how males had made history. Women had to cope with terminologies created by men for men. The person constructed from female perspective carried the traces of the value-imbu ed body of males. Within the circle of biblical scholarship, Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:56) has correctly formulated the problem female scholarship had to deal with by entering a predominantly male oriented academic environment: 'Feminist studies therefore maintain that established scholarship as androcentric scholarship is not only partial insofar as it articulates only male experience as human experience, but that is also biased insofar as its intellectual discourse and scholarly frameworks are determined only by male perspectives primarily of the dominant classes'. For that very reason, the women researched by feminists during this phase were the notables, the leaders, the movers, those that were significant in terms of male terminology.

The problem with this type of feminist research was the incongruity between the desire to prove an equality of the sexes, but having to avail oneself of the value-laden terminologies created by one of the sexes. Although feminist scholars recognised the dilemma of representationalist assumptions their construction of person could not divest itself of democratic, representational tendencies. Schüssler Fiorenza's earlier work is a case in point. On the one hand she recognises the problem of repre-

\(^7\) From Scott (1988:18–25) it is possible to distinguish at least three phases in the history of feminist investigation. The first phase consists of a collection of data, attempts to construct a 'her-story', but the problem is the 'enlanguagement' of the female story in male power terminology. The second phase, introducing the embracement of social history and historical phenomena, is no longer restricted only to those notable and very male-like female figures of history, but family relationships, social issues related to fertility and reproduction, sexuality as such, economic, industrial and matters concerning the labour market, giving evidence that a history from below is emerging within feminist circles. The third phase, which also evolves into gender, can be characterised by an intense awareness of the networks of political, discursive configurations shaping hierarchies and sexual differentiations. None of these three phases should be seen in the sense of completed periods of time, but they do signify the changing of assumptions.
sentationalist and objectivist theories of meaning; the first steps towards a rhetoric of the body can also be seen in statements such as 'It is not “biological” sex difference but patriarchal household and marriage relationships that generate the social-political inferiority and oppression of women' (1985:58). On the other hand, the objective of feminist research is to inscribe equality of women in early Christianity. Various valid criticisms are lodged against historical criticism, but it is also taken to task for not being able to 'conceive of women as involved in early Christianity equally with men' (1985:47). The question is, of course, if 'patriarchy' was rampant during the days of early Christianity, how can we hope to construct a female person 'equal with men'? In referring to the patriarchal nature of New Testament sources, the tension again surfaces. New Testament texts are seen as 'not an accurate reflection of the historical reality of women's leadership and participation in the early Christian movement' (59). Besides the obvious representationalist remains in the implication that there are indeed texts that could provide with an accurate historical reflection, the desire to establish a history of 'notables' emerges in the dominance given to women's leadership.

8 In showing how the process of canonisation functioned to exclude women from leadership in the early church, this same problem occurs. Schüssler Fiorenza seems to find social formations in early Christianity which can be depicted as more egalitarian, even radically democratic. She formulates (1994:7): 'The “radical democratic” understanding of the ekklēsia entailed all those gifted with the charisms of the Spirit to ecclesial leadership. Not only propertyed freeborn men but also slave women and men and freeborn women were full “citizens” of the ekklēsia and were therefore called to public responsibility and leadership'. As an 'androcentric selection process' the process of canonisation inculcated a kyriarchal imperial church order of which 'the effects on the radical democratic understanding of the ekklēsia and the ecclesial rights and citizenship of all women and marginalized men were devastating' (8). To offer a critique means to run the risk of also being delegated to the ranks of male patriarchists but there are a few issues that need to be addressed. Although we may have inherited 'democracy' from the Graeco-Roman world, their version of democracy should be understood in a very exclusivistic and narrow sense. To qualify this as a 'radical' democracy is not only confusing, but it also implies the kind of democracy that we have not even attained in a modern society—it is a modern, political idea, but very difficult to visualise in predominantly patriarchal cultures. Terms, such as 'egalitarian', 'citizenship' and 'rights' in communities where slavery, bodily abuse, rigid, gender and class hierarchies and patrilineality were commonly assumed, may be an indication of a historiography taking the audience you write for into consideration, but these terms do not account for the violent pervasiveness of male domination and androcentricism in the first century. Furthermore, if the 'charisms of the Spirit' entitled 'all' to 'ecclesial leadership', why was this a problem for Paul at the time of writing? Why and by whom has this been a presence and what type of attitude prompted Paul to come down upon these free spirited women like a ton of bricks, for example in 1 Corinthians? The point I wish to argue is that few, if any, valorised, paradigmatic social possibilities existed during early Christianity, which could have given incentive and structure to an all inclusive 'radical democracy'. As such the process of canonisation should not be seen as putting a stop to something that could have evolved into some kind of ecclesial democratic system, but it was simply the institutional culmination of a process that was probably already present in all forms of early Christianity. As a society structured along gender and reputational hierarchies, forms of Christianity were probably more symptomatic of patriarchal culture than possibilities for a cure.
as field of study. Why is the issue of leadership so important in historiography, whether that be the leadership by females or males? Why should people who have overestimated and foregrounded themselves to the point of making others followers necessarily occupy such an all consuming field of historiographical study?

Although gender studies has within a relatively short time reached a sophistication and diversification which constrains generalisations, decentering ‘male authorship’ of personhood will not happen unless a rhetoric of the body is taken seriously. However, feminists are slowly but surely approaching personhood in early Christianity from a rhetoric of the body and its results provide us with an indication of the social predicament in which women, especially those with a higher social status, must have been in early Christianity. Retaining the social position from which a viewpoint could be voiced, was by no means a permanent privilege and the possibility to be subjugated, fall out of social favour, even rejected, when social boundaries were nudged, was a constant threat. Where a rhetoric of the body is taken as point of departure, the person constructed displays the marks of the powerful gender stereotypes that structured ancient society. Within this approach, Paul also no longer emerges as the ‘hero’ of early Christianity, but instead as the protector of the status quo. This could perhaps best be illustrated by some of the work done on 1 Corinthians 11.

1 Corinthians 11:2–16 is concerned with the covering of women’s heads when they pray or prophesy in the community (11:5). According to Corrington (1991) Paul wanted to establish control within the assembly and since the micro-cosmos of the body replicated the divine macro-cosmic order, this had to be done by establishing control over the body. She argues that the women referred to in 11:2–16 were probably women with some kind of social status, whose social position gave them the potential to be a subversive element. Paul wanted to re-assert societal boundaries between male and female. But how is it possible that women without a veil could be a threat to the social body? Why was the person of a woman such an alienating threat; what kind of person did Paul envisage whose hair could be a disruptive threat to his work?

What is at stake is an engendered hierarchy infused, pervaded and maintained by what was regarded as honourable and shameful. What is at stake is a body or bodily part being put into discourse in such a manner as to be perceived natural and objective. Various studies have shown that a woman’s head was sexualised in antiquity. D’Angelo (1995:140) indicates that a woman’s head ‘stands for her genitals by a kind of erotic metonymy. In the anakalupteria (unveiling) of Greek wedding rituals, the bridegroom removed the veil that covered the bride’s face as a sign to also ‘unloosen her girdle’. From the perspective of the male gaze, a woman’s head is a sexual object and since the head can be seen as the most honourable part of the human body, she is by definition a sexual object. This is confirmed by Levine (1995:85–86) who even finds in hair a metonymic relationship with the rest of the person. Hair can be associated with fertility by virtue of its regenerative qualities but it is associated with
sexuality also by its resemblance with pubic hair. Other studies have also confirmed an association between the mouth of a woman’s head and the vagina (Eilberg-Schwartz 1995b). This should sufficiently indicate that the head of a woman is sexualised in the ancient world. D’Angelo formulates: ‘For early Christian men, as, it seems, for men of antiquity in general, women’s heads were indeed sexual members...’ (131). As sexual members, female heads contained the potential for creating an out of control situation, an out of order situation.

Hair metaphorically designates how this control can be regulated and the difference between the hair of women and men signifies that a hierarchical social difference is maintained. As such the hair of people may signify a situation of equilibrium. Where the cultural regulation of hair is transgressed, societal order may be disturbed. What is regarded as natural, is threatened.

It stands to reason that cultural concerns with the head, such as headdresses, veils and cosmetics also form part of these processes of symbolisation in which the body is put into discourse. For that reason, the veiled woman is the woman who has entered the hierarchy of marriage; it is a manner of designating a person who has subjected herself to the wise control of a husband. Headgear is of no significance for virgins, because untamed hair has to elicit the attention of a male. However, the transition from the female minor via the process of marriage is signified by the insistence on the covering of the head (Levine 1995:96). She has become a sexual member under control. She has to cover herself in order to reserve her person for the gaze of the husband alone—in that lies her honour. By covering her head, she also covers her sexuality, preserves her sexuality for her husband. In this subjection lies also her power, because it is through him that she may become person. Levine (1995:106) writes:

Men with visible hair and married women with invisible hair form the normative landscape of the ancient Mediterranean. This distinction in practice engenders new etiologies: difference begets hierarchy. Men, who in patriarchy are the ones reading the signs and assigning the meanings, inevitably will be on top. However, initially intended or read, the covered hair of the married woman can be and is transformed into a sign of women’s moral inferiority. Women must have done something to provoke cultural constraints more stringent than those of free men. The covered hair of women easily lends itself to explanations which locate this difference in sin. The covered head of the bride evokes the covered head of the mourner or criminal.

It is within this world which regards the bodies of women as threats to the social order and well being that Paul also makes his little contribution to safeguard the order that has to be maintained by men. Addressing his male audience, he reminds them that a woman should be deprived of a head, because her husband is her head (11:3 ‘the head of a woman is her husband’). The woman is depersonalised since she finds meaning only in being the body of her husband. By removal of a veil she not only forfeits her position of value, but she also dishonours the person of her husband (11:5, cf also v 8). “The wife is the symbol of the husband’s reputation: her behavior will shame
him, her “head” (Corrington 1991:226). By uncovering her head, she is exposing herself as sexual object and subjecting to the public gaze what is rightfully his. He substantiates his argument by referring to the engendered hierarchy instituted by a male constructed god (11:3, 7, 12, 13) and embeds the difference in hairstyles as a natural difference, thereby giving expression to what can be seen as his context of situation.

Paul’s appeal is addressed to males to exert better social control by subjecting women to their divinely instituted and natural location on the social hierarchy. Avoiding this meant to allow a social mimicking of male privilege and that is to allocate shame to the males of the assembly. It would also be possible to argue that Paul is in effect attempting not only to regulate dress codes within the assembly, but actually to silence the voices of women. Keep in mind that he has appealed to the males of the Corinthians firstly to imitate him and secondly to maintain the traditions that he has transmitted to them (11:1-2). The context in which women’s heads are denied may also be a context in which the use of their tongues are inhibited. Eilberg-Schwartz (1995b:166) speaks of ‘phallogocentrism’, meaning ‘those cultural or theoretical systems in which there is a conflation of the phallus and the logos (speech, thought)’. He indicates how the relationship between teacher and disciple is in many instances seen as a relationship between father and son. To put it a bit differently: the relationship a sage may have with his followers can be understood in procreative terminologies. However, this relationship which has as its objective the proliferation of the tradition, may be subverted by the sexualised head of a woman with the resemblance between mouth and vagina. Paul’s maintenance of ancient engendered hierarchies in this instance may simply be the first step to silence the speaking women of the Corinthian body.

Although biblical critics within the field of gender recognise the omission of women’s voices from the writings of early Christianity, the way in which constructions of female persons happen seem to be infused more from modern perceptions of democracy and equality. A rhetoric of the body constituting personhood allows a terminology to emerge in which value laden meanings have completely differently been configured. In determining whether a rhetoric of the body is possible radical difference and not sameness should be the point of departure.

4.2 Romans 1:18–32 and a rhetoric of the body

This particular text (Rm 1:18–32) provides us with another opportunity to investigate the possibilities of a rhetoric of the body and gaze at the manner in which empersonation takes place. Romans 1:18–32 has often been used to lament and to vilify the same sex person. This section has traditionally been interpreted as referring to the non-Jews and their inclination towards idolatry. Owing to their resistance to acknowledge the one true God, their distorted and inversed values had to follow the logical consequence into the sphere of sexual relations. Just as their foolishness made them replace God by images, they also exchanged ‘natural’ relations for ‘unnatural’.
From this section a particular constellation of homosexuality is usually derived. In taking especially Richard Hays to task on his interpretation of Romans 1, Dale Martin (1995) articulates this constellation as follows: firstly, it consists of the relocation of homosexuality within the corruption of universal human nature which necessitates that it has to be associated with the Fall; secondly it is assumed that a distinction is made between homosexual and heterosexual desire, with the latter seen as pristine; thirdly, Paul's use of the phrase 'contrary to nature' is anachronistically interpreted as referring to the wrong 'object choice'. The homosexual person constructed by modern biblical interpreters displays the following constitution: s/he is the product of a universe that has been intrinsically corrupted by the Fall and owing to this corruption exhibits abnormal sexual desire and behaviour and the abnormality consists of a dis-oriented desire and wrong 'object choice'.

Martin argues that there is no substantiation for the inscription of homosexuality into the bondage which the so-called Fall brought into play. According to Paul same sex activities are seen as the punishment for the sins of idolatry and polytheism. Idolatry and polytheism probably relate to a genre of Jewish anti-Gentile propaganda narratives, which associated the Gentiles with idolatry and the decline of civilisation. But these narratives are not concerned with the creation and neither are they concerned with a universal human condition. Biblical interpreters, however, associate Paul's condemnation of Gentile polytheism to a general condemnation of perverse human nature, inscribing homosexuality within the context of the Fall (1995:337). Within the context of the Romans letter, addressed to a non-Jewish audience, it should further be taken into account that Paul is here inverting anti-Gentile propaganda making it applicable to the Jews themselves. Very specific non-Jewish ethnic impurity is here exchanged for the universal deviancy of humankind (:338). According to Martin (:339) 'heterosexual scholars alter Paul's reference to a myth which most modern Christians do not even know, much less believe...and pretend that Paul refers to a myth that many modern Christians do believe, at least on some level (the myth about the Fall).'

But there is a second aspect which makes Martin's interpretation important for our purposes and that relates to the necessity of a rhetoric of the body as constitutive for the construction of person. According to heterosexual biblical critics the homosexual person described by Paul in this section manifests a desire originating from a different source than that of the heterosexual. Despite the fact that no differentiation is made between heterosexual and homosexual, biblical critics create a dichotomy which legitimates heterosexual desire but simultaneously denigrates homosexual desire as deviant or

9 The term 'homosexuality' is used because the problem concerns the relationship between contemporary homosexuality and the use of the Bible in the making of persons.

10 In this respect, reference is made to: 'God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity' (1:24), 'God gave them up to dishonourable passions' (1:26) and 'men were consumed with passion' (:27).
abnormal. Despite the value-laden dichotomy deriving from a Cartesianism embedded in objectivism, the differentiation between homosexual and heterosexual is historically problematic. Although same sex desires and activities were well known in the ancient Mediterranean world, these forms of sexuality were not opposed as if they belonged to different kinds of sexuality. Following Veyne, Ariès (1985b:65) speaks of a legitimate ‘bisexuality whose manifestations seem to have been dependent on chance encounters rather than biological determinism’. Instead of two opposing types of sexual desires same sex desire was rather seen as an extreme form of sexuality. 'The problem had to do not with a disoriented desire, but with inordinate desire. Degree of passion, rather than object choice, was the defining factor of desire' (1995:342). For this reason Rm 1:26–27 cannot be interpreted as referring to the homosexual person. What is at stake is the principle of moderation. The references to 'acts contrary to nature' (1:26, 27) committed by both female and male should likewise be understood in terms of Greco-Roman culture. According to heterosexist biblical scholars, the dichotomy heterosexual versus homosexual is extended to natural versus unnatural, thereby again legitimating the deviancy and abnormality of homosexuality, because, as we all know, the second term in these dichotomies should always be seen as of lesser value. However, what is seen here as 'contrary to nature', should be interpreted in terms of what was regarded as 'natural' in the first century. What was regarded as natural, were the norms and conventions of their society, in this case a gender hierarchy which strived toward masculinisation. Nature ordained the superiority of the male and to threaten this superiority was to act unnatural. To conduct oneself in the role of the female was to willingly surrender the societal role and was seen as unnatural. For that very reason it is also problematic to equate the sexual logic of the ancients with modem logic on sexuality. Since masculinity was related to being active, just as passivity was associated with femininity, the active person, by virtue of being active would have fulfilled the allocated societal role and would have maintained the so-called natural status of being superior. 'Males, by definition, are those “on top”, those who penetrate. It is “unnatural”, therefore, for a man to be willing—and even eager—to allow himself to be penetrated' (344) and the ‘penetrating woman’ was so out of sync with the established gender hierarchy that she was seen as a ‘monster’ (345).

11 Cf also Paul Veyne (1985:27) who refers to Plato’s views on homosexuality. He indicates that it was not the homosexual as such who was seen to be ‘unnatural’, but rather the act he committed. What is at stake is the degree of sexuality, that is the problem of excessiveness.
12 Veyne (1985:26) explains the ancient connotation of what was regarded as natural in the following manner: ‘For when an ancient says that something is unnatural, he does not mean that it is disgraceful, but that it does not conform with the rules of society, or that it is perverted and artificial. Nature meant either society or a sort of ecological ideal, directing people to self-mastery and self-sufficiency’. The concern is therefore, with moderation versus excessiveness, with degree of passion rather than with passion itself.
13 Cf also Veyne (1985:30) who indicates that the passive homosexual was rejected because of his lack of virility, not because of his homosexuality as such. Ariès (1985a:37) indicates that passivity was linked to a wider variety of sexual activities than simply homosexuality. Cf Veyne also
The evil, corrupt, abnormal and deviant person constructed by biblical critics from Romans 1:26-27, therefore seems to display quite a different structure than the person Paul had in mind and it seems that the body of this person has been empersonated by what is regarded within heterosexist ideology as deviant, abnormal and corrupt. However, in the process Paul's view had been used as justification for a specific perspective and the objective was probably to vilify, to encourage impersonation by negation.

Margaret Davies (1995) seriously questions the validity and contemporary appropriateness of Paul's views on homosexuality. Where Martin's problem is heterosexist ideology and the way in which biblical critics make their own person constructions, Davies subverts the real culprit, Paul himself. She argues that Paul's statements seem to originate from the priestly writings of the Torah which create a web of relations in which procreation and all its various implications determine sexual behaviour. Within this web of relations same sex activities are condemned as they endanger the continuity of the people. Furthermore, the Priestly creation story retains an absolute distinction between male and female extending to all spheres of life (:322), but this distinction should be seen within a 'one sex' model 'female genitalia were understood to be internalized versions of male genitalia, and women were regarded as inferior to men' (:323). The argumentation of Davies follows two lines. On the one hand she argues that the web of relations producing the kind of logic found in ancient texts differs so substantially from the webs of relations that determine modern human behaviour that it can no longer be seen as sustainable. For example: if human sexuality has only one purpose, namely that of procreation, 'human females would (have to) "come on heat" for a limited period like female animals' (:320) and infertile people would be confronted with a moral problem. Furthermore, modern, genetic research into human chromosomes has relativised the absolute distinction between males and females and has indicated that one should probably think more in terms of a continuum of more or less. (:324). On the other hand, Paul exhibits a number of inconsistencies. Whereas 'against nature' is here used as motivation why same sex activities should be condemned, Paul has no problem when God acts against grafting the branch of the wild olive into the cultivated (:324). Furthermore, procreation could not have been the motivation for Paul's condemnation, because he advocates celibacy, even within marriage (cf Davies 1995:325). Perhaps a more feasible explanation would be that Paul was suffering from a severe case of homophobia. Owing to an immediate eschatological expectation, procreation would not have featured that prominently with Paul as Davies would have us believe. However, the fear that the gender hierarchy could be upset features prominently with Paul. If same sex activities are seen as a manifestation of an out of control situation, that is an inordinate expression of desire,
the emotional hangover of which Davies speaks could be seen as a fear of getting out of control.

Whatever the reason may be, a web of relations consisting of an engendered hierarchy determined by masculinity, procreation as the sole purpose of sexual activity, an apocalyptic eschatology as constituents for the construction of person—all these issues question the validity of imitating Paul’s attitude towards same sex activities in the twenty-first century, except perhaps as a means of showing difference and of exposing the mechanisms by means of which stereotypes operate so powerfully. Where the rhetoric of the body that constituted the construction of person by Paul is taken into account, it becomes clear why this ‘person’ should not feature in modern moral discussions.

5 IN CONCLUSION:

1. I have indicated that the category ‘person’ is not something of substance, but is a constructed entity. As constructed, it is contextually contingent, imbued with social values. But its construction is not innocent, it belongs to the world of the deceptive, the rhetorical sphere. As such it is strategic—it functions as a site for political meaning. The category ‘person’ is not something from which meaning can be extracted as if it were some or other container, but it is something people do with. How we empersonate is therefore also no neutral activity. As a matter of fact, owing to the transference and incorporation of communal values, empersonation is biased, particularistic and society oriented. Despite the fact that we think of ourselves as substantial, the person is open ended and volatile. Perhaps it would not be too far off the mark to say that the construction of person is concerned with the way in which someone is oriented within his/her world.

2. The construction of person happens through a rhetoric of the body. Via the manner in which a society uses its processes of symbolisation to induce people to cooperation, personhood is constructed. A rhetoric of the body should consequently always be seen as constitutive of person construction. In this regard body should not be seen in an essentialistic sense simply continuing the Cartesian dichotomy with a materialistic impetus. What matters is how a society has constructed its bodies.

3. The biblical critic is her/himself the product of empersonation, a social construct and to that extent has also been de-centred. Just as the rhetoric of enquiry has insisted on the enhumanisation of our academic discourses, we have to realise that we are to a large extent incarcerated within a web of relations that determine our daily behaviour. To a certain extent, academic freedom never was and never will be. And yet, it is precisely our rhetoricised bodies that seem to make what we do appropriate, that re-install identity and enable us to resist.

4. As biblical critics we invest personhood on the bodies of early Christianity. However, the manner in which we empersonate the bodies of early Christianity is by
no means a neutral procedure; not only do we operate from the categories we have created by various means, but there is also a certain telos in the production of academic discourse. Although academics are fond of naming this telos the 'understanding of...', such innocent sounding claims are in itself the remains of a Cartesian dichotomy. How we empersonate the bodies of early Christianity should in itself also be seen as a political activity. But if it is political then it should also be accountable. It is in this respect that we need to ask ourselves to what extent we are accountable to our society when we erase the differences between us and the persons of antiquity and request of our society to empersonate via our empersonations.

WORKS CONSULTED


