

**Reading Mark 4:35-41:  
A Study of Student Discourses  
in the School of Theology,  
The University of Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg**

**By**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy at  
the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

This thesis is dedicated  
to my children Liam and Bethany  
simply because they are luscious and gorgeous.  
and  
to all the students who endured the process of this  
research with me

May God bless you and watch over you  
May She make Her face shine on you  
and give you joy and peace.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the research presented in this thesis is my own work unless otherwise acknowledged.

## **Abstract**

In this study I present the results of interviews conducted with thirty-four students in the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. In the following eight chapters I have provided a description of the discourses and discourse communities in the School of Theology which have emerged from my analysis of the data collected from these interviews. These discourses fall into three categories: The primary discourse, which is the result of the students' socialisation within their family and the primary community structures of their childhood, the secondary discourse ensuing from their educational and denominational backgrounds and their relationships with their teachers and the hierarchy of their denominations and the tertiary discourse of critical biblical exegesis which they encounter in their studies in the School of Theology. The product of this encounter is a clash of discourses which challenges the students both academically, leading to poor academic performance on the part of many students, and spiritually, leading to such dire consequences as nervous breakdowns or the loss of faith and vocation. In describing this clash of discourses I include a plea for the management and staff of the School of Theology to provide both academic and spiritual support for the students' in their attempt to face and overcome the considerable challenges of studying in the School of Theology.

## **Acknowledgements**

- I acknowledge the financial support of the National Research Foundation which made this research possible
- My thanks to Professors Jonathan Draper and Gerald West, my supervisors, for their support (financial and otherwise) enthusiasm and inspiration in the writing of this thesis.
- My thanks go also to Dr Jenny Clarence-Fincham for her advice, support, and the loan of many valuable books. I owe her a special debt of gratitude for taking the time to read parts of this thesis at crucial stages of its development.
- Further thanks are due to Patsy Clarke of ITED at the University of Natal in Durban for her help, training and encouragement in the use of the Nvivo data analysis software.
- I owe a special debt of gratitude to Robynne Thompson who lived with the tapes of my interviews for three months and did sterling work in accurately transcribing the equivalent of fifteen hundred pages of interviews onto computer files. My thanks also to her mother Carol and her partner Callie who had to live with the sound of my voice echoing from their spare room for all that time.
- Other transcription credits are due to Carollynn Rall and Zama Madlala for filling in some of the gaps and especially to Jess Hart for the transcriptions of the data for the final chapter.
- I owe a special vote of thanks to my colleagues in Academic Communication Studies for their support during the process of writing up this thesis.
- Special thanks are also due to my parents who have supported me emotionally and financially throughout my long student career.

- My love and thanks go to my wife Fiona Jackson, for pushing me to complete this thesis when I was ready to give up and for taking on my marking load in the November 2001 exams in order to give me the time and space to write up my work and finally for proofreading much of the thesis during the Christmas break.

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# *1. Introduction*

## **1.1 Excerpts from my Autobiography**

I am beginning this thesis in autobiographical mode in an effort to give the reader an insight into the personal motivation that gave rise to this study. It has been my observation that research of this nature is rarely undertaken for purely academic reasons. For some people something that sparks their interest, or their anger, sustains them through the tedious process of research. By contrast, in the Seventies and Eighties a good deal of postgraduate research by white South African males was undertaken in the effort to stave off the spectre of conscription into the apartheid defence forces. Other people I know have undertaken their research to recover from bereavement, divorce and sundry other causes of broken hearts. Many people, no doubt, labour their way through research in the hope of promotion or personal advancement. In my case, I have come to the growing realisation that this research is an effort for me to come to terms with my theological education.

Let me explain further by outlining my reasons for embarking on a course of study in theology in the first place. I left South Africa in 1988 to travel in Europe for a year, thereby putting several thousand kilometres between myself and the deteriorating political situation in South Africa. I had just completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and among the reasons for my trip was to consider my options for the future. These included staying in Europe and joining an ecumenical monastic order at Taize in France or returning to South Africa to embark on postgraduate study. As it turned out my options were halved by the refusal of the Community of Taize to accept me as a postulant. In hindsight my advisor was correct in his assessment that I was attempting to use the order as a means to escape both political and personal problems with my life in South Africa and that it would be far better for me to return home and face them. On returning to South Africa in 1989, I took another year to think about my future, dividing my time between working on my parents' farm and some volunteer work for a mission organisation in Pietermaritzburg called African Enterprise. During that year I made the decision that I would change my career path and enroll in the School of Theology in

Pietermaritzburg.<sup>1</sup> At the time I had no idea if I intended to go into the ministry of any particular denomination, but I harboured the hope that theological training might persuade the Taize Community that I was a suitable candidate for their order.

I commenced my studies in the School of Theology with an interesting mixture of an awareness of the challenges I would face and a naive belief that I would weather these challenges and emerge relatively unaffected. I cannot say that I was hopelessly wrong because I seemed to be sustaining myself admirably until the day I came to the end of the Master's programme and realised that I was clinging to the tattered shreds that were all that was left of the faith I had come in with. With this realisation I began my PhD by trying to research a way of talking theologically about miracles and faith that would both recapture the spirit of what I had lost and be academically respectable. Once again my hopes were ridiculously naive, but in the process I have produced this study which helps me come to terms with my experience of theological education by charting the experiences of others, in the hope that this will lead to improvements for those who come after us.

## **1.2 The Shape of this Study**

In this study I will be exploring the experiences of thirty-four students who were studying in the School of Theology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in 1999, half of whom were in their first year and the rest had been with the School programme from the beginning rather than coming in later from other institutions. The major focus of my study will be the discourses and discourse communities to which these students belong. In Chapter 2, which I have titled *A Discourse on Discourse*, I define the term discourse, taking into account its relationship to other terms such as text and ideology, placing it in the context of other terms such as position and identity and ending with a description of communities of discourse. In Chapter 3 I explore the methodology that I have used in this thesis, including qualitative

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<sup>1</sup> I have already thanked my parents in my dedication for their support during my academic career. I would like, once again, to register my thanks for their support in making the decisions I have just described.

research methodology and reader response or reader centred methods. In Chapter 4 I return to the idea of discourses and discourse communities with a presentation and analysis of the data I have collected on the students' family, educational and denominational backgrounds, all of which come together to form what James Gee (1996) calls their primary and secondary discourses. This is followed in Chapter 5 by a presentation and analysis of the data I have collected from the students on their feelings about and their experience of their first semester in the School of Theology, during which their primary and secondary discourses first clashed with the tertiary discourse of the critical exegesis of the Bible. The theme of the clash of discourses is continued in Chapter 6 where I present and analyse the data I collected from students, mainly the first years, as they examined and passed their judgement on the work of scholarly commentators and their reading of Mark 4:45-41. Finally in Chapter 7 I provide what I am calling profiles from the frontline of the clash of discourses, in which I elaborate on some of the points raised in earlier chapters by describing and analysing my own experience of teaching a class for the School of Theology in 2001, coupled with the results of some parallel research on postgraduate students in the School of Theology undertaken by Fiona Jackson, my wife. In addition this chapter includes three profiles of students who were in their first year in 1999 and completing their degrees in 2001. In these profiles I compare some of their responses in their 1999 interviews with their responses to questions in 2001 in order to gauge how the experience of three years of theological education has shaped them. Finally I will present my summaries and conclusions in Chapter 8.

## *2. A Discourse on Discourse*

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with discourse, discourses and discourse communities and the relationship between these terms and other key terms such as ideology, hegemony and identity connected with them. Discourse is a term that features prominently in post-structuralist, post-modernist theory. It is a term used in a variety of contexts and covers a range of meanings, the definition and delineation of which will be the task of the first part of this chapter. The list of the founding theorists who have developed the use of the term includes a litany of leftist academic thinkers of the last century: Louis Althusser, Michel Pecheux, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin (Mills 1997:7-11). These thinkers will concern me only briefly in this chapter, rather I will consult the useful introductions to the term provided in the work of Diane Macdonell (1986) and Sara Mills (1997) to provide the background and history of the term thereby initiating me in the multiple uses of the term. In the course of the chapter, I will begin to develop a definition of the term through the consultation of contemporary theorists. These will include, Weedon (1997) writing from the perspective of feminist post-structuralism, Harré (1999) writing from the perspective of social psychology, social construction and identity and Gee (1996) writing from the point of view of ideology, social construction and social change. In addition, I will undertake an eclectic exploration to unravel the historical rivalry between discourse and ideology in leftist thinking and the close relationship inherent in their analysis of language and society. I will conclude the chapter by debating the existence of societies or communities of discourse and showing how the use of this theoretical construct will play a part in the analysis of the data in the following chapters of this thesis.

### **2.2 Defining Discourse**

Diane Macdonell begins her attempt to define discourse by emphasizing that it is about dialogue and that it has a social nature (Macdonell 1986:1). It is about dialogue because it is concerned with spoken and written texts as diverse as love letters, formal prose, political speeches and

drunken brawling. Secondly, discourse has a social nature because it is situated in a social context. These social contexts are determined by institutions, social practices within the community in which the discourse is located and the position, social or otherwise, of the participants. Macdonell adds that recent work on discourse has gone beyond the immediate context of the dialogue to explore how speech acts are set up historically and socially (Macdonell 1986:2). This demonstrates that discourses have hierarchies and differences depending on who is saying them, for example the speech of a hospital patient or a pregnant woman about their bodies is different from the speech used by the doctor to talk about the same illness or pregnancy. These differing patterns of speech are the result of discourses or ways of speaking that have developed historically, so that the way women speak has developed in one historical direction, while the ways the doctors speak have developed in another. Therefore, on the one hand, discourse is a particular area of language use, spoken or written, which is identified by the institutions, the position and concerns which shape the interlocutors and which they attempt to inscribe on society (Macdonell 1986: 3), while on the other hand, a discourse can also be defined as anything which has meaning or which is significant in society, from the organization of a library, to the behaviour patterns developed within a particular institution and including the pedagogical forms used to transmit knowledge (Macdonell 1986:4). So in its widest sense, discourse is about the organisation, making and maintenance of meaning in society.

Sara Mills begins her search for a definition of discourse with the general sense of the term in standard dictionaries. In everyday use the term discourse has attracted two basic connotations which derive from the dual heritage of the term in English. On the one hand, it may mean simply a conversation, a connotation derived from the core meaning of the term in French. On the other, it can mean the content of a formal speech, this connotation derived from the Medieval Latin term *discursus*, meaning an academic or formal argument (Mills 1997:2). However, since the 1960's the connotations of the term, in both French and English, have been greatly expanded owing to the use of the term in philosophical thought of the French Left. In addition, various academic disciplinary contexts have begun to add specialist meanings, derived from the connotation of discourse in French philosophical circles, to the already complex range of

possible meanings that have accrued to the term discourse (Mills 1997:4). Even within disciplines, the attempt to define what is meant by discourse, as opposed to text, adds further confusion. All this leads Mills to the conclusion that discourse has no simple meaning but is rather a fluid term that covers a range of connotations (Mills 1997:6). This is shown in the work of Michel Foucault who uses the term to cover three fluctuating domains:

1. The general domain, where all statements, texts or utterances which have a meaning or some kind of effect on the real world, can be called discourse.
2. A second domain of groups of utterances which have some internal structural relationship, connection and coherence. This meaning of the term is applied to examples such as the discourses of femininity or Marxism.
3. The third domain in which discourse means the structures and rules that can be used to explain how statements and texts are produced from their historical and social contexts (Mills 1997:7)

The term discourse has also been influential in structuralist and post-structuralist theory, as a vehicle to break away from the old passive view of language as merely communication or representation, to a dynamic view of language as a system which determines the way speakers think and express themselves (Mills 1997:8). However, as Mills is at pains to point out, it is often very difficult to separate the definition of discourse from the specific meaning it can hold in individual disciplines and even in the work of individual theorists (Mills 1997:8,9). This can be seen below in the definition of the theorist James Gee.

James Gee is discussing discourse in the context of socialization and the social construction of reality, which leads him to the definition of discourse as:

A socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network, or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role (Gee 1996:131).

Or in Gee's simpler definition

Ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, acting, doing, being and becoming which is common to me and my group and different from others (Gee 1996:131).

These definitions are closely related to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) construct of a symbolic universe, but on smaller scale, with potentially a number of discourses within one symbolic universe. It also bears a close resemblance to Foucault's general definition of discourse included earlier in this chapter. However, according to Gee, people can belong to more than one discourse depending on the number of groups they belong to. We need only think of ourselves as members of families, churches, congregations, disciplines, faculties etc. What also occurs is that dominant and marginalised groups function within different discourses and that the dominant discourse is used to further exclude and marginalise the non-mainstream discourse. Gee further argues that when marginalised, or non-mainstream, people attempt to learn the mainstream or dominant discourse, they are faced with a clash which many of them are unable to handle. This results from two main problems: Firstly because learning the dominant discourse can entail profound challenges to the value system that is crucial to their culture or primary discourse (cf. Gee 1996:61). Secondly because any discourse needs, primarily, to be acquired rather than learned. This happens naturally with our primary discourse, but not with our secondary discourses, like school-based literacy. The difference between mainstream and marginalised people is that school-based literacy is very close to the primary discourse of the former but far removed from that of the latter, thereby functioning as a gate to keep them out. This is one aspect of discourse which I will pick up and develop in later chapters of this thesis.



A similar theory to that of Gee is found in the work of Harré and van Langenhove. Their work is in a field which they are calling positioning theory, an attempt to replace the classic Newtonian space/time grid with a grid in which persons/conversations are the basic references for analysis in the Social Sciences ( Harré and van Langenhove 1999:15). Although they leave the term discourse undefined in their writings, a series of other definitions gives some clue of where their definition of discourse could be found within the connotations of discourse already outlined above:

Social constructionism stresses that social phenomena are to be considered to be generated in and through conversation and conversation-like activities. As such discursive processes are considered to be the 'place' where many if not most of the psychological and social phenomena ... are jointly created (Harré and van Langenhove 1999: 3).

Discursive phenomena are not regarded as manifestations of what goes on 'inside' the mind, but ...they have to be represented as the [psychological] phenomena themselves (Harré and van Langenhove 1999: 4).

Positioning theory focusses on understanding how psychological phenomena are produced in discourse. It's starting point is the idea that the constant flow of everyday life, in which we all take part, is fragmented through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of both our biographies and the social world (Harré and van Langenhove 1999:4).

So like Gee, Harré and van Langenhove see discourse, what they call discursive phenomena or conversations, as the basic constituent of reality as we experience it. In addition they share with Gee the idea that our position in that discourse or conversation is vitally important. But while Gee concentrates on the political position of the centre and the margins, Harré and van

Langenhove adopt a more complex stance. Firstly, in describing the features of the relationship between position and discourse:

These three basic features are:

- i. The moral position of the participants and the rights and duties they have to say certain things.
- ii. The conversational history and the sequence of the things already said.
- iii. The actual sayings with their power to shape certain aspects of the social world (Harré and van Langenhove 1999:6).

Secondly, in classifying the way participants in discursive episodes are positioned:

We have adopted three main ways of classifying position. On one dimension of difference what matters is whether individual people are positioned by individuals or collectives by collectives. On another dimension what matters is whether an individual or collective reflexively positions themselves or whether it is by some other which [sic] positions and is positioned. The third dimension is whether the positioning act is symmetrical or asymmetrical that is whether each positions the other or whether in positioning one the other is positioned in the same act (Harré and van Langenhove 1999:6)

The question of position and who is positioning who, which has been raised by both Gee and Harré, raises questions about ideology, a term which has had an uncomfortable and even antagonistic relationship, some would even say a rivalry, with the term discourse in the academic thinking of the twentieth century. In the following section of this chapter I will digress somewhat into an exploration of the term ideology to see whether I can make some accommodation between ideology and discourse, at least in my own mind.

## 2.3 Discourse and Ideology

As with the term discourse, the term ideology is notoriously difficult to pin down to something less than a dozen definitions, some of which are specific to particular disciplines. This problem has also stemmed from the mixed heritage of the term. David McLellan (1995:80) identifies two strands in the history of ideology: Firstly, the science/ideology dichotomy, in which ideology is used to refer to those ideas which are not based in science and as a result is in some way false or misleading. This view of ideology is strongly present in Marx and Marxist thinking, but also in the sociology of Durkheim and the conservative empiricist tradition of Anglo-American thought. Secondly, the term ideology, as it is employed by the historicist German tradition, seen especially in the writings of Hegel, Mannheim and Habermas, is linked to sectional interests, and social positioning and is more or less present in any system of ideas rather than just in those of your opponent. Terry Eagleton basically agrees with McLellan's historical analysis:

This distinction ... reflects the dissonance between the two mainstream traditions we find inscribed within the term. Roughly speaking one central lineage, from Hegel and Marx to Georg Lukács and some later Marxist thinkers, has been much preoccupied with ideas of true and false cognition, with ideology as illusion, distortion and mystification; whereas an alternative tradition of thought has been less epistemological than sociological, concerned more, with the function of ideas within social life than with their reality or unreality (Eagleton 1991: 3).

John B. Thompson (1984: 4) calls this double approach the critical and neutral conceptions of ideology. The critical approach, is so-called because it critiques the way ideology is used to sustain asymmetrical power relations. While the other is neutral because it recognises that ideology is present in all political programmes and is not concerned whether they seek to preserve or transform the social order. This dichotomy may however be too simplistic, for as McLellan (1995:81) and Eagleton (1991: 3) point out, the strength of Marx's and Marxist

approaches to ideology is that they straddle both traditions and the work of thinkers such as Gramsci and Lucien Goldmann have used both to fruitful critical effect.

It is this divided tradition and the permutations of meaning given to the term by each new attempt at a definition, produced by individual theorists within these traditions, that makes ideology such a difficult term to define with any precision. One approach is to follow Eagleton and produce a series of six definitions ranging from the most general and neutral, where ideology is the process by which ideas, values and beliefs are produced, stressing the social determination of thought (Eagleton 1991: 28), to a more particular definition, where ideology is linked to the legitimation of particular interests arising from the dominant or ruling group or even from the way society is structured (Eagleton 1991:30). A different approach, is to choose a position within the traditions and develop it towards your own ends. However, two questions remain to be answered before I can go any further with a definition of ideology. The first is to investigate the degree of power that can be assigned to a particular ideological position, especially one which seeks to mask or legitimate asymmetrical power relations, to dupe or persuade those against which it is positioning itself, to accept the position that they have been assigned within an ideology. The second is to return to where I began in this chapter and look at the relationship between ideology and discourse to try and decide in which areas the meanings of the terms overlap.

## **2.4 The Role of Discourse and Ideology in Power Relations**

To answer my initial question I will do some exploration of the ideas of self, identity and the construction of the subject. These ideas are as difficult as any of the others I have attempted to tackle so far, not least because, as McLellan has pointed out, the self is a disappearing phenomenon in the post-modern world view. This is not surprising in the light of the growing importance of packaging, branding and image over substance leading to the rapid turnover in the production of 'newer and better' goods, all of which can be purchased with speed, using the latest information technology. The rapidity of change and obsolescence in consumerism induces growing uncertainty in much that once produced a stable conception of reality, human relationships, economic structures and the familiar rhythm of everyday life (McLellan 1995:73). The result of the constantly moving and changing world has undermined the idea of the thinking subject or rational superego that lay at the heart of modernist philosophy and psychoanalysis. In its place philosophers and psychoanalysts alike have developed a concept of the self that is far more slippery.

This slippery idea of self or subject identity is expressed theoretically in the work of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. Both theorists are working within the neo-Freudian tradition, developing Freud's "theory of the unconscious in which rational consciousness is decentred and subject to unconscious wishes, desires and processes" (Weedon 1997: 84). In the initial phase of Lacan's theory, the ego or self emerges as the child gains control over her motor functions and recognises that there is a world outside herself including her own mirror image. This recognition leads to the development of the unconscious and the imaginary and is achieved at the expense of a unified image of the self (Leader 1998: 21-3, Lacan 1999:62, Kristeva 1999:72). As his theory developed, the role of words and symbols in the construction of the subject became more marked.

The baby is bound to its image by words and names, by linguistic representations. A mother who keeps telling her son "What a bad boy you are!" may end up with either a

villain or a saint. The identity of the child will depend on how he or she assumes the words of her parents (Leader 1998: 43).

Lacan extended this theory by drawing connections between the unconscious and language in which words trapped in the unconscious can actually become symptoms and give real pain, so that the phrase 'getting out of the wrong side of the bed' can have the physical effect of banging your head each morning (Leader 1998: 51-52). For Kristeva the subject is even more closely related to language. The individual takes up a unified and rational self as a function of the discourse in which she is engaged, but this position is only temporary because in another discourse with a different object the subject cannot be the same. So in Kristeva's terms our subject identity is constantly in progress according to her position in the symbolic order and the challenges to that order which come from the repressed meanings of her unconscious (Weedon 1997: 85, Kristeva 1999:74-5). Weedon expresses the experience of subjectivity in progress in this way:

Many women acknowledge the feeling of being a different person in different social situations which call for different qualities of modes of femininity. The range of ways of being a woman open to each of us at a particular time is extremely wide ... We may embrace these ways of being, these subject positions, wholeheartedly, we may reject them outright or we may offer resistance while complying with the letter of what is expected of us. Yet even as we resist a particular subject position and the mode of subjectivity which it brings with it, we do so from the position of an alternative social definition of femininity (Weedon 1997: 83).

The positioning theory of Harré and Van Langenhove (1999:60) divides identity into two, social and cultural identity "what it is to be and to be seen to be, a certain kind of person" and personal identity "what it is to be one and the same individual through a life course." This split is important because it is the social identity which takes on the different subject positions which are necessary to successfully manage the needs of everyday life while the personal identity retains a

relatively stable idea of self so that “ it is always the same person who has an identity, but in another sense that identity is always mutable” (Harré and Van Langenhove 1999: 61). The fact that we can tolerate the contradictions which arise between the two parts of our identity is because they are both products of a discourse for which the self is the only referent and the biography of the personal identity can be adjusted to fit the context while retaining a strong sense of spatial and temporal continuity.

Having come this far with the idea that identity is a subject in process, I will concentrate on a further exploration of the mutable, social and cultural identity which adapts to the contextual needs of everyday life. This is the site of social and ideological positioning, both of ourselves and by others, which proceeds through a number of stages. To begin with there is first order positioning which “refers to the way persons locate themselves and others within an essentially moral space” (Harré and Van Langenhove 1999: 20), in other words assuming that there is a moral right or authority for that position. When this positioning is questioned or resisted then second order positioning takes place and the position of both parties needs to be negotiated. These positions are located in a lived context or ongoing storyline, which takes into account the previous experience of both parties. When the challenge to the first order positioning takes place outside of the initial context or conversation then third order positioning is said to take place now including other participants who were not part of the original storyline (Harré and Van Langenhove 1999: 21). As Weedon has already shown, none of this positioning can take place without some reference to the other parties in the conversation, so that when I position myself I position others simultaneously as the same or different from myself, either tacitly or intentionally. First order positioning is usually tacit but, as that position is challenged, this forces the first participant to adopt an intentional position in relation to the other parties in the conversation. So, when I adopt a deliberate position for myself this forces me to adopt a position for the other participants and vice versa (Harré and Van Langenhove 1999: 22-4). This is the reason why, once our personal identity has taken up a particular position in the conversation or storyline, our social identity will need to adapt to the challenges raised by other conversations or

storylines and force us to adopt a different identity, self or persona when dealing with our parents, our children, our boss or with a stranger we are meeting for the first time.

Now I will return to the relationship of the social identity to ideology. Most theories of ideology, especially those on the critical end of the spectrum, include some idea of positioning or the attempt by one group to position another in a certain way, in the hope that the group being positioned will accept and live the identity or storyline that has been assigned to them by the first group. This type of positioning is mostly named with the term hegemony. The concepts of ideology and hegemony seem to travel as a pair in the sense that ideologies are said to take on a hegemonic character. This is usually taken to mean that the ideology of a ruling elite becomes so dominant that the oppressed classes actually believe in and consent to the ideology (in the sense of false consciousness) which oppresses them and this ideology is reinforced by the media, religious and other institutions which act as organs of state power (Eagleton 1991:112). The formulation of this definition is usually attributed to the Italian Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci. The term hegemony however, has roots in the classical Marxist-Leninist tradition where it is related to the concept of the vanguard of the proletariat, the organized and disciplined leadership of the workers, who in emancipating themselves, emancipate all other spheres of society at the same time (Hoffman 1984:52). In other words it has a sense that workers may need to be coerced into doing what is in their best interests. At the same time, in the writings of Marx and Engels, the proletarian movement is urged to win the support and consent of the mass of the people if it is to succeed in representing the immense majority of the population (Hoffman 1984: 58). Gramsci's contribution to this classical Marxist tradition is his analysis of the relationship between coercion and consent in political relations (Hoffman 1984: 60). He claims that these forces operate at two levels, 'domination' (i.e. coercion) and 'intellectual and moral leadership' (i.e. consent) (Hoffman 1984: 68), but at the same time are part of a single political process. Hoffman (1984: 73 -75) sees this attempt as a heroic failure, but adds that in his examination of the workings of domination and hegemony by political elites Gramsci has played a decisive part in laying the foundation, which has been taken further by other theorists. Eagleton's assessment is that, especially when applied to the workings of the bourgeois capitalist state, Gramsci's



analysis shows that: “Hegemony, is not just some successful kind of ideology, but may be discriminated into its various ideological, cultural, political, and economic aspects ” (1991:113). Civil society institutions take care of winning the peoples’ consent through the use of ideological, cultural, political, and economic apparatuses. State power, meanwhile, reserves for itself the ‘legitimate’ means of coercion and violence, but operates through institutions of law and order, which, to some extent, enjoy the consent of the majority of the people they coerce (Eagleton 1991:114). Such an analysis leaves the impression that, while most power elites operate against the best interests of the majority, they have duped them into agreeing with this state of affairs and left them no opening for protest. However, as Harré, Van Langenhove and Weedon have explained, a position is rarely simply accepted and is often challenged leading to negotiation, or else it is either resisted actively or subverted in some way. Jon Elster describes the way in which ideology is negotiated with his observation that:

Ruling ideologies can actively shape the wants and desires of those subjected to them: But they must also engage significantly with the wants and desires that people already have, catching up genuine hopes and needs, re-inflecting them with their own peculiar idiom and feeding them back to their subjects in ways which render these ideologies plausible and attractive (Elster in Eagleton 1991:14-15).

However there are also times when these negotiations can break down;

Dominion fails to yield its victims’ sufficient gratification over an extended period of time, then it is certain that they will finally revolt against it. If it is rational to settle for an ambiguous mixture of misery and marginal pleasure when the political alternatives appear perilous and obscure it is equally rational to rebel when the miseries clearly outweigh the gratifications, and when it seems likely that there is more to be gained than to be lost by such actions (Eagleton 1991: xiv).

In addition to these observations, James Scott has developed a critique of Gramsci's model that the weak are the victims of 'false consciousness'. Scott's analysis divides Western theories of hegemony into two, the 'thick' version, represented by the description above of hegemony as an all pervading system of power, and the 'thin' version, which proposes that:

What ideological domination does accomplish, is to define for subordinate groups what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible, of idle dreams. By persuading under classes that their position, their life chances, their tribulations are unalterable and inevitable, such a limited hegemony can produce the behavioural results of consent without necessarily changing people's values (Scott 1990: 74).

Some theorists (Abercrombie, Moore, Willis cf. Scott 1990:74) have shown that the thick version is inadequate to explain why even the most hegemonic ideologies cannot prevent violent conflict and indeed seem rather to provoke it. This is because the social contract, implicit within any hegemonic ideology, provides the means by which to resist abuses and take revolutionary action in favour of change (Scott 1990:78). But, Scott also criticises these theorists for thickening the thin version of the theory of hegemony, to the extent that the limited room for action permitted by the ruling ideology becomes naturalized and acceptable (Scott 1990:76).

If there is a social phenomenon to be explained here, it is the reverse of what theories of hegemony and false consciousness purport to account for. How is it that subordinate groups... have believed and acted as if their situations were not inevitable when a more judicious historical reading would have concluded that it was? (Scott 1990:79)

Scott (1990: 82 -3) replaces these theories of hegemony with what he calls a paper-thin theory of hegemony, which accepts ideological hegemony under only two conditions:

The first of these is that there exist a strong possibility that a good number of subordinates will eventually come to occupy positions of power. The expectation that one will eventually be able to exercise the domination that one endures today is a strong incentive serving to legitimate patterns of domination.

The second is that, “onerous and involuntary subordination can also, perhaps, be made legitimate providing that subordinates are more or less completely atomized and kept under close observation.”

In all other cases, Scott would argue that these theories of hegemony should be replaced by a twofold model of the public transcript – the public performance of subservience and domination acted out by the subordinates and the dominant (Scott 1990: 2) and the hidden transcript, the actions which take place ‘offstage,’ away from the observation of the other group (Scott 1990: 4). In this model the public actions are performed under a tacit agreement between the parties that they accept the official ideology. While, in private spaces, the masks of observance come off and there emerges a quite different picture, of underlying resistance, fantasies of reversal and hopes for liberation on the part of subordinates, and the chance to relax the facade of power on the part of the dominant (cf. Scott 1990: 2-16). This is by no means a simplistic theory, it accounts for a series of gradations in both the public and hidden transcripts (Scott 1990: 26ff) which explains the often contradictory messages observed by researches of marginalised communities and for the way in which the weak and the strong may manipulate the official transcript for their own ends, only to retreat behind it when they are discovered (cf. Scott 1990: 90ff).

For the Comaroffs (1991:19 -20) the problem is not so much Gramsci’s definition of hegemony but rather, whether there is any systematic definition of the term in Gramsci’s writings at all. Instead, they see in his work a subtle melange of the terms, hegemony, ideology and culture, which lead them to the following definitions:

Culture is “The space of signifying practice, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:21).

Ideology is “a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life” (Gramsci 1971 in Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:23).

And hegemony is “that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies, - drawn from an historically situated cultural field, that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:23).

With these definitions I begin to hear distinct echoes of Gee’s definition of discourse, but before exploring this relationship further I will turn to the Comaroffs’ distinctive contribution to the debate about the relationship between hegemony and ideology. For the Comaroffs the totality and dominance of hegemony succeeds only as long as it remains unquestioned and cannot be negotiated, in other words where the surveillance and repression are so total, that they have become invisible (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:25). Once a hegemonic order is questioned, it is transformed into a site of an ideological struggle where orthodox and heterodox interpretations of signs, relations and images are in constant conflict and debate until a new state of negotiated consent is arrived at (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:26-7). As often as not, however, this debate and negotiation is taking place not so much in the open but in what they call the liminal space between conscious resistance and unconscious acceptance, in the gap between the invisible coercion of hegemony and the physical exercise of power in ideology, and takes the form of debates over cultural signifiers and symbolic protests which test the safety of the water before full scale resistance to the dominant and the powerful emerges (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 30-31).

So once again I return to the relationship between hegemony, ideology, discourse, position and identity as the powerful and the marginalised engage in this conversation about what position and identity each will accept at the hand of the other. These ideological positions are developed and adopted at all levels of society from the policies of a ruling elite to the level of individuals in conversation. The work of Scott and the Comaroffs has provided a picture of the negotiation of position and identity taking place between the hidden and the public, the conscious and unconscious, where both parties have to tread carefully in the effort to protect their positions and identity in the power structures in which they are forced to live. As my study progresses I will attempt to show how position, ideology and identity can operate within an academic discipline, in a particular university, but before this I must attempt to answer the second question that I posed earlier in this chapter by revisiting the relationship between discourse and ideology.

## **2.5 The Relationship of Discourse to Ideology**

By now it has become something of a cliché for me to declare that a concept or issue under discussion, in this chapter, is complex or hard to define. However, the relationship between ideology and discourse is fraught with complexity. At some levels the discussion so far would suggest that they are strongly related terms, or at least that discourse could be seen as another name for “ideology in the neutral non-pejorative sense” (Mills 1997: 7). However, it is also true that the term discourse has developed in reaction to the strongly Marxist heritage of the term ideology, and offers a neutral, though not necessarily apolitical, means of analysing language and hegemony (Mills 1997: 31). To explore this further it will be necessary to return to the work of Michel Foucault, the theorist who has developed the most nuanced and complex theory of discourse and who has gone farthest in abandoning the term ideology for the term discourse (Eagleton 1991: 8).

Foucault developed his theory of discourse in a number of stages throughout his life. One of these stages is represented by, *The Order of Discourse*, his inaugural lecture given to the College de France in 1970. In this lecture he outlines the parameters of the term by demonstrating how

societies produce and attempt to control the production of discourse. At the external level control is achieved through measures such as exclusion. This is achieved through the use of three measures:

Firstly, prohibition, restricting the circumstances in which it is possible to talk about certain subjects (Foucault's example refers to the language of politics and sexuality).

Secondly, through the development of the division between reason and madness, valuing the first and using the other to exclude any discourse that is too unpalatable to swallow.

Thirdly, the similar division between truth and falsehood, where truth is knowledge that has gained institutional support, while all else is false (Foucault 1981: 53-5)

But there are also internal controls on the production of discourse. These he calls commentary or genre, they are the primary texts which limit the variation that can be made within discourse in a particular culture.

Firstly, there is the author, an individual identity which gives discourse unity and coherence, further limiting the possible variation.

Secondly there are disciplines, the objects, methods and propositions, which are grouped to limit the number of valid new discourses that can be created (Foucault 1981:57-9).

Then there is a third level of constraints, which regulate access to discourses by limiting those who can qualify to speak within a certain discourse.

The first is ritual, which defines the gestures, behaviour and circumstances which are the signs which must accompany discourse in order for the speaker to be accepted.

The second are 'societies of discourse,' which are closed communities with 'secret' languages or jargon limiting those who are qualified to speak.

The third is doctrine, which limits what the speaker can say to certain topics and denies them access to all others (Foucault 1981: 62- 4).

By this schema which delineates the workings and restrictions placed on discourse, Foucault hoped to develop an analysis of language and power relations which was more subtle than the

classic Marxist stance represented by theorists such as Althusser who emphasized the repressive role of the dominant classes in the mechanics of language and power:

Foucault argues strongly against the notion of the repressive hypothesis..., because for him it is clear that power circulates through a society rather than being owned by one group. Power is not so easily contained. Power is more a form of action or relation between people which is negotiated in each interaction and is never stable or fixed (Mills 1997: 39).

Foucault is also reacting to the tendency in the theory of ideology, to contrast ideology with truth or science, where ideology is characterised as false consciousness and truth is what is in agreement with your position. He also distanced himself from the unitary subject which he sees as a necessary presupposition of much theorising on ideology. Finally he questions the economic basis of much ideological theory and proposes a more complex interaction of economics, social structures and discourse in determining what can be said or thought (Mills 1997: 37). However, Foucault's move to abandon the term ideology in favour of an all-encompassing discourse in his analysis of power is not without its critics. The most notable critique has come from theorists working in the emerging disciplines of post-colonial studies, who while making fulsome use of Foucault in their analysis of power relations between the centre and the margins of the globalized world, nevertheless see the move from terms such as ideology and hegemony to discourse as an attempt to silence the margins and reimpose the dominance of the centre.

Edward Said (1993: 29) notes that Foucault and other philosophers of post-modernism and discourse have abdicated their role as "apostles of radicalism and insurgency" to play games with the "micro-physics of power that surround the individual." This has arisen from their disillusionment with narratives of emancipation and enlightenment in the face of a general post-colonial disillusionment that has swept Europe with the failure of former colonies to measure up to the hopes of the Sixties and Seventies. The new feeling is that colonialism was not such a bad thing, emphasising the cultural and industrial development heritage of the colonial past and

ignoring the violence, repression and brutality that accompanied it. Another criticism is that, although Foucault has been instrumental in uncovering the genealogies in “the development of dominant discourses and disciplinary traditions in the fields of scientific, social and cultural inquiry” (Said 1993: 47), on the other hand his history of discourse is lacking because the imperial experience of both the dominant and the dominated is considered irrelevant despite the fact that it has affect most of the population of the world. For Said, Foucault is totally mired in the imperial mind-set of the West, privileging the lone white male scholar and ignoring the “subjugated knowledges that have erupted across the field once controlled, so to speak, by the Judeo-Christian tradition”(Said 1993: 293), despite the fact that he is the scholar who has done the most to bring the existence of such knowledges to the attention of Western theory (Said 1993: 336).

Gayatri Chakravotry Spivak’s criticism of Foucault is similar to that of Said:

Foucault is a brilliant thinker of power-in -spacing, but the awareness of the topographical reinscription of imperialism does not inform his propositions. He is taken in by the restricted version of the West produced by that reinscription and thus helps to consolidate its effects (Spivak 1988: 290).

In fact it is the very brilliance of the analysis and the minuteness of the detail into which Foucault goes in his studies of workings of power and discourse in the prison, the asylum and the university in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe that allows these to act as “screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism” (Spivak 1988: 291), masking the fact that this period is also the heyday of colonial expansion and ignoring the effects of the imperial mind-set on these institutions. As she continues:



I have tried to argue that the substantive concern for the politics of the oppressed which often accounts for Foucault's appeal can hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the "concrete" subject of oppression that in fact compounds the appeal (Spivak 1988: 292).

But this is not her fiercest criticism. At the beginning of her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak deals with the attitude of Foucault to the Subject. Her criticism is that while denying the existence of the subject, and preferring labels like 'the workers' or 'women', he is in fact creating or assuming the existence of "a coherent and homogeneous class consciousness and a coherent and homogeneous subject capable of representing and fully articulating that consciousness"(Arnott 1998: 110). This is the crux of her problem with Foucault's rejection of ideology because it assumes that,

The oppressed, knowing what their true interests are, can act out their desires in pursuit of those interests, and the role of ideology, producing the misrecognition of interest – and thus the irreducible gap between desire and interest – is obliterated (Arnott 1998:111).

The effect of this process is that Foucault, while claiming that there is no such thing as representation, assumes that the oppressed are representing themselves, while in fact it is he, the privileged Western intellectual, who claims to be representing the oppressed and their discourse. This error arises from the conflation of the two senses of representation which are, "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as re-presentation as in art or philosophy"(Spivak 1988: 275). These terms are fleshed out in Spivak's argument with reference to a text from Karl Marx which elucidates the difference between the two terms so that

The first sense of representation (connoting substitution) is indicated by the German word *vertretung*, [and] the second, with its implications of portrayal or reportage, by *darstellung* (Arnott 1998: 112).

Arnott explains further,

The passage from Marx is one which indicates clearly that neither class consciousness nor individual consciousness is a coherent and homogeneous expression of an identity capable of full self-representation (in the sense of *darstellung*), and this has implications for the process of political representation (*vertretung*) (Arnott 1998: 112).

What this means is that the assumptions of a collective agency or consciousness, made in formulations like ‘the workers’ or ‘women’, is inaccurate. Firstly because the common interests of the group do not result in common desires, and secondly because those who represent (in both senses) oppressed groups with such collective labels very rarely have their interests at heart. This applies particularly to the privileged Western intellectuals who speak for and silence the voices of the most marginalised. In the following chapter I will take this issue further and discuss questions of presentation and re-presentation in this thesis including how I represent myself and how I represent the students’ voices so that they speak of their experiences within the School of Theology as participant observers rather than as passive subjects.

From the discussion above it seems that Foucault is reacting mainly to the critical heritage of ideology and is drawing himself closer to the neutral heritage of the term. His emphasis, that power relations are negotiated, has also been taken up by many theorists of ideology, so that it may not be necessary, as Mills (1997: 46) does, to separate so forcefully the terms ideology and discourse because if it is possible to see them working in tandem. Because each term has such subtle gradations within its definition, it is possible to see that, at some levels, ideology works within discourse and, at others, discourse works within ideology.

This interplay of ideology and discourse is strongly evident in the work of James Gee, regarding the ideological and hegemonic underpinnings of discussions about literacy and how these are linked to the education system (Gee 1996: 22ff). Gee argues that the most powerful rationale behind the education system (in his case of the United States of America) is the need for literacy

(Gee 1996:26), but that literacy is a term laden with ideological presuppositions which need to be stripped away so that its true meaning is made manifest. The first part of the myth of literacy is that it is one single thing. That this is not true can be demonstrated simply by showing that there are at least two parts to literacy, namely reading and writing. Furthermore, there are people who can do one or the other and gradations of reading and writing skills in between. The second part of the myth is that literacy brings freedom and development and is a kind of cure all for the ills of society. But as Gee points out, these simplistic formulations mask the ideology hidden below. For a start, far from promoting freedom and development, literacy is a potent weapon for control and/or maintaining the status quo. Gee provides the following examples. First is the remarkable achievement of near universal literacy in Sweden by the end of the 18th Century, which was primarily aimed at “the promotion of character and citizenship training in a religiously dominated state” (Gee 1996:32). Indeed, Gee (1996:34-5) maintains that in most working class schools this remains the goal of literacy training, i.e. the production of a skilled and compliant work force for the industrial machine (we only have to think of the goals of apartheid education in this regard). The second example is that of Paulo Freire, whose pedagogy of the oppressed, although it aims to liberate people’s colonial mentality, ends up being highly prescriptive in the kinds of thoughts it allows people to think. Underlying this Western myth of literacy is an ideological reality that only the elite in the society will be taught the critical thinking and analytical skills of essay/text literacy, that is the dominant mode of our schools and universities, and all others will be educated to accept their place in the society.

Gee’s understanding of the mythic, hegemonic and ideological relationships of power that are inevitably in operation within any system of education will play an important part in my thinking in the following chapters of this thesis. But, I cannot dismiss the observations of other theorists explored in the earlier parts of this chapter that all hegemonies and ideologies are negotiated and resisted. As this study progresses, I anticipate that the most difficult area of analysis of the data I have collected will be to balance the interplay of voices, as the students alternately seek to accommodate themselves to and resist and struggle with the hegemonic discourses of both the education establishment, in this case the Biblical Studies discipline in the School of Theology,

and the religious establishment, the voice of the official interpretation of the Bible arising from their respective denominations. In this balancing act I will have to heed the warnings of Said and Spivak about the danger of seeking to represent (speak for) the students who participated in my study rather than re-presenting their views in such a way that their voices are heard. In the succeeding chapters of this thesis in which I introduce the data I have collected and then my analysis of that data I will have to keep in mind the understanding of discourse and ideology that I have built up in the course of this chapter.

In this and the preceding sections of this chapter I have been investigating the relationship of discourse to ideology and have discovered that they are rival, yet inter-related, terms which both contain within them a critique of power relationships and the way groups and individuals seek to position themselves in their own terms and in relationship to others. Also that while dominant ideologies, hegemonies and discourses are resistant to change they are often subjected to subtle, yet persistent, questions from the margins which may gradually require the whole edifice to be questioned and re-established. However, the primary discourses which shape the individual can prove the most difficult of ideologies to dislodge and any attempt to overhaul them may result in a clash of discourses that can have profound consequences for the individuals and groups concerned. Before I go on to explore what I believe to be such a clash of discourses, which is taking place in the School of Theology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, I must return to one aspect of Foucault's order of discourses outlined earlier in the chapter, the concept of societies of discourse or what later theorists have come to call communities of discourse.

## **2.6 Communities of Discourse**

There is some level of difficulty in defining exactly what a discourse community is because, as is the case with so many of such terms, the meaning of the term depends primarily on the discipline within which the term is being utilised. The term originated within the study of dialectology and referred to a small unit of speakers in a local area who form a communication network and are linguistically homogeneous. However as Michael Halliday (1978:154) has pointed out, this is an

unrealistic and idealised construct which is only approximated in social reality. The idealisation of the construct becomes even more apparent once linguists began to use the term outside the original context of a highly localised linguistic entity such as a big city (Halliday 1978:155; Gumperz 1972:16). As the term was pressed into use by scholars in the ethnography of communication, they realised that linguistic criteria were not sufficient to define a discourse community on account of the impossibility of narrowing a group down by the language they speak alone. Rather it became necessary to begin with a social entity that can be easily defined by extra-linguistic measures and then research the language repertoire, as well as the resources, organisation and structure of speech within that social context (Saville-Troike 1989: 17). Dell Hymes adds that the definition of this community needs to consider a whole variety of factors which determine the boundaries between one discourse community and the next, including “self-conceptions, values, role structures, contiguity, purposes of interaction and political history” (Hymes 1972:55). Once this has been done a speech or discourse community can be tentatively defined as “a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety” (Hymes 1972:54). In more recent times this concept has come to be associated with smaller and smaller entities, including academic disciplines (or even departments of particular academic disciplines at a given university) and corporate cultures (such as the different ways of using language in two consulting firms) to the extent that claims have been made for a degree of mutual un-intelligibility between people working in virtually the same field of endeavour (Freed and Broadhead 1987:157).

In his critique of the very idea of communities of discourse Thomas Kent has questioned this thick formulation of a community and has extended his reconsideration to include even the thin formulation of the term which states that “one is always simultaneously a part of several discourses, several communities, is always already committed to a number of conflicting beliefs and practices” (Harris in Kent 1991:425). The basis of his review is his claim that all such “social constructionism” is philosophically underpinned by an essentially internalist conceptual scheme which claims that all knowledge is relative to the community in which we live and is as a result utterly speechless in the face of a crippling political correctness that precludes any definite

opinion on anything that is not somehow contained within some narrowly defined community (Kent 1991:426). He proposes instead an externalist framework, based on the work of Donald Davidson, in which external factors, principally public linguistic interactions with fellow language users, rather than introspection and self-reflection, are the primary method by which humans interpret the world around them (Kent 1991:431). In these linguistic interactions people employ a prior interpretive theory, which is the knowledge the interlocutors bring to the communication, and a passing interpretive theory, which is the strategy which they actually use to negotiate what the other person says. Once we know what other people mean we then use these meanings to triangulate with our knowledge of the world to build our belief systems (Kent 1991:433). Such a scheme to explain communication is a direct response to the crippling political correctness, skepticism and relativism which accompanies much anti-foundationalist postmodern thinking. For externalist thinkers, truth lies in the logical consistency of our utterances with our beliefs, so that if we have had our beliefs confirmed by others in communication situations we are then perfectly justified in asserting these as truth in other situations. By contrast, Kent characterises “social- constructionists” as unable to assert anything because they are unable to accept the contradictory nature of the justification of their beliefs (Kent 1991:436-7).

While I can accept Kent’s critique to a certain extent, especially in relation to the analysis paralysis inherent in much postmodernism, at the same time this thesis is based clearly within a social constructionist paradigm which recognises that in the broad strokes of reality we are constituted by our social contexts and by the discourses or socialisation which has shaped us. In truth, I cannot see much difference between Davidson’s ideas and those of Gee or Harré who conceive of our belief systems being constructed in relation to other people in the kind of communication interactions that Davidson implies. In fact there is no reason why the external interlocutors with which a person builds and triangulates her belief systems could not be termed her discourse community. So while it may be untenable to endorse the thick version of a discourse community, or maybe even the thin version, I will assert the existence, by analogy with hegemony in Scott (1990), of a paper-thin version of discourse communities, to the extent that a student entering an unfamiliar academic environment for the first time may literally find that she

speaks a different language from her lecturers and professors. So, unless she is carefully instructed in the new language and inducted into the “sacred texts, revised statutes, many of them unwritten” (Freed and Broadhead 1987:163) of the relevant discourse community(ies), she will fail to learn the necessary criteria for membership of an academic discipline. However, having made this assertion I must also state that the idea of discourse communities will not play a major part in the analysis of data in this thesis. Instead, the idea of discourse communities is a stepping stone to return to James Gee’s theory of discourse.

## **2.7 Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Discourses**

In his exploration of the concept of discourse, James Gee makes a basic distinction between primary and secondary discourses.

Primary discourses constitute our first social identity, and something of a base within which we acquire or resist later discourses. They form our initial taken-for-granted understandings of *who* we are and who people ‘like us’ are, as well as the sort of things we (people ‘like us’) do, value, and believe when we are not ‘in public’.

Secondary discourses are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialization within various local, state and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization (Gee 1996:137).

In Chapter 4 will explore the primary and secondary discourses which have shaped the School of Theology students’ lives as they embark on their years of study at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

However, I will also adapt Gee’s model slightly so that primary discourses apply, in this case to, discussions of the nationality, home language and home environment of the students while secondary discourses apply to the socialisation that the students have received through their apprenticeship as members of their denomination (Gee would call this community based

Secondary discourse) and in the school system, which in Gee's system is a non-community based secondary discourse. But, through my analysis of the student data I have seen the need to make the crucial distinction between these sorts of discourses and what I call tertiary discourse, which, in this case, is critical academic engagement with the Bible which takes place in the School of Theology. I have developed this idea by noticing the synergy between Gee's theory of discourse and the positioning theory of Harré and van Langenhove (cf.1999:21). In my analysis therefore, tertiary discourse is a new set of circumstances, or a new position, encountered once the primary and secondary discourses are in place. This encounter with the tertiary discourse or position then forces a revision of the positions established by the primary and secondary discourses. I will deal with the way primary and secondary discourses are modified by tertiary discourse in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have laid the theoretical groundwork for this thesis which I will use to explore the data I have collected from students within the School of Theology, at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. This groundwork is based on a conception of discourse which understands that it is a term which analyses the relations of power and ideology between people, and with their texts. However, in the practical working out of the analysis of data I will predominantly utilise Gee's theory of primary and secondary discourses, modified from Harré's theory of positioning which recognises that discourses position people at primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Gee 1996:61; Harré and van Langenhove 1999:20). Gee and Harré also recognise the role of power relations, particularly those of an asymmetrical nature, in shaping and forming discourses. Therefore, in analysing the student data in terms of discourse I will be taking into account how they have been shaped by their families, schooling and denominations and how the results of all of these discourses react to the encounter with critical, University discourses within the School of Theology. However, before I come to the presentation and analysis of data, I will, in the next chapter, account for the social location of myself and the students within the discourses of the School.



### *3. Locating Myself and the Students in this Thesis*

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is about method and the way that my voice and the students' voices have interacted within the methodologies I have used. In this chapter it will be my task to develop a theoretical understanding of my self and the students from my sample as participants in this thesis. Firstly I will clarify my own location as a player in the unfolding storyline of this thesis. Clearly, I am a major participant in this study because it is my intellect and imagination that will give this thesis its final form. So I will begin by talking about myself and the discourses which have shaped me as a white, male, English-speaking, left-leaning, South African academic and the struggles I have gone through to arrive at my research subject. I will outline my struggles to find a subject for research which would validate the years I had spent studying academic theology and affirm the beliefs that I had clung to in that process. I will recount my attempts to find a discourse to speak about miracles and my resignation to the fact that this is impossible in the academic context.

However, as part of my role in shaping this research I have chosen to give the students' voices a large role in expressing their feelings about the discourses that have shaped them in their lives before and since entering the School of Theology. I will outline briefly my research history in reader response and chart the way I have followed the trajectory of this method through post-colonial and cultural studies into a focus on ordinary readers and to a particular group of ordinary readers who are students in the School of Theology at the University of Natal. Part of this endeavour will be theorising, with the help of critical language awareness and the role of qualitative writing methods, the pivotal role their voices play in the way this thesis works and acknowledging that without them there could be no thesis.

In the final sections of the chapter I will account for my collection and analysis of data. I will outline my research process of tutorials and interviews with groups of students within the School of Theology and then the methods I used to analyse my data through computer based

qualitative analysis and then within the sorting and writing process of ordering and presenting my data within the next three chapters of this thesis.

### **3.2 Locating Myself in this Thesis**

This thesis began life as an investigation into miracles. It was an attempt to put my own belief, hope, faith in the existence of the miraculous down on paper, thereby to convince myself of their existence. The method that I planned to use was an investigation into a group of people who really did believe in miracles, first-year Biblical studies students and other groups of people not yet contaminated by the scepticism that invades much of the theological discourse on miracles. I had attempted something similar in my previous research in which I investigated the reader response of two groups of ordinary readers of the Bible to reading the whole epistle to the *Romans* in my own translation (Meyer 1995). I hoped that what would emerge would be a way of talking about miracles and the faith that people had in miracles that could stand up with confidence in the annals of academic enquiry. However as I began to try and read myself into the subject I found myself, and the authors who I was reading, struggling to find a discourse that could adequately talk about something that is an article of faith and not an observable, falsifiable, reliable part of the modernist paradigm. The two authors who came closest to finding a way of talking about miracles, Davis (1993) and Brown (1985), were fine when it came to dismissing objections to miracles but found themselves totally inarticulate when it came to expressing how and why a miracle could exist in modernist academic terminology. For a time it seemed as if postmodernism offered me some hope of finding an adequate discourse for a discussion of miracles, but in the end, for all its claims that reality is multilayered and that everything is equally valid, this approach has nothing to offer in terms of a discourse about miracles that is more reliable or believable than anything else. Having arrived at this point, I abandoned miracles as an object of study and decided to try to look at the hermeneutics of miracles, or how people read them, through the study of a series of miracle stories in Mark chapters 4 and 5 which pitted the readings of ordinary readers against those of trained readers.

In his re-evaluation of the ethics of biblical interpretation, Daniel Patte calls for biblical scholars, especially white male Americans, to adopt an attitude of ethical accountability and

responsibility for the way they have interpreted the Bible and the effects that this has had on their hearers and readers (Patte 1995:2). Therefore, in determining my location in this thesis I will take this perspective into account. At the same time I will also take note of Robert Carrol's caveat that such an attitude should not spill over into a self-hatred or that I should regard my own socialisation as some kind of ideological defect (Carrol 2000:187). Having said this, I need to state for the record that I am a white, male, English-speaking South African, a position fraught with many and varied complications. The appellation "white" is controversial because of its association in Christian symbolism with purity and goodness and because it is essentially inaccurate as a description of pinkish-grey European pigmentation. Furthermore, in a post-colonial context I could, as a white male, face accusations of racism, oppression and violence against people who happen not to be white and powerful. I will however resist the temptation to modify this appellation in any politically correct way because in South Africa the term "white" encapsulates my history and locates me within the structure of the popular perceptions of race, where the colour of my skin will always be an issue. As a male I could carry yet another ideological burden to add to the one of being white, including accusations of the oppression of and violence against the female Other by males and especially white males. On the other hand I believe it is enough that I live my life to an ethical standard that does not conform to the stereotype of white male settler culture.

My location as a South African is equally complex. As far as it is possible for me to tell, I come from a long line of god-fearing Afrikaners on both sides of my family tree. The two grandparents that I knew while I was growing up, my Ouma, Geertruida Susanna Liebenberg Van Eeden and my paternal grandfather Gert Hendrik Meyer, while in all else they seemed essentially incompatible, in their daily routines had much in common, with each other and with many Afrikaners of their generation who were born during the Anglo-Boer South African War at the turn of the twentieth century. I remember them best reading their well-thumbed Afrikaans Bibles and ancient Bible notes and listening to the daily church service or religious programming on the Afrikaans service of the SABC, with as much attention as they gave to the radio soap operas that followed, sustained by their Church and the growing power of the Afrikaner state which promised and delivered them security. How is it then that contrary to this heritage, I have turned out an English-speaking, left leaning academic? The

answer is not as complicated as it may seem. As a Cape Town Afrikaner Ouma Geertruida was bilingual and because she had been educated in Dutch was somewhat self-conscious of her Afrikaans so tended to favour English in conversation. The result was that my mother grew up bilingual speaking English to her mother and Afrikaans to her father. On the paternal side an English widow, Magdalen Broderick Flanagan, won my grandfather Gert's heart, resulting in three English-speaking children with, at least in my father's case, a deep and enduring love of all things English. Add to that an expensive private education in liberal institutions that prided themselves in their disdain of apartheid propaganda and a dose of left-wing student politics, and the picture is complete. To determine theoretically how this heritage has shaped me, I will briefly explore the terms post-colonialism and diaspora that have helped me to determine my place in this thesis.

Post-colonialism is a term that refers to the lived reality of millions of people and diverse cultures all of which have a slightly different experience of colonial and post-colonial heritage. In a basic sense the term refers to the relationship between the people and places in the metropolis, Europe and North America (the West), and those on the periphery of geopolitical space, Asia, Africa and Latin America, or to put it another way, the relationship between the rich and developed countries at the centre of power and the poor underdeveloped countries on the margins. In a more specific sense it refers to the relationship between the former imperial powers and the peoples and nations which they formerly colonised. Crucial to the term, however, is a critique in which this relationship between imperial and colonial is problematised and questioned. This is a term which focuses on the raising of the conscience and consciousness of people to their continued domination by the interests of the West/Centre/ Metropolis, despite their nominal political independence. In addition it draws attention to their history of continued opposition and resistance to the imperial project, both in the past and in the present (Segovia 2000:11-13).

In locating myself and this study within the post-colonial world and post-colonial studies, I take cognisance of Roland Boer's warning that post-colonial studies is not so much a movement against capitalism and the metropolis but an essential part of the logic of globalization in late capitalism which gets a kind of frisson from the critique but is too

powerful to care (Boer 1998:26-7). What is more, the term post-colonial studies has a nice safe ring to it as the following quote from Anne McClintock makes clear:

While admittedly another p-c word, 'post-colonialism' is arguably more palatable and less foreign-sounding to sceptical deans than 'Third World Studies'. It also has a less accusatory ring than 'Studies in Neo-Colonialism', say, or 'Fighting Two Colonialisms'... The term borrows, moreover, on the dazzling marketing success of the term 'post-modernism'. As the organizing rubric of an emerging field of disciplinary studies and an archive of knowledge, the term 'post-colonialism' makes possible the marketing of a whole new generation of panels, articles, books and courses (McClintock 1993 in Boer 1998:29-30).

Nevertheless, the idea of post-colonialism has direct relevance to my social location in South Africa which is both post-colonial and post-apartheid. Like other countries of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, the centre and margins in South Africa are not only located globally but locally and, in South Africa's case, also continentally. The white minority in South Africa has held political power under apartheid and continues to wield economic power in the post-apartheid dispensation, thereby reflecting the relationship of the imperial metropolis to the colonial masses at a local level. In addition the ending of apartheid has opened up the possibility for South Africa to become a mini metropolis to the peripheral continent of Africa, as South African products and capital invade and begin to dominate the Southern African Development Community (SADC). South African Multinational companies have also begun to invade the metropolis itself, listing on the FTSE 100 of the London Stock Exchange and taking over companies in other part of the periphery (for example it was lately reported on the radio news that South African Breweries has the potential, though a merger with another multinational, to become the second largest brewer in the world). In addition, South Africa like the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, was settled by immigrants from the centre, who now form a diaspora community at the periphery.

The term diaspora has emerged in the past decade as a specific location within post-colonial studies. For Segovia (1995:322) the two concepts which characterize diaspora hermeneutics

are otherness and engagement. The first concept relates to the experience of people from the margin who have moved to the countries of the centre and, having made the attempt to assimilate, are no longer at home in their original culture but equally are treated as other or outsiders by the inhabitants of the centre unless they play the game of assimilation which denies them their culture. The second concept is a critical response to the experience of otherness which seeks to affirm and define themselves within that experience in a positive light and to engage in a critical dialogue with the centre. More recently however Segovia has widened his definition somewhat to include the analysis of geographical translations of people in general both within and outside the West/ Centre/ Metropolis so that the term diaspora can be a multifarious and polysemous signifier which can cover the experience of people who are dispersed from their original culture while still retaining cultural and emotional links (Segovia 2000:17). This definition of the term diaspora is useful to cover the experience such as mine, a descendant of white settler colonialism, constituted by and yet not of the centre, culturally connected, yet subtly different, in language, taste and outlook, critical yet envious. What role therefore should this location play in determining my role in this thesis and the way my voice is heard?

For an answer to this question I turned to the experience of Roland Boer, who is the descendant of a parallel white settler culture in Australia, which is struggling to find its voice in the metropolis, while being stuck at the margins of the centre (cf. Boer 1998:31-33). In his attempt to find a way for his voice from the margins to be heard, Boer rejects the first two options which present themselves as possibilities, either slavish imitation of the Scholarship modelled from the centre, or focussing on those aspects of Australian culture and thinking that make it an exotic flavour to be consumed by those from the centre. Instead he is attracted by what he calls 'positive unoriginality' which uses the tools and symbols of the centre but does not take them entirely seriously (Boer 1998:35-39). I am attracted to Boer's position because, while I see that it is important to have some knowledge of and even to use the tools and symbols of the centre, the focus of my research and the scope of my endeavours will be entirely local, taking seriously my social location rather than the approval of globalized academic theology.

I have provided this brief sketch on my own social location to introduce some of the influences on my thinking that constitute who I am as a scholar and researcher. In the next section of the chapter I will look at the voices of the students in this thesis in the light of recent work on reading the Bible with real, flesh and blood, or ordinary readers. In addition I will employ insights from qualitative research methodology and the theory of critical language awareness to substantiate the presence of the substantial student voice, and the way it will be re-presented, in the following chapters of this thesis.

### **3.3 Locating the Students in this Thesis**

At the drafting stage of this thesis, as I was feeling my way into the order and pattern that my data presentation would take in the final form, one of my readers raised a question about the amount of data included and the consequent size of the student voice that emerges in the later chapters of this thesis. This section of this chapter is an answer to that question. In this section I will theorise the size of the student voice in this thesis and the role this student voice has played in shaping the data presentation and the nature of the insights that have arisen from the data. Perhaps the first thing to say about the student voice in this thesis is that it was always intended to be a major part of this thesis. In my previous research I had already done much work in the field of reader response. The first study, my Honours project, looked at reader-response by groups of readers to an illustrated version of the Gospel of Mark which I had drawn. The second study, my Masters project (Meyer 1995), was a study of the same groups of readers' response to my translation of the epistle to the *Romans*. So, for my doctoral project I was keen to continue and develop this trend.

The theory of reader response in literary studies is not a unified critical position, but rather a collection of methods of analysing literary texts which foreground the role of the reader, the reading process or the response of the reader, in the production of meaning from literature. In effect these critics acknowledge that readers, through their mental response, realise the existence of literary texts (Tompkins 1991:ix). The other essential similarity is the way that these theoretical positions, to a greater or lesser extent, break down the idea of the text as an object with a fixed meaning and erode the boundary between reading and writing until they can be seen as a continuum of activities which result in the production of a meaning for the

text (Tompkins 1991:x). Some reader response critics have gone so far as to say that literary criticism has always been a discussion of the experience of reading, except that in the past it has been hidden under other labels such as authorial intentions or literary structure (Fowler 1991:1) However, in recent years the trend in reader response has taken a twofold path, at least as it can be traced in Biblical Studies. On the one hand, some critics have gone into the realm of autobiographical criticism in which their personal autobiography and response takes up a major portion of their work (Anderson and Staley 1995:8), while on the other hand, another group of critics have taken up the challenge of hearing the responses of ordinary readers of the Bible (Patte 1995, Segovia 1995, 1998 and West and Dube 1996). In this thesis I will follow this trend in reader response, modifying it slightly to include not only the response of ordinary readers to the biblical text but also their response to the way trained readers have responded to the text. However, before I continue, I will briefly consider how these three authors have theorised their attention to ordinary readers.

For Daniel Patte the focus on ordinary readers is connected to his need to develop an accountable and responsible method of critical exegesis. He like other male, protestant, European -American critics have expressed their vocation as countering the ill effects of fundamentalist, evangelical readings of the Bible (Patte 1995:76). However, he attributes the clear failure of that vocation, seen in growing fundamentalist movements and the rejection of critical scholarship by these movements, to the fact that critical exegetes have committed the same mistakes as fundamentalists, universalising their own experience and denying the legitimacy of other interpretations (Patte 1995: 83). Rather, Patte suggests that emphasising the positive aspects of evangelical ordinary readings and faith interpretation and giving them legitimacy would open the way to education fundamentalists of the harmful and illegitimate aspects of their interpretation. In addition it would allow critical exegetes to acknowledge their past and present relationship to fundamentalist interpretations, to treat these non-critical interpretations in an equal nonhierarchical way and to reaffirm the power and authority of the biblical text to affect and transform its readers (Patte 1995:92 -5).

Fernando Segovia writes on reading the Bible within the paradigm of cultural studies or ideological criticism. The major point in which this method of biblical criticism can be



distinguished from the literary studies of the Bible is that while literary studies had made a move towards reader response, focussing on reader constructs and ideal readers and their construction of meaning from the text, cultural studies of the Bible is interested in the real readers and their readings of the Bible as socioeconomic, sociocultural and ideological products (Segovia 1995:3). This is because in the view of cultural studies these real readers lie behind any kind of interpretive tool that can be brought to bear on the biblical text because it is these real readers who reconstruct the history behind the text, who recreate the meaning from the text and develop models of interpretation by which the text is being read and all do so within their social location (Segovia 1995:7) For cultural studies the location of meaning in reading is not the author, or the world behind the text or even the text itself, but rather, that meaning is constructed in the interaction between “a socially and historically conditioned text and a socially and historically conditioned reader” (Segovia 1995:8) and as such, all readings by all readers are profoundly ideological (Segovia 1998:2). This means that cultural studies acts as a kind of umbrella for a variety of methods of approaching the text, whether in front of the text, on the text, or behind the text (cf. West 1991:104-131), all of which are now seen as encounters between text and real readers (Segovia 1995:9, 1998:1).

Closer to home another focus on real readers which has been influential has been Gerald West’s method of “reading with” ordinary readers in the context of Africa. Here again the focus is on the real readers of the text but in a very specific sense since the term reader, in this case, can be metaphoric, in order to include people who, although illiterate, “listen to, discuss and retell the Bible” (West and Dube 1996:7). These readers are ordinary in the sense that they are people, who read the Bible pre-critically and are specifically poor and marginalised, and in the work of West they are brought into interface and dialogue with the critical readers of the academy (West and Dube 1996:7). This process of dialogue is dubbed “reading with” and rests on three foundations: Liberation hermeneutics, a system of interpretation which moves the focus of dialogue within Biblical Studies from the Academy to the poor and marginalised; Postmodernism, a world view which abandons the search for right readings of texts in favour of useful readings and resources, which take seriously the ethics and effects of reading texts, and opens opportunities for the poor and marginalised to be heard, by destabilising and decentring the opinions of the experts; And reader response or reception

hermeneutics, an interpretive stance which shifts the focus of meaning from the author to the reader (West 1996:27). Also essential to the process of “reading with” is carefully and precisely foregrounding the social and historical subjectivity of both the biblical scholar and the reader, and at the same time clarifying and attempting to equalise the power relations between them. The desired result is that the needs, questions, reading resources and the interests of the readers should form the starting point of textual Bible study and that the critical tools and resources of the biblical scholar should be at the service of these communities (West 1996:28). The readings of the poor and marginalised are brought to the fore by people who are committed to work as organic intellectuals in an equal relationship with these communities and thereby to read with and avoid the danger of reading for these readers (West 1996:34). Therefore, “reading with” ordinary readers is a commitment to take their voices seriously in their religious, social and economic locations.

My attention to ordinary readers found confirmation in other trends in theological studies, especially the importance of social location, in studies of the hermeneutics of readers and interpreters of the Bible. Randall Bailey (1998) writes about the importance of his social location as a Black American reading the text of the Bible. The first half of his paper is a review of the way the Spirituals of the Black Church in the time of slavery and beyond, interpreted the Bible and staked claims to freedom and equality in the face of oppression (Bailey 1998: 67-74). But in the second part of his paper he points out that the danger of this wholesale adoption of the religion and religious language of the oppressor is that people begin to distrust their own cultural observations and to accept interpretations of text and symbols that are clearly not in their favour. He highlights the problem of the representations of Jesus as a white person and the association of the term “white” with purity and wholesomeness, which is accepted as normal by Black Christians. However, if the symbol of “white” is approached from a Black cultural bias many distortions in the interpretations of texts and symbols emerge. Looking back into the Hebrew Bible without white supremacist lenses shows that the term “white” had negative, rather than positive connotations. For black skinned Hebrews it was synonymous with skin disease, uncleanness and punishment from God (cf. Exodus 4:6, Numbers 12:10, Bailey 1998:75), yet in Black congregations they

continue to plead with God to wash them “whiter than snow” even though if this were to happen in reality it would be a serious sign of ill health (Bailey1998: 77).

A similar point is made by Kwok Pui Lan (1989) in her argument that the cultural resources of Chinese culture should have an equal right to be considered in the canon of scripture as the Hebrew Bible and that only a western agenda of ideological dominance has prevented this from being more widely accepted. In keeping with this focus on the cultural resources for reading I will turn briefly to context of Africa<sup>1</sup> and I will signpost some of the multifarious encounters between ordinary African readers and the Bible that have emerged in recent work. These encounters of Africa with the Bible range from the biblical hermeneutics of the Coptic Church of Egypt, which preserves a living tradition of reader response to the Bible dating back to Patristic times (Loubser 2000:116), to the appropriation of the biblical text by ordinary readers such as artists, hymn writers, traditional medical practitioners and functionaries of African traditional religion. The link between Art and the Bible is not unique to Africa, but as West (1999:44-8) points out, the study of a particular artwork as a reading of the biblical text (in this case Azaria Mbatha’s wood cut of the Joseph Story) is a valuable means of assessing the ways in which ordinary readers in Africa can appropriate a biblical narrative to illustrate important values (community and linking with their ancestors) and comment on their social context (unequal power relations in pharaonic Egypt and apartheid South Africa). In the same way the link between hymn writing and the interpretation of the Bible is as old as, if not older than, that of the representation of the Bible in Art. Once again I present merely a taste, from one particular study, of a hermeneutic resource that is widespread among ordinary readers in Africa. Fergus King’s analysis of Youth Hymns in the (Anglican) Church of the Province of Tanzania (King 2000:363) shows how an ordinary African reader, Motti Mbogo, appropriates and adapts biblical texts in his hymn writing, using a traditional literary genre (King 2000:369) and to address local concerns and issues that are not met in the official liturgy and hymnals (King 2000:371). The use of the Bible text in Tanzanian hymns

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<sup>1</sup> I do not intend by any means to provide anything like an exhaustive account of how the Bible is read in Africa, or to survey the past and current trends of African Theology, this task has been undertaken elsewhere in great detail (Goba 1983, Holter 2000, Le Marquand 2000, Ndingu Mushete 1994, Ukpong 2000, West 2000).

is analogous to the use of Psalms by African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria to ward off evil and misfortune (Adamo 1999:71, 2000:337) and to combat and cure disease (Adamo 1999:76, 2000:341). While it is true that this specialist use of the Psalms has been developed by the traditional religious and medical practitioners who prescribe the use of texts (Adamo 1999:74, 2000:340), these people can at the same time also be described as ordinary African readers of the Bible, who are using the texts to meet a need in their community. The same could perhaps be said of the traditional rain-making cults of Zimbabwe who have staged a wholesale appropriation of the Christian God by claiming continuity with the tradition of Moses talking with God on Mount Sinai and the voice/ Word of John 1:1-3, and as a result removed a significant barrier between the worship of African Traditional Religion and African Indigenous Churches in the area (Mafu 2000:413).

These are necessarily only a brief set of sketches of biblical encounters in Africa and they are here to illustrate the continuing importance of the Bible in Africa and to set a local context in which I and the students who participated in this study read and interpret the Bible. However, at the same time, I need to avoid giving the impression that readers of the Bible in Africa are in any way a homogeneous “they” which can be generalized and therefore marginalised at will. While the majority of readers of the Bible in Africa may be, as the studies above suggest, largely illiterate, pre-critical and untrained (cf. West 1999:29), this is not the case of the students who participated in this study. To begin with they are far from illiterate, rather they are part of the small privileged minority of people in Africa who have completed their secondary education with a qualification which allows them to pass on to the tertiary level. In a continent where illiteracy rates remain high this gives these students a potential access to power which few of their contemporaries share. Secondly, while most first level students in the School of Theology would be untrained in Biblical Studies and therefore read the Bible pre-critically, a number of the students who participated in this study had completed one year, or more, of tertiary level training, either in the University or seminary.

So far I have accounted for the presence of ordinary readers in this thesis and discussed the resources they bring to the interpretation of the Bible. What I have not yet done is to justify the amount of space that the student voice will occupy in this work. Before I do this however,

I feel it is necessary to explain the use of qualitative research methods in this thesis. There has been much said and written in recent times about the distinction between and relative merits and demerits of qualitative research and its rival quantitative research. The distinction that is usually drawn is that quantitative research is based on 'hard' data in the form of opinion polls or questionnaires which can be easily analysed by statistical computer software packages. In the quantitative style of research the researcher is ideally detached from the process and therefore she is able to produce research that is objective, reliable, and independent of context. By contrast qualitative research is based on 'soft' data, depth interviews and long term participant observation in which the researcher is explicitly involved in the process and produces research in which she constructs and interprets the social reality and its meaning, and is constrained by particular contexts of her subjects. However, as both Bauer and Neuman point out there is in fact very little research that does not include elements of both styles of research and the distinction is most often promoted by the interests of publishers who have spotted the marketing potential of the rivalry and polemic between proponents of both sides (Neuman 2000:16-17, Bauer et al 2000:7).

Be that as it may, in this thesis I have tended to use primarily qualitative research methods in the collection and analysis of my data with only a few instances where I have alluded to numbers or rudimentary statistics which have emerged from my data analysis. My use of qualitative methodology is also clearly linked with the issues I have already addressed in the previous section of this chapter in which I have expressed my interest in social location and local issues over generalization and global issues. Qualitative research methods are also more compatible with my interest in reader response or "reading with" ordinary readers because of their focus on the particular and the social context rather than value free and context independent statistics. Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration Bauer et al's (2000: 12-16) point that qualitative research does not intrinsically give a more critical analysis of the context, nor does it naturally lend itself to empowering and "giving voice" to its subjects. Instead these qualities can emerge in any research that is committed to bringing them about and that it is the researcher, rather than the methodology, who sets the analytical and moral tone of the research.

Having provided a justification for my use of qualitative research methods, I will return to the question I raised earlier about the size and the presence of the student voice in this thesis. Probably the first question that needs to be raised is the question of the reliability of the student voice as it emerges in the presentation of the data in this thesis. This question is legitimate in the absence of any statistical or numerical measure to show that my findings are anything more than aberrations. Equally important is the issue of the artificial nature and constructedness of the formal interviews that were my main method of data collection. How is it that I can be sure that the students did not tell me what they thought I wanted to hear? On the other hand, it might be equally true that the students were constrained by what they could say in the interviews by my presence as a member of staff, albeit a marginal one. In the past, qualitative researches have tried to overcome questions about the reliability of their findings through the method of the triangulation of data. This is a means of comparing your findings with those “collected by a variety of methods, or from a variety of sources, or by a variety of researchers or via the lenses of a variety of theoretical perspectives” (Ely et al 1997:34, cf. Bauer and Gaskell 2000: 367) and dealing with and accounting for the inconsistencies and contradictions that arise in this process (Gaskell and Bauer 2000:345). However, as the 1990's progressed, Margot Ely and her co-authors have come to realise that mere triangulation can become mechanistic and distract the researcher from the task of “wrestling with complex ideas of multiple perspectives and meanings”( Ely et al 1997:35). Rather they suggest that data needs to be approached from a variety of angles because the refractions and patterns which emerge from the data depend largely on the observer's angle of repose. In their work Ely and her co-writers have reviewed a technique of representing voices in a qualitative study which they have called layered stories. In this technique a number of stories, anecdotes or vignettes emerge from the research memos, field notes and other qualitative data, are collected and reflected on by qualitative researchers. In these stories the experiences of different participants are set out next to each other, thereby creating as many voices and perspectives on an issue as possible and leading to richer and deeper meanings arising from the data (Ely et al 1997:88, 146). In this thesis I have endeavoured to allow the students to be observers of their own learning and the changes they have undergone in the process of their encounter with the discourse of academic theology. Therefore, in the presentation of data I have included as many of the individual student's observations and responses to questions

and situations in their learning process. I have done this in order to develop multiple perspectives on any given issue and to show those issues where many students have made similar observation about their experiences. However, as Ely and company are quick to point out, in the end even the best final draft of a research project, which has made the best endeavours to be fair to the participants, is still only an “artful version” of the lived experiences of the students. It is in this light that I have, in this project, had to constantly check my position on the different sides of the blurring line between “giving voice” to or “reading with” the students and my tendency to distort and overpower these voices with my own (Ely et al 1997:88, 143).

This then leads to the second question about the size of the student voice in this thesis, that of empowerment. In the following chapters of this thesis the students and I will talk about their perception of disempowerment in the process of the encounter between their primary and secondary discourses and the tertiary discourse of critical academic Biblical Studies. They will speak about how the critical approach to the biblical narratives undermines their faith in the power and authority of the Bible as a sacred text. They will speak about how their lack of knowledge about the lecturers’ personal faith commitment undermines their trust in what they learn. They will speak about how their suspicion that their tutors, lecturers and the scholars, who they read in the course of their studies, deny the divinity of Jesus and the existence of miracles can lead to breakdowns and doubts with which they cannot cope. They will speak about how the things they learn disrupt their relationships with their communities. The combined effect of this double experience of disempowerment and disillusion is a kind of despair, which leaves them ill equipped for ministry.

An answer to the students’ condition may lie in the field of critical linguistics, particularly in the ideas of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) and emancipatory discourse. CLA is rooted in leftist discourses about hegemony and interpellation. Interpellation is a term invented by Louis Althusser to account for the way people seem to accept and be subjected by names that they have been given (Althusser 1970 in Janks and Ivanic 1992:308). In the light of the critical discussion of hegemony in the previous chapter (cf. Scott 1990, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), I cannot unthinkingly accept the idea of interpellation in its “thick” form as

an unconscious process, but perhaps it exists when any name or position we are given is temporarily uncontested or subject to negotiation. Hilary Janks and Roz Ivanic's example of a university teacher's experience in a doctoral programme at a foreign university illustrates my point nicely. In their example, the student was never unconscious of the problems related to his disempowerment within the University context, however it was when he contested and negotiated his place and his appellation that his emancipation took place (Janks and Ivanic 1992:309-10). Emancipatory discourse is therefore the renegotiation of names and positions and it can happen at any point in a communication, even to the extent of re-negotiating the position of the students within this thesis without their physical presence. It may be enough for my attitude as reader and presenter of the data to superimpose an emancipatory agenda in the re-presentation of student voices, which was not fully worked out or made known to the students when they did their interviews. In these circumstances it is important that I, as a lecturer and researcher, change my relationship with the voices of the students as they emerge from my data, thinking of them not as moaning students who need to get with the programme, but as intelligent observers of their own circumstances who can teach me about themselves and how they meet the challenges of the tertiary discourse (cf. Janks and Ivanic 1992:312). As a researcher I also need to be aware of the power invested in me as the writer and shaper of the data and therefore my responsibility to present and represent the data within a discourse that empowers the voices in the data (Janks and Ivanic 1992: 314).

Having theorised my presence in this thesis as well as the voices of the students in the data, the final task in this chapter is to give an account of the research process which resulted in the data that is presented in this thesis. Therefore, in the following section of this chapter I will outline the research process of collecting and analysing the data which makes up the ensuing chapters. In this section I will try to show the evolution of the project and how it developed to the point it has reached in its final form.



### **3.4 Locating the Data for this Thesis**

In the first semester of 1998 I did a pilot study for my research with first year students. This was intended to be the first stage of a process that would take me out of the University to study the interpretation of Mark 4:35 - 5:43 (The pericopes of the Stilling of the Storm, Gadarene Demoniac and the Two Women) among groups of ordinary readers from churches in Pietermaritzburg. The plan was to document their reaction to and reception of a series of Historical - Critical interpretations of the biblical text chosen from books in the library. As it turned out, in common with much other pilot research, my plan was hopelessly overambitious. The reading tasks that I set the students consisted of 12-15 pages (single spaced) of academic writing on each story, which was in addition to their load of prescribed reading for their courses. Furthermore, they were expected to discuss these readings in groups comparing their interpretation of the biblical stories with those of the Historical-Critical scholars and then to hand in written answers to a series of basic questions I set them each week. Not surprisingly, I found that attendance at these sessions began to wane as the semester drew to a close and I also had great difficulty persuading the students to hand in the written feed back which I required as my data. It was soon very clear to me that the size of the passage from Mark that I wanted studied would have to be reduced so that the students could concentrate on one story only. In addition I realised that I would have to provide incentives for attendance, by varying the tasks and making them more enjoyable (See Appendix Two:304-317).

As the project developed, I tried to expand the search beyond first years to see how the reactions of second, third and fourth year students compared with those of the first years through the instrument of interviews which explored educational background, attitudes to the School of Theology, attitudes to the Bible, to the pericope and to miracles (See Appendix One:300 -303). Through this I hoped to develop a picture of the context in which the students were interpreting the text and what these interpretations have to tell the School of Theology about the reception of Biblical Studies in the School. As a result of these observations I found that the whole focus of my thesis was being changed. I also yielded to the suggestions of my supervisors that this study should have its focus in the School of Theology. With this change of focus came a whole set of new questions. This was no longer a study simply of reaction

and reception of Historical-Critical writings by ordinary readers. By studying our student's interpretations I would in effect be assessing the impact of theological education on the way they read the Bible. So I began to ask questions about the outcomes, in terms of education and literacy, which theological, and in particular, Biblical Studies education was trying to achieve.

In the first semester of 1999 I conducted a series of tutorials with the incoming first level class of Biblical Studies. The aim of these tutorials was to collect the readings of the pericope of the Stilling of the Storm (Mark 4:35f) by the students and to contrast these with their reactions to some selected scholarly readings of the same text. I also had in mind that I might, through this process, begin to build up a profile of our first level students and to begin to develop some sense of the effects of the Biblical Studies programme on their reception of biblical texts. The method that I used to collect the necessary data was to set a series of tasks to which the students would give written feedback. I presented the students with a work sheet with the intention that this would facilitate their participation in the tutorials, which included the intended outcomes that I was aiming for and a table of contents which presented the intended programme for the tutorials (See Appendix Two:304-5).

The progress of my work with the first year students began well with some very interesting and encouraging responses to the Life History Exercise and to the Dramatization of the Story (See Appendix Two:306- 8). Using the Life History Exercise, in which the students wrote four paragraphs in response to an open-ended series of questions about their family and educational background, I collected some valuable data which I used later to construct the section in the interviews dealing with these issues. The students also participated fully in the dramatization of the story and seemed to respond well to the challenge of using this a technique of exploring their reading of the text in an alternative format.<sup>2</sup> However, the enthusiasm of the students soon waned and, by the time we reached the stage of tutorial discussions on the interpretations of the pericope by trained readers (See Appendix Two:310-317), most were reluctant to speak and others were questioning the point of the tutorials and

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<sup>2</sup> For a student evaluation of this exercise see 6.2 on page 183 of Chapter 6.

as a result I also had to struggle a great deal to get them to hand in their written work on time. This was disappointing because I had hoped that these tutorials might be an enjoyable learning experience for the students. The cause of both the apathy and the questions appeared to be that as first years they were struggling with the intellectual and spiritual demands of many other courses and unable to get particularly enthusiastic about any one of them. Also by this stage in my data collection it was becoming clear that I would need more data in order to achieve the goal of my study, so I made a decision to interview all the students who had taken part in the initial tutorials and to extend my data collection by also interviewing students at the second, third and postgraduate level.

As a preliminary to the process of interviewing I did an initial analysis of the responses of the first year students in my tutorials to the questions about their life histories from which I developed the opening section of the questionnaire which aimed to gather more background information on the students, especially their educational background (See Appendix One:300). I then expanded the questionnaire to include questions designed to elicit their reaction to the experience of studying at University, their perception of gender, race and power relationships within the School of Theology, their relationship with their denomination, and their attitude to the interpretation of the Bible and miracles. Finally, I returned to an analysis of my preliminary data on the reception of the critical readings by the students to develop questions which would elicit more information about their reading of the pericope of the Stilling of the Storm (See Appendix One:303).

Using this questionnaire, I then proceeded in the second semester of 1999 to interview the students who had participated in the tutorials in the first semester. Added to these I sought out the survivors of the class of 1998 who were still doing Biblical Studies and also I drew up a list of senior students whom I wished to interview. In order to complement my focus on students in the first year, I interviewed only those students who had been part of the School of Theology Biblical Studies programme from their first year of Study. My sample therefore finally consisted of thirty-four students, sixteen were first years and six were second years and the remaining twelve students were senior students who had come through the programme and were in their third year or at postgraduate level.

The other aspect of my sample is to map the complexity of race and gender. In the next chapter I will present an analysis of the students in terms of language and national origin arising from data collected in the questionnaire. In that chapter and the following chapters I will also mention, where pertinent to my analysis, the race and gender of the respondents especially where the questionnaire probed issues of race and gender within the School. However the questionnaire never explicitly asked students to give their race and gender so I will give a brief profile here as an illustration of the range of views I have collected in my layered stories. I will also provide, as an appendix, a key to the initials I have used to identify the students (Appendix Three:318). The sample includes seventeen men and seventeen women. The male sample includes twelve black men, ten are South African and two are from other African countries, in addition there were two men of Indian and mixed-race origin who in apartheid parlance would have been classified Asian and Coloured<sup>3</sup>. The remaining three men were white and are all older men or senior students, two are English speaking and one is bilingual in German. The female sample includes ten black women, four from Zimbabwe and Zambia and six from South Africa and also two women of Asian origin, one of whom is from the Island of Mauritius. The five remaining women are white and four are from South Africa including one of German culture, while one is a British expatriate.

I made individual appointments with each student to come to my office for a half-hour appointment in which I asked them the questions in the order they appear in the questionnaire (Appendix One:300-303) while recording each interview with a Dictaphone. Some problems did arise in the course of my interviews, in particular the rigidity of the questionnaire which often induced me to forget to follow up an interesting or insightful comment by a student because of the perceived compulsion to stick to the script and move onto the next question rather than probing further. For example this extract from an interview, in which the student appears reluctant to give information:

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<sup>3</sup> Such identities are still present in South Africa and the coloured man actually named himself as such in the question on nationality.

DW: I'm a coloured.

BM: Well, South African, that's all I wanted to know

BM: Right. So there were miracles in the Bible, do they still happen today?

SM: No, no, not all.

BM: Not all of the miracles happen in the Bible, so there's some kinds of miracles happening today.

SM: Yes.

BM: OK, does your church give much teaching on miracles?

SM: Not much.

Later in the analysis of the data I was to regret this shortsighted attitude in some of the earlier interviews which resulted in missing some very interesting data. However, as I gained confidence as an interviewer and became more experienced in the research process, I was able to develop and expand on my questionnaire in order to elicit more information for the students'.

Having collected the data in this way, I then employed three assistants who transcribed each interview into a separate computer file. In the following chapters therefore I have tried to deal with the student voice as fairly as possible. I have tried by all means to leave the student words as they emerge from the interview transcripts, but in some cases I have made changes for the sake of clarity. The first reason is that in the process of recording and transcription, some of the sense of what the respondents say in the interview has been lost. An interviewee may speak softly, or fast or with a difficult accent which led the transcribers to miss what they said and mark the place with (*in*) standing for indistinct. In these cases I have tried to guess what fills the gap or else reconstructed the sentence to leave it out. In other cases the transcribers may not have understood words and jargon used by the students, but I have recognised and corrected their mistakes. In addition the transcribers also had experience of transcribing interviews for other staff who required a much more fine grained discourse analysis, as a result they often included unnecessary pauses and gaps in the transcriptions which I have removed. Finally some of the respondents proved to be confused and inarticulate in some of their answers, which has led me to interpret or edit their words in order to isolate a point they were trying to make from a longer passage. I have tried to do this as little as possible in order that their voices are as authentic as is practicable, but in the end I

am aware that it is my hand that constructs the analysis and the picture it paints so I make no apologies for a bit of adjustment.

Once the transcriptions had been completed, the computer files were then entered into a qualitative data analysis programme called Nudist Vivo through which I proceeded to analyse the data (See Richards 1999). After converting the computer files from word processor files to Nvivo document files I was able to begin the process of creating codes with which to analyse my data. The process of analysis began with creating nodes and codes which would organise my data into categories for analysis (Richards 1999:53, 105, Ely et al 1997: 164f, Neuman 2000: 420). For the initial sweep through my thirty-four interviews and other written data that was transcribed at the end of each computer file I used each of the categories in my questionnaire (Appendix One:300-303) as a guide creating a node for each question and then sub-nodes for the common responses. For example for the node *denomination* I created nodes for all mainline, Protestant denominations represented in the School of Theology, the other small Protestant denominations, Pentecostals and Catholics and coded the response on each interview accordingly. These responses would then be created as node files by Nvivo which stored them and I could retrieve them by clicking on that node and seeing which data was stored there. In this initial sweep through the data my perspective can be variously described as an etic, outsider or third-person perspective, in that I imposed on the data categories that were derived from my concerns when I set up the questionnaire (Kelly 1999:401).

After going through all the documents in this way, I then changed to a more emic or insider perspective in order to create sub-nodes with which to code the bigger nodes that I had already set up. In the emic perspective the categories for analysis of data are created from within the cultural system using the native terms and indigenous knowledge. For example when I came to code a node called *stories* under the main category node of *educational environment*, I named the sub-nodes after different genres of stories like folktales, Bible stories, children's books etc. which had been identified by the students in their interviews. Using these categories, I was able to develop a picture of the complexity of stories and literary resources that the students were able to identify in their early learning environment.

At the end of this process, I had constructed an analysis tree data base which included 354 nodes and sub-nodes. At this point I once again took up an etic perspective and using the nine major categories from my questionnaire (Appendix One:300-303), I compiled these nodes into results reports, generated using the Nvivo system, in which I tried to summarise the major trends in the reactions of the students to each question. In order to develop the layered effect in my data presentation, which would cover as many voices as possible, I endeavoured to include anyone who had anything to say on any subject. In the final part of this chapter I will describe the process by which this raw data was transformed into the data which appears in the following three chapters.

### **3.5 Conclusion: Transforming the Data**

The results reports which I produced from the analysis of the data were converted from Nvivo files back into wordprocessor files. These files then became the basis for the next three chapters, but the data that was in them has been rewritten, edited and largely rearranged into three larger categories. I have called the first chapter Primary and Secondary Discourses and it includes students' observations of their home life, schooling and their relationships with their denominations. The next chapter is called Tertiary Discourses, it deals with the students' observations of the School of Theology in their first semester. For some this was very fresh while others were looking back over three or more years to their experiences as new students. The data in this chapter covers a number of areas including coping with reading, writing and examinations, dealing with race and gender issues that arose in their class and in their studies, and their relationship to the staff and the way they were taught about the Bible and about their attitude to miracles and those of the staff. In all of these categories there was an interesting interplay and clash of discourses as the students tried to come to terms with their new environment. The final chapter of data presentation is a reading of the text of the Stilling of the Storm as it emerges from the tutorials and the interviews. In this chapter I present the students as ordinary readers interpreting the text in various ways in the tutorials and then reacting to some of the major trends in biblical interpretation from the last century. Firstly, their reactions to the Jesus Seminar's translation of the story. Secondly, their response to a social scientific commentary of the same text. And thirdly, what they felt about three examples of Historical-Critical methods of interpreting the text, two of

*Formgeschichte* and one of *Redaktionsgeschichte* which are known in English as Form and Redaction Criticism. Once I have finished the presentation of this data, I will go on to the final chapter of this thesis in which I will attempt to bring this analysis of discourse within the School of Theology together and to suggest some general and preliminary recommendations.



## *4. Primary and Secondary Discourses*

### **4.1 Introduction**

There are five sections in this chapter, which cover different parts of the primary and secondary discourses which the students have experienced. Firstly, there will be a brief discussion of nationality and home language to show the variety of primary discourses at work within the student body within the School of Theology. This will be followed by my discussion of the students primary discourses, consisting of their early education through stories and games within the home environment and the effects that this can have on the way students adapt to their secondary environment within the school system. The third part of the chapter will deal with how the students felt about the formation of their secondary discourses within the school system and the extent to which they were served by that system in terms of quality education in a language they could understand and the leeway that was permitted for them to critically explore and construct knowledge, rather than accept the line taken by the school. In the fourth section of this chapter I will explore the role of discipline in the formation of the students' primary and secondary discourses, concentrating on their attitude towards the systems of discipline to which they were subjected as a clue to the level at which they accepted or resisted the discourses that were imposed on them. Finally, I will consider the crucial role played by their denomination in the secondary discourses of the students. I will discuss their attitude to and relationship with the hierarchy of their denomination as a clue to the extent of the power of their denominational discourses as they come into conflict with the critical academic discourse of university theology. In the conclusion I will look at the ideological burden with which the students enter the School of Theology. It is a burden that is imposed on them not from their primary and secondary discourse, but an interpellation that is placed on them as they enter the university as disadvantaged, oral, fundamentalist students who need to be moulded into critical exegetes of the Bible in order to save them from their wrongful paradigm of interpretation.

## 4.2 Home Language and National Origin<sup>1</sup>

The first clue to the variety of primary discourses that affect students within the School of Theology is the variety of home languages and nationalities present within the student body. Each of these languages represents a different primary discourse. While at some level these primary discourses will share common factors, in the main the different languages spoken by the students represent distinct discourse communities with different perspectives on the world.

The home languages spoken by the students interviewed fall into four major categories. Firstly, twelve students speak a Nguni language (Xhosa or Zulu) which suggests that they hail originally from eastern seaboard provinces of South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal or the Eastern Cape. Secondly ten students speak a European language (English or German) suggesting that they are White or Asian South African students. Thirdly, nine students speak other Southern African languages (Bemba, Shona, Sotho, Swati, Tswana or Venda) suggesting that they come from the inland provinces of South Africa or countries of the SADC region. Finally there are two speakers of other African Languages (Pelle and Mauritian Creole). This tallies with the nationality figures, twenty-three South Africans, four Zimbabweans, two British, and one each from Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, Mauritius and Liberia.

An analysis of the home language and national origin of the students is important in the South African context where the default mode of analysis would be to presume that the issue is a simple binary racial divide between Black and White students. The data illustrates the complexity and variety of the student population in the School of Theology and is indicative of the growing multi-cultural nature of the University of Natal. However, this data is not a true reflection of the variety, because my sample excludes the students from other parts of Africa who join the School of Theology after their first year of study or in the postgraduate programme. The first matter to raise in any analysis of this diversity of languages and nationalities is the difficulty of making any generalizations about this group of students. In

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<sup>1</sup> For a one page overview in table form see Appendix 3, page 319.

this group there will be almost as many frames of reference or background knowledge, primary discourses and social contexts as there are languages, nationalities and individuals. At the same time it is the very complexity of this data, in common with the rest of the data which follows, that provides the link to the issues of variety in discourse, identity and position that I presented in the theoretical chapter of this study. It is all too easy to label and position students as privileged or marginalised, well prepared or under-prepared, advantaged or disadvantaged or any other kind of binary oppositions which mask the subtleties and infinite gradations of scale, which exist between these extremes. In the rest of this study I will reflect on this richness and diversity while at the same time discovering patterns of commonality and also to develop a grounding for this study in the South African context. In the following section of this chapter I will initially focus on the role of stories and games in the home environment, to assess the extent of family involvement in the students' preschool education and what influence their primary discourse at the family level had on encouraging their learning behaviour.

### 4.3 Home Environment and Early Education

In this section of the chapter focus will be on the role of stories and games as primary socialisation practices modelled in the home and community and their connection to the secondary discourse practices prevalent in schools. Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* (a study of three different communities in an area called the Piedmont Carolinas in the United States of America) has stressed the essential role that parents play in preparing their children to face the particular discourse(s) that are favoured in education systems. Heath's findings are that among the members of the two communities with strongly developed oral cultures, the traditions of the community emphasize either the moral values and community building resources to be gained from true stories of overcoming weakness and adversity or the individual artistic powers of the storyteller, rather than the kind of decontextualized literary values espoused by the school system (Heath 1983:184-5). She also shows that in both these communities almost all the people can read and write, but that these reading and writing skills tend to be contextualised by, and interwoven with, their oral uses of language. In addition they are not called on to use their literacy skills in their working environment which further undermines the status of these skills in the eyes of these communities (Heath 1983:234-5). By contrast, the third group which consists of people largely oriented towards the literate school-based culture of the mainstream in the United States, the use of books, stories and writing mirror school-based practices where their children are encouraged to listen to and then discuss or answer questions about a story (Heath 1983:254). Their children are taught to recognise books and writing as "decontextualized representations of experience" (Heath 1983: 256) and that books and written tasks have specific functions in society (Heath 1983: 257). My simplification of Heath's complex ethnographic study should not lead you, the reader, to conclude that what is at issue here is a binary opposition of oral and literate cultures. As Gee (1996:64) points out in his analysis of Heath's study, the relationship among the three cultures would be more accurately characterised as a complex web of shared and differing features and emphases. In addition, he demonstrates that if other cultures are placed alongside those in Heath's study, the web of similarity and difference becomes all the more complex. What these theoretical observations emphasise is that certain cultural practices are a good preparation for the literacy demands of the schooling system while others are not. Furthermore in the cases where the home-based cultural practices do not prepare children for

the demands of schooling, school systems generally fail to make up this deficiency and tend to work on the premise that the necessary groundwork for school-based practice has been laid at home (Gee 1996: 64, Heath 1983: 262). In the analysis of the student data that follows in this and other chapters, the legacy of advantage and disadvantage arising from this foundation is crucial. I want to avoid the impression, because some students in the School of Theology come from primary discourses which are more adapted to school based literacy than others, that the data in this chapter is a value judgement on any of the primary discourses represented in the sample. Rather it is my aim to draw attention to the variety of primary discourses and to emphasise that they could be viewed as resources for doing theology rather than as literacy problems to be solved.

In response to my question on their home environment, most of the students indicated that their parents or grandparents were a presence in their earliest education. Twenty-eight students answered this question, of these eleven had stories told by their parents, fourteen by their grandparents, and two by other members of the family. The following responses are fairly typical.

BM: Who told you stories?

JM: My grandpa, my grandma, sometimes my mother and my father, and my elder sisters and brothers.

BM: And did you have reading books, did they read books to you anything like that?

JM: When I was about to start school they began reading books, but before that it was only story telling

NN: Yeah, my mother and my grandmother were very... you know when they told a story you would get very vivid pictures, so they were very ... my mother especially, she is a good storyteller.

In order to do a more fine grained analysis of the early experience of the students I did an initial rough classification of their responses, according to the genre of the stories they were told. The most frequent answer to this question was that their parents or grandparents told

them folktales. A stereotypical analysis of such a finding would immediately suggest that there should be a rough correspondence between this finding and the Black African students. This conclusion is partly true, but by no means all the Black African students had the experience of the following two examples, who were given a traditional early education in the form of folktales designed to pass on the moral values and oral traditions of their culture.

EC: Ya, I think for my background my parents did give a good quality of stories in grooming me, in my morals, and even my perspective to life. It was always told in a story how I should view other people, but not necessarily biblical stories, just stories. It was not read to me, but told to me. It was oral.

BM: And what about Shona folk tales, things like that?

EC: That's actually what I mean, yes.

TM: Yes, especially the stories that they used to tell us they were stories of creation, telling us that the Zulu nation comes from the rib, and it's not like if you look at the creation story to the Bible, so these stories

In the experience of other Black African students the role their parents chose to play in preschool education was to pass on the values of Christianity as contained in Bible Stories.

AB: Yes, especially my grandparents. They used to read some stories, some past stories.

BM: What kind of stories?

AB: Bible stories.

BM: What about folk tales?

AB: Not that much on folk tales.

BM: Mainly Bible stories?

AB: Mainly Bible stories.

LM: My parents only told us Bible stories.

In other cases the oral traditions and the values of the Bible had been fused seamlessly to provide the moral grounding for the young child.

PZ: Ja, my grandmother looked after me, because most of the time my mother was at work. And she told me stories most of the time.

BM: What kind of stories?

PZ: Um...like um fairy tales and also stories from the Bible and she used to talk to me a lot about issues around us and things like that.

Still other Black African students appeared to report that their parents and grandparents had neither time nor inclination for telling stories whatsoever.<sup>2</sup>

BM: I'm looking now at your education environment. Your parents, your grandparents, other members of your family, did they tell you stories or things like that, or read for you?

OS: No, no, no.

BM: Nothing like that?

OS: No.

BM: Did your parents, grandparents or other members of your family provide you with a rich environment of stories when you were a young child?

LZ: No, not exactly.

The diversity of the responses defies an easy correlation between genre and race. The cosy picture of the ancient grandmother at the fireside telling folktales may still be the reality for some children, but it is not the universal experience of Black African students. Furthermore the experience of students also illustrates the fluidity of tradition to include and incorporate

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted here that the role of apartheid in breaking up families through migrant labour and the undermining of the educative role of parents that resulted from their absence from the rural home could have played a role in creating the conditions for this response.

the Bible and also shows that the conscious memories of stories and storytelling are an important vehicle of primary socialisation.

The second most popular genre, in my initial analysis, was Western style children's literature followed by a category I have called oral history, which are stories about family and community history. Once again a stereotyped analysis would expect some correspondence between these genres and White, Indian, or foreign students. Once more this is true to a certain extent, but even with students of a similar culture, like these students of German origin, there was no uniformity of experience.

CM: Well my gran when I was of the ages of about one to five, or whatever it was, read me stories every night. And, well sometimes she would also tell me stories, perhaps from the war and stuff. Ja, but I don't remember any folk tales just being told orally, it's always just been read at night.

RS: Ja, there are those traditional stories that we sort of hold on to, you know. Stories about why we are where we are, and so on. You know at that time it was apartheid, and they sort of just justified the situation really, as it was.

Other students of Indian origin also had diverse experience.

LC: Yes, okay the other thing is, is the newspapers. My Dad, used to read the newspaper articles for me.

BM: When you were little.

LC: Yes, I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis, I even sort of got into a bit of politics. When I got into Class One, I kind of knew what was happening in those days.

SA: No, not from books, there wasn't any stories from books and stuff like that. They used to tell me about the old days.

MP: When I was very little my father used to tell me stories.



BM: OK, and what kind of stories?

MP: Like uh, the nursery rhyme, like it passed on from generation to generation

BM: Mauritian folk tales? Any particular type of story?

MP: Like he used to tell me what my granny used to do, you know it passed to my father and now it passed to me.

English-speaking white students showed some measure of similarity in their memories of Western children's literature but there was nothing like unanimity on the subject.

AS: My Dad always read me stories: Famous Five, Enid Blyton that sort of thing.

BH: Well, my mom bought me like quite a few books, you know the usual type of books: Little Red Riding Hood and that kind of thing, you know the usual fairy stories and that.

JW: My mother and my grandmother, particularly, spent a great deal of time reading to me, for two reasons: One, because they loved books, but secondly because I'm also dyslexic so they would help me out with that process.

MB: Not a lot of stories, but more stories relating to family and incidents within family history, kind of story. And then other stories would have been just your children's books, that kind.

TL: They occasionally read stories, um, not very often. If I was told a story, sometimes it would be made up, my Dad would often make up stories and that, but it wouldn't be anything serious or any traditional stories or anything like that.

These experiences show the variety of ways in which stories act as primary socialisation, ranging from the explicit use of oral traditions to explain and justify the position in which the family finds itself to the more diffuse utilisation of popular literature with no overt goal in mind. Of all the students interviewed, only three students, who grew up in orphanages, had a

largely common experience. As children in the care of an institution they had, mostly, to provide the resources of primary socialisation for themselves.

SD: Well, I didn't really grow up with my parents, I grew up as an orphan. I grew up on an orphanage mission, back in Liberia, and on this mission school we didn't have people to really sit us down as family to tell stories or to provide a rich environment, like you, because we were orphaned children. So we were in a dormitory, and that's how I grew up, and it was at this mission school I completed my primary and junior high education.

BM: But if you were brought up on the mission if we can go back did anyone at the mission then, tell you stories?

RN: No, they didn't tell us stories, they tell us they are too busy.

BM: I know in your case, you were in the orphanage, did you get any stories or anything when you were a young child?

DW: Ja, but the nuns would read us stories in the evening.

BM: OK, nobody really personally told you stories?

DW: No.

Another aspect of preschool education and primary socialisation provided by families and peer-groups are games. Games can play a variety of functions in primary socialisation from providing skills useful for schooling including writing and counting, to equipping young children with social and group interaction skills. The reason for asking these questions was to find out the extent to which the students in the sample had received games which built direct schooling skills which together with stories and books would stand them in good stead in the school system. In their responses eleven of the students remembered being provided with unstructured resources, like dolls, board-games, soccer balls, but nothing aimed specifically at school preparation.

DAW: We played all the games that people played, board type games, snakes and ladder type games.

TL: I think that games that we used to play were just the common sort of games that you play with friends you know, cards, um, running games and that sort of thing. Monopoly, you know, that sort of stuff. Nothing too educational you know.

NQ: Games were provided, we used to play house with my friends. My grandmother used to make dolls for me... sew them up.

DS: I had little books, like the story books, ya, I think I had three of them, and I also had some dolls to play with.

By contrast, overt primary socialisation practices are illustrated by the memories of one student who spoke of how playing on the streets with the other children produced one type of socialisation and resources for learning, while at home he was socialised into the family's ways of being.

MR: I cannot say from a family level, cause with things like we actually as young boys and girls we played them in the streets and uh... that is where we made the learning, but to say at home, no. But there we were learning, for instance how to behave - in the family...

Others had the experience common to most rural South Africans, poverty and chronic lack of material resources, in which communal games and peer groups provided an important source of primary socialisation.

MAN: Before school? Because I grew up from the rural area I never got things like games when I was young, but we used to make games for ourselves.

BM: Like what.

MAN: Like soccer, playing soccer.

TM: Yes, although we did have some things using teams, playing it and making some balls with the plastics, and played around maybe kicking, playing soccer.

PZ: Not really, not my parents. But when I played with other children we had our own games.

In contrast to this experience are the almost idyllic circumstances of white Europeans and South Africans, where a rural life provided a safe environment to explore and learn while still being provided with resources which would be valuable when faced with demands of the schooling.

AS: I think we always used to play games. I can't really remember actually. It would mostly be outside games I think because we used to live in a caravan when I was that age so there wasn't much room.

RS: Not really other than toys, some of the toys that were given to us to play with. But I mean, before preschool... I really just played on the farm more than anything. And I didn't get much sort of training, and that.

There were another large group of students who were provided with more structured educational games or other resources as part of their parents attempts at primary socialisation. As with stories, the influence of the Bible was a major factor in some parents' idea of appropriate preschool games.

KK: The one thing that I still remember very well, I had a puzzle box, on the Bible. It was a cross and then divided into four parts, it was a cross, then the top left, the top right, bottom left, bottom right ...they all ... represented different sections of the Bible.

Other parents focussed more directly on school readiness, although some showed more creative flair than others, as the following examples illustrate.

MP: Like my mother she used to teach me some of the like, teach me at home so that I can know better like at school. And, me and my two brothers we used to play the games like naming the country and guessing the capital ...

OS: Ja, I mean they did provide some games like we drew pictures and things like that, and colouring and you know, trying to let me say this is a picture which has got those colours and they give you some crayons and I try to do something of the same, you know, just in colour.

The data provided by the students interviewed shows a complex picture of primary socialisation practices embodied in the stories and games that the students experienced before they began their formal schooling. Once again it is vital to avoid the temptation to base conclusions on simplistic binary oppositions of advantage and disadvantage, or Black and White. However, given Gee and Heath's contention that school systems tend to reward, rather than provide, foundational literacy practices, the conclusion can be drawn that certain students ease in tertiary critical and academic discourse is owed, at least in some measure, to the grounding they received from their parents and community in their primary discourse. At the same time the students who struggle with the academic discourse in the School of Theology may perhaps owe their difficulty to their primary socialisation as well as to the well-known deficiencies of the South African education system. To explore this idea further I will now turn to the students' school experience.

## 4.4 School Experience and Environment

Education systems tend to bear the burden of popular blame for a whole range of problems in society. This is not usually fair when considering that systems of education tend to reflect the inequities and iniquities in society rather than create them. This is particularly true in South Africa where the apartheid and the colonial administrations which preceded it have twisted education to fit racist ideological goals. In particular, primary education for Black students has been grossly neglected, as Hartshorne (1992) observed:

In the 150 years that there has been some form of primary schooling for blacks it has always been neglected in relation to other levels of education, starved of resources, and generally accepted as a route march from which most would drop by the wayside (Hartshorne 1992:22 ).

In the following section of this chapter I will consider the data provided by the students in my sample about their experience of schooling. The questions asked focussed particularly on the language of instruction in the schools, the availability of resources and whether teachers encouraged creative thinking.

The first issue to deal with, in the area of school experience, is the issue of the language of instruction at the primary and secondary levels of education (See the table on page 316). The vast majority of the students questioned, that is twenty-seven of the thirty-four, had experienced either bilingual or second language education and only nine had been educated in their mother tongue. While, bilingual education in itself may not be harmful, intrinsically, to most children, studies in Europe and North America (Cummins 1986: 17, Adamson 1993: 32) have shown that the positive effects are usually restricted to students who speak majority or high status languages such as English, rather than those from lower status, minority or immigrant communities. Cummins explains the negative effects of bilingual education on marginalised groups by explaining that the kind of cognitive development necessary for success in school is based on developing a common proficiency in both the first and second language to the extent where academic tasks could be undertaken in either language (Cummins 1986:82). However there is a problem in cases where the second language is of a

higher status than the first, namely that the rush to immerse the student in the prestigious language leads to what has been called subtractive bilingualism. This is a state of affairs where the cognitive development in the first language has been seriously neglected, and because the language skills necessary for school are common to both the first and the second language, the result is that the student fails to develop communicative competence in both the first and the second language (Cummins 1986:18). The situation in South African schools with regard to bilingual education has been profoundly affected by the separate and unequal education systems which characterised the policy of apartheid (Hartshorne 1992:40). Since the 1950's the policy in Black schools was that the first language should be the medium of instruction at the primary level and that English and Afrikaans should be used at the secondary and tertiary level (Hartshorne 1992: 200, Nuttall and Langhan 1997:215 ). However, at the same time, official languages, especially Afrikaans, were aggressively promoted at all levels of schooling at the expense of the stated commitment to first language education (Hartshorne 1992:198). While much has changed, in the wake of school uprisings from 1976-80, 1984-6, and since the first democratic election of 1994, the language policies in many schools have continued to value English over the first language to the extent that some schools have opted for English instruction from year one and have abandoned first language instruction altogether (Vinjevold 1999: 213-5). However, in a context where preschool and school readiness programmes are nonexistent, where teacher training in English is woefully inadequate, where African language syllabi are poorly designed to develop communicative language skills and learners have no environment to support their English learning outside of school (Nuttall and Langhan 1997: 216), this switch to English language education has resulted in what can only be termed a tragic failure. The consequence of these conditions in most South African schools is that those students who are native speakers of European languages are advantaged by a system of education which still privileges the languages of the metropolis, while the majority of students have been disadvantaged by studying in a second language (Langhan 1992 in Nuttall and Langhan 1997:215).

This dismal picture of South African education is not meant to suggest that every black student within the School of Theology programmes is labouring at a profound disadvantage.

As I have already suggested, many of these students are in University because they fall into an elite category of school leavers who are products of the few pockets of excellence in education which have survived, or come from family contexts where their education has been well supported. Nevertheless there are also significant numbers, who despite their success against the odds of a flawed schooling and examination system, face on going problems with tertiary education in a second language

In the next part of the questionnaire I aimed to develop a sense of the extent to which the educational environments in the schools attended by the students' were open to encouraging independent research or learning. In thinking about their primary school experience ten of the students thought there was some degree of openness to creative thinking by the teachers. The most interesting feature to emerge from the responses is that not one of the ten students was a Black South African, which is unsurprising given the poor quality of teachers in the average township school. Encouragingly, students from other African countries reported some measure of independent learning at primary level.

MP: Yes, we could ask the question and she will tell us where to find the answers like on our own, have to research work.

PM: Unless you were a member of some clubs, like we had a Science club. That's the only place where you could really like go and do research and find your own answers. Otherwise, in a class situation, it was mostly given to you.

JM: But I think when you are doing like the last two years, at least you're now in a position to say something, contribute something towards any subject.

Students from more privileged White and Indian Schools in South Africa also reported a degree of openness by some of their teachers.

DAW: It's quite difficult to recall, it was a long time ago, but I would say there was some. It would vary through teachers, some it was very teacher talk, and you just listen,



and write down and be good and regurgitate, but there were others who did allow you to explore.

SA: Sometimes. In English we used to have a lot of debates about topics and current issues...

BM: Even in primary school?

SA: Yes, in primary school. But that was just English

**A student from Lesotho remembers struggling to become an independent learner against the grain of a school system which discouraged such display.**

KK: I can't really give a definite answer to that.....I'm not sure whether it was their nature or whether it was their intention to do it but personally I've always been one person of his own kind, so I'm not sure whatever I was doing was in line with what other people were doing or was it just that I was doing my own thing, I'm not too sure. But I did have an opportunity of asking questions and coming out with my own questions.

**While another student had a predictable, if not very objective, measure of what constituted an open environment in Primary School.**

AS: School, well I went to about five different primary schools. All of them seemed to be quite open. Three of them were Christian schools, so there was a good environment.

**By high-school, nineteen students felt that independent learning and questioning of teachers was being encouraged even in some township schools, but only in a very limited sphere.**

DS: Ja, sometimes, but not ...

BM: What kind of subjects?

DS: In Agriculture and Science

OS: OK, like in Biology then OK, you will just come up with our own discovery.

MR: There were 'flexible' subjects, where you could sometimes go and look for answers like, History and Biblical Studies.

NQ: Only the history teacher was like that, where you could ask questions freely, I think it's maybe because he had a political, he was politically minded, and so he was concerned, especially with us, wanting to know how we grew up, our background our experiences. So he would allow us to ask questions and come up with answers that you think are suitable.

More rarely, students reported an experience where the environment in the school was free and open for the students to ask questions from their teachers. However, there is significantly no mention in this response of independent research and thinking.

MAN: Yes, I think in high school it was a good environment because we were able to ask questions freely, to our teachers.

Only in cases where South African students had previous tertiary qualification, before coming to the School of Theology, did they report any encouragement for creativity and independent thinking. Significantly, in the example quoted below, the student had moved from the disadvantaged black education system to an institution where she had the luxury of well-trained teachers.

PZ: But after Std. 8 I went to Amanzimtoti College of Education, and most of the teachers there were white and that was totally different for me. They expected us to be creative and think for ourselves... it was a challenge but um, Ja, I also feel like I learnt a lot from that.

In countries outside South Africa the role of school clubs remained important for independent learning.

LM: Yes in a way, like in the clubs, there were these clubs where you were free to join, Science Club, Wool Making Club, Art Club. That was the place where you could ask questions.

But in most schools there was virtually no encouragement of independent learning even in those schools which might have been termed privileged. Students from all classes and racial classification in South Africa shared the common experience of coming up against the limited knowledge and imagination of their teachers, trained in the authoritarian mode of Christian national Education, and suffering the consequences if they had the temerity to ask questions or try to probe further. Some students who felt inclined to do some of their own research reported that they were forced to do so against the prevailing ethos of their school which discouraged or even actively banned questioning and independent thinking.

CM: Well, not really. Like if you did disagree, the teacher would say well it's not right or whatever. So, it was I remember I had a mathematics class once, and the teacher was definitely teaching the wrong maths, and I challenged her and she just went through the roof.

DW: I wouldn't really say so also, because in high school it would be more or less the same thing, I think it was throughout our education. The high school teachers have like, a limited amount of knowledge, they know what the text books say about it, and nothing really more. So if you asked any other questions, perhaps you watched a documentary, then they wouldn't really know what you spoke about.

TT: In high school...it...Ja the environment did allow for questions to be asked but there it was still also more like the teacher has all the answers, you didn't have to go and find the answers anywhere, but the environment did facilitate... where you could go out to the library, get more books and look for information yourself.

SM: Ja at high school, the environment was opened, but to subjects that I was doing, Science subjects. Because when you are studying you have to be taught, to be

given information and reading after that, and answering papers, and so to the subjects I was doing, I was not ... the courses were not challenging.

BM: And then in high school was there an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?

NN: No.

BM: Not at all?

NN: No.

The gap in expectations between their experience of schooling, which actively discouraged independent thinking and the assumptions of the academic discourse in the University, which emphasised challenge and independent learning, made tertiary study an eye-opening experience for many students.

AB: I think things changed at the high school. We were given some chances to ask questions, and to answer questions. But we were not given that great opportunity to challenge, as I want, especially just like in the University. Here in the University we are given the chance to argue a point, to come up with your own information, with your own views, you know, to challenge the lecturer. But now in the high school we are not given that opportunity.

The question of access to literacy resources is an important one in South African Schools especially where these resources have historically been unevenly distributed. The South African students in the sample described the scarcity of school libraries in most schools apart from those in privileged areas. In South African terms this usually means schools that were formerly reserved for White or Asian students or Black schools in Urban areas.

RS: Ja, I don't think books were ever a problem. The teachers always encouraged us to read and there was a little library where we could take out books.

SA: They used to take us to the library, and we used to have a storytelling time, where they used to just read us stories from books.

JW: Yes, uh, we were members of the council library...there was a library at the school and also there was the local council library.

NQ: In the school that I initially went to there wasn't any, but when I came here [to Pietermaritzburg] there was in the sense that the school had a library, and we were encouraged to take books and read from there.

MAN: There wasn't just a big library, it was a small library, it wasn't for those who were still in the low classes, it was for those who are in higher primary.

But perhaps the most interesting, though not surprising, response to the question of availability of resources was that some students from all kinds of schools found little cause to use the library or to do any extra work, even when they were encouraged to do so. However, in the light of the experiences described by students in the previous section, it is not easy to assess the extent to which this was personal choice or an unconscious internalisation of the disabling attitude towards independent learning which pervaded the school system.

BM: And were you encouraged to do extra reading, go to the library?

TL: Ja we were encouraged. I didn't do that much reading though. I did pretty much what was the set work.

LC: Yes, we were encouraged to use them, but in the early stages of class one and class two. I can't remember. I don't remember taking books from them.

But a school library is not the only literacy or educational resource that is potentially available. As the student from Mauritius pointed out, parents and teachers helped her to use the library resources that were available, pointing perhaps to a different ethos with regard to independent learning in schools outside South Africa.

MP: No, we didn't have the library, so that to read over there, we have like our library at the municipality.

BM: OK. But did the school encourage you to go to the municipal library?

MP: During the primary we couldn't have time, it was like

BM: But say after school would they encourage you to go, your teachers?

MP: Ja, ja.

Apart from libraries, the students reported that other learning resources in schools also had a varying distribution. The students who had attended privileged schools in South Africa (and in the first case the former Rhodesia) reported that they had never experienced any kind of problems with textbooks and literacy resources.

DAW: Ja, it was a pretty rich environment in that way ... the schools that I went to were based on the British system, and ya, there was a lot of reading material.

BM: Um, did you have many books and stories in Primary school?

BH: Ja, ja I did.

MB: You know I can't really remember because I wasn't a big reader myself, so I didn't go looking for the books other than if they were provided. What was prescribed at school was those Dick and Dora, you know, those things, but nothing over and above that, other than what was around.

However, for Black South African students the situation was very different. Even in the wake of the new dispensation in South Africa there continues to be serious problems in the availability of textbooks and other learning material in many parts of South Africa especially in rural and township schools (Vinjevold 1999:169-173). Even more problematic is the inappropriate and badly written content of many textbooks that have been prescribed in Black schools (Nuttall and Langhan 1997:217). As a result the students tend to remember making the best of limited resources by memorising the lessons or resorting to oral traditions, rather than making use of textbooks.

MAN: Yes, very much because we were having lots of stories that we were reading, and sometimes we had to memorize them, just repeating those stories.

BM: Did your teachers in primary school provide many stories and books for you?

DS: Ja, we had dance like a story, like we were doing them like poems.

Once again there is an emerging pattern which suggests that schools in other parts of Africa had more success in providing learning materials for their learners. This student from Zimbabwe still vividly remembers the experience of coming to school for the first time and being faced with the demands of academic discourse.

EC: Yes, they did. And I must say that it was a very big change, cause coming from home where we didn't read, and you come to school from first level, grade one, we were given readings, we were given homework, many things to do.

To sum up this analysis of the learning environment of the students, before they arrived at University of Natal, I found two countervailing patterns. On the one hand the picture in South Africa pointed to White and perhaps Asian students enjoying privileged education and with ample resources, set alongside the Black students, on the other hand, who in the main endured deprivation and shortage of resources. At the same time Black students from other parts of Africa seemed to have much in common with White students from South Africa, at least in terms of the availability of resources. However, most South Africans had a common experience of the variable quality of teachers and a prevailing education ethos which actively discouraged independent learning. By contrast, students from other African countries appeared to have come from schools where libraries were valued and clubs provided valuable lessons in independent thinking. It should come as no surprise that South African students of all races and classes were actively discouraged from questioning and learning independently by a system of education which embodied values of racial discrimination and attempted to impose racial separation. As Gee (1996:35,57) observes, the role of education systems is usually to encourage students to accept their place and to embody the values prevalent in

society. They do this by attempting to exert the maximum ideological control over the minds of the students and generally only encourage “open” or “critical” thinking when it fits in with that purpose. One way in which this ideological control is maintained is through a system of discipline and punishment. In the following section of this chapter I will assess this aspect of the students’ socialisation, in both their home and school environments.

#### **4.5 Discipline and Punishment - Home and School**

In this section of the chapter I will explore the response of the students to power relationships represented by discipline and punishment in the home and school environments. Discipline as Foucault has observed is the art or the means by which correct training is achieved. It is the exercise of power through the surveillance and punishment of individuals in order to build cohesion in society and use that cohesiveness in the service of that power (Foucault 1975:170, see also McHoul and Grace 1993:71). In the case of schools, this system of discipline is used to produce “behaviours and attitudes” appropriate to good citizenship and moral behaviour, largely as these are perceived by the elites of society (Gee 1996:34). In the questionnaire the students were asked to assess the disciplinary regime at home and school as harsh or adequate, fair or unfair. In the process of analysing their responses, I will assess their attitude to the way they have been positioned, through systems of discipline, by those who have power over them in the earliest phases of their socialisation. Will they accept their positioning or will they question or resist it? Furthermore, the extent to which their reactions to being positioned are repeated in other spheres of their lives, especially their denomination and home congregation will be explored in the final section of this chapter.



### 4.5.1 Home discipline

As in the previous sections on resources for education, I will consider the home environment first because it is the source of the most basic and primary socialisation. In response to this question, twenty students from a variety of cultures found the discipline at home was strict. On the other hand, some cultural differences do show up in the way that discipline was administered, for instance these two white students emphasised the role of their fathers in discipline, in each case justifying their father's actions with reference to cultural traits which explain their attitude.

BH: My dad's Afrikaans so he's quite harsh with discipline, but it was quite balanced though 'cause of my mom....and my dad....well my dad was like quite harsh but justified in his disciplining, so it was quite fair discipline.

DAW: Particularly by my father, a Victorian kind of background.

From this data I might have assumed that discipline would be more relaxed when it was meted out by a female hand. However, as the third example shows, the special circumstances of a single parent home could lead a woman to play the traditional role expected of a mother and as well as the disciplinary role expected of a father.

CM: Well, I'm not sure, this is sort of a broad question of what discipline is. I mean I would get a smack if I were naughty, you know, but on the other hand, if I was asked to tidy something up my gran would inevitably do it anyway because I just wouldn't tidy it up I've always been a very untidy person.

NN: Mostly it was scolding. My mother hardly ever hit us but she would talk to us, sometimes in a scolding way, but it still worked I guess.

SA: My mom was very strict. When we were small, we weren't allowed to play out till late but as we grew up she got a little bit more stricter, in that she was a single

parent, so she was the disciplinarian in the family, and we're still not allowed total freedom, until we're twenty-one.

The above examples show that neither cultural nor gender criteria are fully adequate to predict the disciplinary pattern in any particular family. This is further borne out by the experience of the Zimbabwean and Zambian students. Again I could have assumed that a similar cultural background would lead to similar experiences. However, each of the following examples shows a different approach to home discipline. The first case shows that all the stereotyped premises about the roles of males and females in discipline are as likely to throw up aberrant cases as typical ones. In the second case discipline was also shared between parents, but extended beyond mere control of behaviour to include the control of desire. In the third case the all-powerful father reappears, this time seeking to control all aspects of his children's lives. Finally, the familiar figure of a strict, but fair, father appears in a form not dissimilar to the experience of the White students in the first example.

PM: I would say it was fair from my father's point of view, and rather a bit unfair from my mother's point of view. My father is an open-minded person, when there's a problem he will always talk to you, you know, sit down and discuss the problem. My mother she's a very quiet and introverted person, she would rather, she will just stop talking to you and you won't know what the problem is, you just keep on guessing.

EC: I think I was, our environment at home was very strict. We got hidings if we were mischievous, we got punished. We never got everything we wanted at any time. We always knew that we can ask for something, but not always get. So it was always a big pleasure when you get something from your parents.

LM: There was very strict discipline. My father would not allow fighting, he would not allow lazing around just sitting or playing, we always had to be working all the time, and also he strongly advised us against having too many friends because we were ten in the family and he said we were friends enough.

JM: I think my father was strict. But I think his strictness was like any to get the better out of me, and for a good character, so I would say it was strict and good.

The cultural background of students could lead to other stereotypes about discipline as in the case of a student of rural Zulu cultural background. His experience was that discipline, although strict, was not the prerogative of one all-powerful father but rather the business of the whole community.

BMK: It was very formal, my family is very strict and I was taught respect for the elder people. And I was taught that any person that is my father's age is my father, and that has helped me a lot because I can relate to people, especially in my context, without violating their rules.

Once again this glib cultural stereotype does not apply to all Black South African students. On the one hand there is the experience of the first student, in the next series of quotations from the data, who describes his parents giving him a gentle guiding hand. On the other hand there were children, the second and third in the series, who were expected, very early on, to have absorbed the lesson of the correct training, and who could expect more relaxed discipline only as long as they continued to show a high degree of self discipline. And in the fourth case cited below we are back to the picture of a home characterised by strict discipline.

AB: I think, it was the right way, the good way, because they were giving me some teachings, you know, putting me in the right way. Especially when I was doing something wrong, they were not shout at me, or punish first, they would show me the way, the right way

DS: Ja, I think it was OK, it was, I was not spoiled that much. I learnt to do the housework when I'm like ten years old, I tried to cook when I was ten years old, and I was doing my washing, my clothes, so I think it was not bad.

TM: There were some rules, like when I was between seven and ten, my job was to sweep the yard every morning that was my job, and another rule was that we should be at home by half five. I don't think there were other strict rules.

KK: My parents were strict, they were very strict.

Another variable factor in the disciplinary regime of the home was the age and position of the recipient. Strict discipline was necessary especially when the virtue of a teenage daughter is at stake, but a more relaxed discipline regime could be attributed to the favoured position that the youngest child holds in the family.

AS: Well I wasn't really very naughty when I was very young, so I wasn't really I suppose I was disciplined necessarily but it didn't need to be too much. But then when I was a teenager I was disciplined more strictly not allowed to go out, and to friends' houses and stuff.

LC: I think it was fair. I wasn't overly disciplined. You see I was the youngest child anyway. So I had more freedom, than the others. I think I was encouraged and praised a lot, you know for my school work.

The role of discipline and correct training is a crucial aspect of the primary discourse or socialisation of the students. Perhaps the most significant pattern to emerge from the students' recollections is that most of them declared that there was nothing amiss in their early discipline and training. These responses would seem to confirm Foucault's observations, that either powerful father figures or the community as a whole were able to succeed in their aim to discipline the children into "correct" attitudes and behaviours which show respect for those of higher status. However, the responses of the students also revealed another pattern where students remembered a more relaxed experience of discipline, where it would seem that the work of correct training was achieved through verbal means or positive reinforcement leading, in some measure, to the same kind of results. The question that this raises is the extent to which this compliance and approval of the discipline in the home is due to the

intrinsic success of the correct training or whether it arose because home discipline is so much part of the students primary socialisation that it is hard to question, most particularly in an interview with a relative stranger. In the following section I will present the experience of students of discipline in the school system and the extent to which at the level of secondary socialisation, the students continued to accept discipline without the appearance of resentment.

#### *4.5.2 School Discipline*

I asked the students about their experience of discipline at school because I was interested to assess their reaction to correct training that was related to the process of secondary discourse or socialization. Within the school system one might expect that discipline would be stricter than in the home given the much greater numbers of children involved and in consequence a greater need to set the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. The question that arose in my mind, with regard to school discipline, was whether the students would find this secondary discourse within discipline as unproblematic and acceptable as was the case with their primary level of discipline in the home and community. In this section there is also a distinction made between the discipline regimes in primary and secondary education, to assess the students' reactions to school discipline as they grow older and mature in their vision of the world created within their secondary discourse.

A small number of the students remembered the discipline in primary school as relaxed and benign or even loving and nurturing.

BM: Right. And the discipline in primary school, how was it?

AB: I think it was quite relaxed, fine, you know.

AS: The discipline was basically, if you did something wrong you would just get a detention, or something like that. But I don't ever remember getting a detention.

BH: Well, in general, I went to quite a caring, loving school so the discipline was adequate but they were still like loving and caring and things like that.

This cosy picture is in stark contrast to how most students remembered the harsh discipline of their first years of school and described in all its traumatic detail, including beatings and corporal punishment and manual labour.

BMK: Um, ...it was...uh strict. It was very strict. We had to comply by the rules.

BM: Mm, and you were hit if you didn't?

BMK: Yes, we were hit and beaten up.

DS: It was like if you have done something, someday they can take you outside and you clean the yard, and sometimes it was corporal punishment, but most of the time it was corporal punishment.

LM: The discipline at primary school was harsh, cause there was a lot of corporal punishment. And even if you were not beaten, sometimes. You were given these harsh punishments digging up a tree, or rooting a tree, or digging a big hole. So it was quite harsh.

OS: Well, I can say, it was harsh, meaning that it was like if you have done something wrong, and the mentality was just punishing you, to punish and so that I mean you can get it right. And we felt, OK, I've done this and the reason why I'm getting this punishment is because of this, but I can say it was harsh because most of the time you just get it, and you just get beaten.

Many of the students remembered the control, surveillance and punishment meted out at school with a deep sense of resentment aimed at the school system and the teachers.

RS: I think it was high. I mean, in the breaks, after tea-break, or early in the morning, we always had to line up in straight lines, if anybody was out of step they would certainly be told, and put back into line. There was no space for messing around. You had to toe the line.

MR: I would say personally I never liked it, I never liked the discipline, especially when it comes to corporal punishment, that is what I hated most. It was ok but once I didn't go to school because I had some black spots on my hand because of the punishment.

CM: Well it was I'd say between harsh and adequate. When I think discipline, you know, I automatically think smacks. Ja, if we were naughty, we would just get hit on the hand or we had this thing at school where it was money or the box, so it really was being hit on the hands with a thick ruler. And the box was sitting on your haunches with your hands in the air for however long the teacher wanted you to do it. So, I didn't quite like that concept of discipline in school.

PM: At primary school I would think it was rather harsh because I mean we were immature then, and extreme measures were taken when we make a mistake. For instance if you come to school late, you would be whipped, really whipped, and you know, I think they should have sat down and find out what the problem is. Maybe there are problems at home, or transport, things like that.

TT: It was harsh sometimes. At that time we weren't even allowed to ask questions, if the teacher thinks we did something bad then they'd give you a cane or they used to hit us on the hands with a stick. You couldn't like, sit down and talk about what's happening, you didn't even have to ask anything, so in that sense I'd say it was quite harsh. If you come late, you don't ask what happened you don't try and explain or give a reason, you just get a cane.

These feelings were compounded when the surveillance, punishment and injustice became sharply personalised in the form of certain teachers who preyed on the children in their care with sadistic pleasure.

SM: It had differed with different teachers, because other teachers were kind, others will treat you harshly. So I would say that some teachers it was good because they

knew that we were pupils so at least we have to be treated as human beings, others were disciplining kids or children as if they are fighting with them.

LC: It was, I think at times, there were certain teachers, certain individuals that actually made discipline a personal thing. Even now I think back to a teacher in Standard Two where he had just in for me. He used to scare me so much I literally had reading problems at school. On the whole it was okay, but there were these individuals which-which I think were psychological faulty who took advantage of their situation.

MP: It was yeah, it was OK. But what I didn't like was when I was in the primary school our teacher was very harsh on us. He used to like slap us or beat us very bad. It was not like now, you have the law put down. The teacher can't like, do this thing anymore.

In the case below the student expressed his anger and resentment at having to endure extra surveillance and punishment from his teachers, because of his parents' status in the church and community.

KK: Like I'm saying, I did my Primary school at our church school and most of the teachers knew me, knew my parents were going to the same church, we also had a minister teaching there and he was a cousin to my father so it was never easy for me as a person because every time there was a mischief or anything I was to blame, wether I knew about it or not, I had to answer for it.

Another cause of deep resentment was the experience of another student who remembered times when teachers would impose public humiliation on their charges in order to assert their control over their bodies and their minds.



ZN: It was harsh because our teachers they used to wash those who came to school with any bit of dirt. We would stand naked there in front of all others' people, so that you would not forget to clean yourself when you get home.

While most of the students therefore looked back on their experience of discipline in primary school with a good deal of resentment, for a very few of the students their view of discipline in primary school was that it was strict but fair, or else they claimed never to have experienced this discipline due to their own good behaviour.

MB: It was strict. Somewhere between - more than adequate, but it was adequate, but it was strict, as I remember it but not harsh, you were sent out of the classroom you would go to your principal or lines writing lines, those kind of things.

NN: I think it was adequate. I mean sometimes I think it could be harsh because you get corporal punishment, but it wasn't bad.

RN: I wouldn't say much about it because you know I was not a person who was doing a lot of things which would require discipline, I would just walk from home to school, and from school to home. So I've never been in an office for that nature, I know nothing about the discipline there.

With such students the question must arise, as it did in the case of the primary discourse, whether this lack of criticism of the discipline regime at the primary school level is a measure of the success of the correct training carried out within the secondary discourse or not. In the light of these few examples it would seem that the students quoted above have completely absorbed the idea that strict discipline was for their own good. However, it is also important to note that these students are a small minority, even in this sample, and cannot be compared to the majority of students who had a similar reaction to the discipline regime of their primary discourse.

At high school level students reported a similar range of attitudes to discipline on the part of their teachers. For many of the students the disciplinary arrangements remained harsh and, in these cases they expressed some similar levels of anger and resentment towards the perpetrators as has already been observed at junior school level.

JM: My high school I did it at a missionary school, so I could say the discipline there was strict because there were all these rules, and sometimes you were forced to go to, like to follow them. It was an Anglican mission school so you had to follow all the Anglican rules whether you liked it or not.

KK: I would say that it was strict. That high school it was an Anglican school and the principal there was an Anglican Priest. It was very strict. And I happened to stay with him. It was very strict.

MAN: Even in high school for me it was so bad because we were hit in the way that sometimes you go back home and your hand is not working properly, the one that you are using to write, even to write homework or assignments, it was very difficult.

This resentment arose as the students became more aware of their frustrations with a school system which would not answer their questions but rather treated any enquiring mind as a threat to discipline.

EC: I would describe it as harsh, and for reasons that at high school we found that we felt that we were adult enough to have someone talk to us when we were wrong, and we always wanted to push our thoughts through, and when we were told to stop, and disciplined for what we were thinking, we would find it very harsh to take in.

However, as the society began to change in South Africa and different sorts of pressures began to force corporal punishment out of the school system, the harsh discipline regimen was relaxed to a certain extent, especially in the senior years.

BMK: It was a bit flexible there, yah, and there was not too much beating up.

LZ: It was harsh as well, but it was better in standard nine and standard ten, but from standard six to standard eight it was very harsh.

JW: Boarding school was very strict, uh, they kept....they definitely kept the line, because it was co-ed school, besides anything else, and it was definitely strict. But in the last two years, it was a lot more relaxed, there was more detention.

MR: Discipline in the 1st years was very similar to... primary, but then after the SRC campaigns that we engaged in, it became relaxed and I would say that it was now reasonable because we also had someone who was looking after things like discipline to talk to people who had guns and sticks and things.

CM: It was more relaxed, you know because by then hitting people was sort of banned and stuff, so you were put in detention or something.

Some of the other students were privileged enough not to have experienced corporal punishment. Instead, they were subjected to systems of discipline that were more or less enlightened or progressive.

AS: Discipline was a bit stricter at high school. You could get detentions, or detention for a week, or lines, or be suspended.

NQ: It was also adequate, yes. We had to conform with the code of the school, the code of conduct, it wasn't harsh at all.

PM: I think it was, I would call it fair then, because I mean we were immature and if you did extreme things like running away from school, then you were punished, which is I think fair.

TT: It was relaxed, I'd say, there was no caning. I only know of one case when some really naughty boys had to be caned and um, it was quite OK I think.

However, in a very few cases the discipline in high school had improved to such an extent that students could be quite excited about the attitude of their teachers to discipline. But there was often a memory of the bad old days of harsh, mindless discipline in the background.

PZ: It was great, it was really good, things were discussed with you if you had done something wrong you were called in to the teachers office, given warnings. It made more sense because things were discussed with you and you understood why you were being punished.

SA: Well I mean if you did something very bad then of course you were reprimanded and stuff like that. But you could say whatever you wanted to the teacher, he wouldn't like beat you over the head or something.

There were exceptions to these general experiences, as in the cases of the following students. The first was subjected to an experience of discipline that ran the whole spectrum from harsh corporal punishment to an attitude that was so *laissez faire* as to be totally ineffectual. In the second case, the sheer load of the academic work meant that there was no time to worry about more relaxed discipline.

VM: Well I went to different high schools but the first one I went to it was very strict and they beat the hell out of you if you didn't do your work. But then the second one was not strict at all, I mean people did what they wanted to do, and go to classes if you wanted to, if you didn't want to nobody bothered you

SD: Well, it was adequate. It was not really harsh, and it was not all relaxed. Cause we were doing a lot of courses, I was doing sixteen courses in high school so you can imagine, and you have to pass almost everything in order to graduate. OK if you hadn't you had to go to summer school.

The levels of resentment and hostility of many of these students towards the violence which they were forced to endure in the name of discipline in school are in marked contrast to the approval ratings of discipline in the home. However, not all of the students experienced strict discipline as harsh and unjust. Rather, they seemed to appreciate the correct training they had received at the hands of their teachers showing that at least some students remained consciously uncritical of this aspect of their secondary discourse.

DAW: Again varied, probably would verge on what these days you would call harsh, but it wasn't, in my mind it was kind of acceptable. It was like, what happened, the cane was wielded and that was that.

DW: I felt it was, at that time anyone would say it was harsh because of the pain but I felt that it really, it helps you to understand that there are certain rules, it enforces that you've got to learn rules and norms, and live your way in a way that's expected of you.

JM: If you did something bad, you had to go for punishment or you had to be beaten. Like if you come late or you speak in class, I think you had to be punished for that, I think it was right.

NQ: It was adequate in a sense that only now in retrospect they were actually trying to develop me into being a better person.

In this section of this chapter I have considered the attitude of the students to the way they have been positioned by the systems of discipline in the home and school. The most striking pattern to emerge is a contrast between their reaction to discipline in the home, which is generally positive, and to discipline in the school system, which is in the main hostile and resentful. Perhaps, as I have suggested earlier these patterns could be explained by the fact that the home and school disciplinary regimes are located in the primary and secondary discourses respectively. If this is the case then it would seem that most students' negative attitude to and critical distance from systems of discipline increases exponentially as they

mature from their primary to their secondary discourse and within the secondary discourse itself. These negative reactions mirror the findings of the previous section where students found their attempt to explore and construct knowledge within the school system stifled by the limitations of their teachers. In each of these cases the students resisted being positioned as quiet, compliant receivers and expressed the desire to be treated with respect (cf. Janks and Ivanic 1992). It may be that most students remember their resistance to the correct training of their secondary discourse in more details, because this reflects the general struggle they had moving from their primary to their secondary discourse, which may very well be analogous to the struggle they will later experience in the move from their secondary discourse to the tertiary discourse of theological studies. In the following section of this chapter I will explore another source for secondary socialisation among our students, their relationship with their denomination. In the course of this section I will explore once again how the students in this sample react to the way they are positioned by the discourse within their denomination.

#### **4.6 Relationships with Denominations<sup>3</sup>**

Apart from schooling, the most powerful source of secondary socialisation for most students within the School of Theology is that of the local faith community to which they belong and in which they have been brought up. In the majority of cases this faith community would be a local congregation of a larger denomination. As the students have progressed in the development of their faith, this relationship to their local congregation has expanded to include a relationship with the hierarchy and leadership of their denomination, especially once they begin to consider studying for the ordained ministry. In the following section of this chapter I will analyse the students' reactions to their relationships with the hierarchy, which in most cases is sponsoring or at least supporting them in their University studies.

The first step in this analysis is to get a picture of which denominations are represented in this sample. Of the thirty-four students interviewed there were six Methodists, five Lutherans, three Anglicans, eight Pentecostals, three Presbyterians, seven members of smaller Protestant

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<sup>3</sup> See an overview of the diversity of denominations in the sample in table form in Appendix 3 on page 319.

denominations, one Catholic and one person with no fixed denomination. Another way to break this down is to see four students from denominations with a long established episcopal tradition, eleven students from denominations with a more recent episcopal tradition, and eighteen students from denominations with a tradition of congregational autonomy.

The second step was to ask the students if they were ordination candidates for their denomination. Eleven of the students were clearly studying with the approval of their denomination and with the view to entering the ministry. The other twenty-one students were either clearly not candidates for ordination, studying Biblical Studies for their own interest within a BA degree or were unsure of their status. And in the case of the two remaining students ordination was already an issue that had been dealt with.

BM: OK right. Are you an ordination candidate?

PZ: No, let me explain that. I went to a Bible College before coming to University, I was ordained, but I resigned because....

BM: OK So you are ordained!

PZ: And resigned!

SD: Well yes, but I was ordained even before I became an ordination candidate in my church. I was ordained by the EMA ( Evangelistic Methodist Association ) in 1996, as an Evangelist.

In the case of four other students where the question of their ordination was tentative, the reason was either because their denomination had not settled the idea of ordaining pastors or because their applications to study for ordination were still pending with the hierarchy.

LC: Not officially, because even though this Church is about five years old and there is over two hundred people in the congregation, I personally I told myself that I don't need all of that as long as I'm doing the job, but I know that some people are saying let us do it professionally.

SA: The only thing I know is that my pastor knows that I'm studying Theology, and he recognizes that, but he hasn't told me as yet, you know, this is the position that you should take up in your church he hasn't told me that.

BM: So, you're not an official candidate sent by your church.

SA: No.

LM: I would like to be, but I am not quite sure because I put my application form through to train as a candidate. But before I got the reply, the reply from the University came and said I was supposed to come in February, so I left Zimbabwe before my application had gone through the Council, but I'm still hopeful that I will be accepted.

TM: I came here by myself, and the church that I'm from, if you want to do theology, they send you to the college, and after college they send you to the University.

BM: Oh right, so you decided to jump college.

TM: Yes.

Having established which of the students were candidates for ordination, the third step in this exploration of the students relationship with their denomination was to assess their response towards the hierarchy of their denomination. Interestingly, there was only one unequivocally positive response to this question. This was from a student who is, himself, already a member of the hierarchy of his denomination, proving once again that those who have power are least likely to recognise how it works (cf. Gee 1996).

RN: Well I think as you know the Anglican church is well structured, you don't come up with your own personal things. All things are documented down in the canons of the church, regressesions of the church, articles of the church, so whatever you do you've got these books. You can only clash with the members of the church if you start doing your own thing, which is very rare, especially if you are in the administration because you must base all your facts on the canons and the recollections of the church.



Otherwise, the only other positive response was more tentative and came from a White male student with a conservative German background. This student regarded the hierarchy of his denomination with sympathy and understanding in their struggles to adapt to the changing situation in South Africa.

RS: I don't have a problem with the leaders of our church. Ja, I think they're trying their best to cope with a situation which requires change, and to also promote change within the church. So I'm quite happy with our leaders.

Most other students had a rather more complex relationship with their denominational hierarchy or structures. Not surprisingly, given that many of our students would have been involved in the denominational youth movements, one of the major complaints was the handling and positioning of these youth structures within the denomination.

AS: I agree with most of their decisions, but there are some things I don't agree with I don't like the way our church handles the youth and the Sunday school and stuff like that.

DS: Ja, I can say no, but I was in a situation where I can't maybe say anything because the youth were like distanced from the church, they were told not to say anything, they were not recommended to say, but for now, Ja, I can say because they've given us an opportunity to say whatever we want to say, and I think I will go against with what they are saying if I'm not satisfied with it.

JM: I found out that sometimes the leaders in the church, they don't want to be objective. Like because they did something in the past years, it's like most of them it's difficult for them to change especially the elderly ones. Usually it's tough for them to accept advice, or suggestions from the young.

NQ: OK, there was a controversy in my church some time last year about the issue of praise and worship, you know as I said I come from a Pentecostal background.

Some of the elders don't like the idea of shouting, singing and praising, they want a more traditional kind of thing, and so that was like a bit harsh on us as the youth because we are so accustomed to that kind of thing. So on other things we agree, on other things we don't.

Another related grievance, voiced by a number of students, was the issue of the consultation of the laity or congregation by the denominational authorities. Many of these students observed that their denominational hierarchies tended to marginalise them in two ways, as youth and as laity, and this led to some degree of resentment and a feeling of powerlessness.

BM: OK. When the leaders make decisions which affect you or your congregation at home, how do you feel about that? Do you agree with them?

MP: Sometimes I don't agree, but like if we go and tell them this is not OK, they will just tell you to go away.

BM: OK, so that can be a bit problematic.

MR: When it comes to decisions that affect the community, for instance, what is to be preached about, I think that is where the running of the church should be given into the hands of the community. I think that so far only few churches within the Catholic church have the priest giving the people a chance to do that. But I would say that in my case, in our diocese, I would say each and every church in their diocese, they don't have that, you know, the community doesn't feel that they are part of the church itself, their structure, the building. They feel like people aren't going there because of the decisions which have not been taken locally.

OS: Well, like when the leaders just, I mean, take decisions that need to be discussed first, you know, for change. I mean out of the blue they just come up with decision, and that decision was made of a minority, you see.

PM: I mean it depends, if there's a problem in church and then they consult, and tell you about the problems and what they plan to do, and they're open to

suggestions, then it's fine. What I don't like it when they come up and make decisions without informing everyone.

MAN: It depends on what they do propose. Sometime some of the members within the church, when it's time for pledges, compulsory offerings, I don't like the way that they use us because saying, we agreed on this and you have to pay it. It seems as if they are putting pressure to people although you see sometimes that those people, they don't have anything to give at that time.

While the students quoted above had a complex relationship with their governing authorities, for others the relationship had deteriorated to the degree that it was decidedly negative. For some of the students quoted below the deterioration of their relationship with their hierarchy developed as a result of their exposure to the tertiary discourse of critical theological studies, which questioned many of the presuppositions of the secondary discourse that is represented by the church hierarchies. However this is not always the case, as in the following example where a first year student is relating her struggles with her denomination over their attitude to the ordination of women, which occurred even before she came to study.

EC: I feel that our church is too patriarchal and the women have nothing to do in the church, nothing to say. The decisions, even as I'm anticipating to be ordained, everything is done by the men. They decide for me when I'm now suitable for ordination, they will decide for me what I'm supposed to do in the church after ordination, and all that, because I'm a woman.

BM: Right, do you think it would be different if it was a male candidate?

EC: Yes, yes. I've actually seen it, it is different

Once the impact of the tertiary discourse had begun to take effect, various other sources of conflict arose between the students and their denominational authorities. In the case of the following student, he had begun to question his denomination's stance on women's dress codes.

TM: Not all of them because there are some decisions which I'm not comfortable about them. Like say the women's, the young women's should cover their heads, and that issue of uniform, even if we are having a meeting at night, they expect us to be in full uniform. So I'm not happy about those.

Another issue that led to direct conflict was the deep distrust of academic theology within their denominational structures. In these cases students, like the following one, could find themselves having to battle with their denominational authorities in order to be allowed to continue with their studies.

LZ: Sometimes when they make decisions, when it touches my future, for example when they say to you, you must stop studying now, you must come to the church full time. So, I will not agree with that, I will rather go to school, and if they like they may even discipline me.

BM: Have they done that to you?

LZ: Yes they did, they did. They told me last year that studying at University now, you will come back unchristian, so we need you as a Christian as you are, because you are spoilt at University.

The worst cases were like the two instances below where the students' relations with their denominational authorities had deteriorated into a state of deep distrust and open challenge.

CM: Well I just don't agree with my church at the moment because like I view them as very corrupt, and so I'm very sceptical of any decision that they make what strings are attached to that decision so I'm very critical about that. I can't think of a solid example, but I would attack the church.

BM: When the leaders in your church make decisions that affect you or your congregation do you tend to agree with them?

PZ: No, and I challenge them openly.

Apart from these larger problems, there were some other niggling irritations with some students about decisions their denomination had made, like the case of these two students from the same denomination who had a difference of opinion about recent decisions taken by the governing structures of their denomination.

DAW: No, not always, I mean that's a very broad question hey. No, I wouldn't always agree with them.

BM: Can you think of any example?

DAW: Ja, I just again, in the Anglican church it's so broad, but I think of maybe it's not issues directly affecting our congregation, but for me personally I have a problem with the marriage of homosexuals overseas.

BM: Right, so within the wider Anglican community.

JW: Some of the examples, well this year's been quite hectic with the Lambeth conference coming out and I disagree with some of the stand points that have been taken with regards to homosexuality in the church. But on other issues like female ordination and the steps they're now taking, I agree with that. There's been other decisions, for example, moving of the assistant priests and things like that, which I have trouble with.

The major pattern emerging from these initial responses to the question of their relationship to their denominational hierarchy is that many of the students came into the School of Theology with a history of conflicted feelings towards their denominational authorities. Only in a small minority of cases can this conflict be traced to problems that arose from issues to do with their studies in the tertiary discourse of the School of Theology. To develop the theme of the students' relationship with denominations, the next step is to assess the students opinions of the way their denomination approached the interpretation of the Bible.

In the light of the fraught relationships that some students had with their denomination, it was somewhat surprising that as many as eleven of the students found that they were in uncomplicated agreement with the way their denomination interprets the Bible. For some this

agreement could have been a simple case of not wanting to question or disturb their traditional biblical interpretation, inherited from their secondary discourse, in the light of their studies. But it was interesting to note that this group also included some students who had only just expressed a complicated relationship with their governing authorities.

AS: I think our church tends to interpret it basically how it is they don't even interpret it they just read it as it is, and don't make any deep assumptions into it. I agree with the way they interpret it.

BM: Do you agree with the way your church approaches the interpretation of the Bible?

DW: Yes

BM: You've got no problems, even from studying you don't have a disagreement?

DW: No, I don't.

BM: OK and do you agree with the way your church approaches the interpretation of the Bible?

MR: Of course. That is the part that I like most.

By contrast to this minority of eleven, the majority of students expressed, if not open disagreement, then at least mixed feelings towards the way their church approached the Bible. Some of the students found that, under the influence of the tertiary discourse of university studies, they were starting to question the tendency within their denomination to spiritualise the interpretation of the biblical text and to leave out any text which is inconvenient or difficult to interpret within their doctrinal framework.

CM: No, because it's very spiritual and you have to find the gospel in every single passage of the Bible which isn't even possible in some scriptures, so then you basically just leave them out. And the interpretation is more from the New Testament than it is from the Old Testament, they just like leave the Old Testament behind.

BMK: I do not agree fully, because they seem to spiritualise everything and they neglect the historical background of text and all that.

Some of the students expressed disagreement of a more selective and personal nature. In these cases their problems were with particular preachers, who either did not contextualise their interpretation of texts or who lacked any training in biblical interpretation at all.

DS: I don't have a problem with that, it's just that maybe if a person is preaching, and maybe I don't just disagree with whatever he's saying, or she's saying, there are those things which I agree with, and then I don't look for the negative things, you know, I just look even for the positive through those things I disagree with.

PM: Sometimes, sometimes I don't like it, you know there are some pastors who just come, and they will read the text, and I mean it doesn't make any sense, they don't make an effort to interpret it into our own context, now how you can apply it to today's context, but others will come and do just that.

TM: Some other times I do agree, and some other times I don't agree. Like in my church there is a special tradition of appointing people who are conducting services. So if you are an elder they give you that chance, but some people they are not trained to do it, and they just read a story and say what they want to say.

In other cases the students found that studying the Bible, within the paradigm of the tertiary discourse of critical biblical study, had led to them being out of step with the traditional practices of their denominations and being unable to accept the biblical justifications given for practices within their congregations.

LM: Unfortunately I don't because there are certain practices, they are not any doctrine, certain practices in the church which they always defend using Biblical interpretation, but interpreting is interpretation. Let me give an example of infant

baptism. There are quite a number of verses quoted to defend it, but as I see it those are just interpretations.

MAN: No, before I came at Varsity, I did agree with them because I studied from the college. When I was at the college, everything was just going in terms of my church. But when I began to be objective and having this stuff of critical engagement with the text, it's where I realized that sometimes we do make mistakes, and then it's where I begin to question the type of doctrine that I have. So I think now I'm in contrary with my church on many things.

VM: Well I think fundamentalism is dangerous, because it doesn't look at the context in which the Bible came out, and analysing that. So like if you look at the issue of women for example, people believe that if the Bible says that it's right, and the truth is established, if women are not supposed to talk in church, so for decades we had women being passive in the church because of that belief.

Other students were beginning to find it hard to adhere to the narrow boundaries within which their denominational hierarchy permitted them to interpret the Bible.

NQ: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It's sort of like prescribes for us what the Bible says, it doesn't allow you to take out what you hear individually or independently. It says this is what has been said in the Bible, it's either you accept it or you don't. So there's no room for independence in some sense.

For many of these students, although they found themselves in conflict with their church over interpretation, it was still vitally important to work out some sort of compromise between their two positions in order to maintain relationships with their denomination. In the second response you will note that a very clear dichotomy is created between what the speaker believes, represented by the use of "I", and what the denominational authority teaches, represented by "they".



SA: Yes, I mean there are some passages in the Bible where they completely misinterpret it. Do you remember you were discussing the haemorrhaging woman? They are still stuck under the belief that the woman had a rare blood disease, and every time.

BM: Rather than just menstruation?

SA: Yes.

BM: OK. Right, so that sort of thing, but in general, the way they approach, their attitude to the Bible, do you think you agree with it?

SA: Yes.

TT: Well, I don't agree with it completely and yet I do accept it because it's the only way that they know is as correct for church to interpret the Bible. And I agree with it to the extent that it works for them, it helps them, they get something out of it. As far as that's going on, I agree with it. But then it also has limitations, the way they interpret the Bible- it's very narrow. And from what I've learnt, I've learnt another new way of seeing the Bible.

The need to come to some sort of accommodation with a denomination or congregation is most clearly demonstrated in the case of a young pastor of a new, independent congregation, who found himself negotiating his way between the beliefs of his congregation and his own.

LC: But I think at times what's happening there is a slight, we have the slight differences. But, I think overall I agree with their interpretation. But I'm also coming to the conclusion now that I think as much as you can have a kind of a general consensus, and that is what you should have, but there are times where like certain grey areas, somebody has to make a final stand. It just so happens that I think, somebody has to do that. There can't be things just hanging in the air, generally we have a consensus but I think at times in the grey areas, you can almost say that somebody has to take an autocratic stand to decide on how things will be interpreted.

The dominant pattern in this section of the chapter is that most students have a complex and ambivalent relationship with their denomination and its hierarchy. Many of the students have the common experience of finding themselves marginalised as the youth of the congregation. This leads to a conflict with their denominational authorities that arises from debates within the secondary discourse of their denomination. However these conflicts are then exacerbated by the impact of the tertiary discourse of critical study of the Bible which questions the doctrines and ways of interpreting the Bible which they have grown up with. At the same time however many students still experience strong ties to the secondary discourse inherited from their denominational tradition. What is perhaps most significant is that it is not possible to easily attribute these patterns to the level of study which the students have attained because some first years are already in deep conflict with their denominations when they arrive at University, while some students in senior years have maintained their denominational relationships on an even keel or have decided to keep their denominational doctrines free of questions.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have illustrated the varying degrees to which their primary and secondary discourses have shaped the students in my sample. The purpose of these illustrations is to provide a context within which to frame a discussion of the students' frames of reference as they enter into the School of Theology. The pattern that has emerged from the data is that, as a general rule, White, Indian and foreign students have benefited from a primary discourse which is more compatible with success in the school system while Black South African students have not. On the other hand, while Black and White South Africans have had contrasting experiences in terms of educational resources, they have been equally subjected to a discourse within the school system which discourages independent thinking and is prone to violence in order to maintain teacher control. Equally, both Black and White South Africans have reacted to the school environment with resentment and anger, resisting the attempt to position them as quiet and compliant in the face of their teachers' coercion and lack of imagination. Another common thread in the secondary discourse of all students is a complex, sometimes conflictual and often difficult relationship with their denomination and its

hierarchy. This experience arises out of their marginalization within their denomination as youth and as women. When, under the influence of the tertiary discourse they enter into a critical relationship with the Bible the strains and conflicts which they have already experienced with their denominations may be strained to breaking point and has led some students to break with their denominations or even to loose their vocation and or their faith.

The results of this primary and secondary discourse development are that many Black South African students enter the School of Theology and the University under an added burden of negative interpellation. Staff within the institution tend to presume that, given the chaos of the school system, Black students entering the school should accept the labels such as disadvantaged or under-prepared or even residually oral (Draper 1996), all of which places the burden of the problem onto the students and makes it their fault when they are unable to cope with the academic demands of the University. The same goes for the secondary discourses which the students bring from their denomination. In the final chapter I will discuss my own reaction to some Lutheran seminary students who attended a class I taught on Romans in the last semester. These students entered my class at third year level. I immediately interpellated them as a potential problem to be solved rather than an alternative resource of interpretation to be tapped. Similarly one of my supervisors made a comment at the end of my next chapter that many Biblical Studies teachers regard the secondary and primary faith discourses of students as something that needs to be smashed in order for the students to be moulded into critical scholars. As Daniel Patte (1995) has pointed out, this leads to two possible results, the students either leave the church because they can no longer deal with their community and their community can no longer deal with them or they fall in with the method of interpretation favoured by their congregation and reject their university training altogether. Some results of this kind can already be seen in the conflicts that have developed between students and their denominational hierarchies outlined above in the previous section this chapter. In the final chapter I will produce another case study of a student, who participated in this study and my third year class, who has left her denomination as a result of her studies. The second result that Patte outlines is that the minute students become pastors they abandon critical exegesis and become fundamentalists or followers of their denominational doctrines once again. In the following chapter you will see some

examples of students who resist or reject or attempt to neutralise the effects of critical questions on their faith by either quitting Biblical Studies, or incorporating insights from Biblical Studies into their fundamentalist schemes without disturbing the essential basis of their faith. In the final chapter I will produce a final case study of two female students who are about to become pastors who are struggling to integrate the legacy of three years of university style critical exegesis into their ministry. Now as I move on to the next chapter let me listen to the student voices talking about their experiences of clashing with the critical exegesis of university theology in their first semester in the School of Theology.

## *5. Tertiary Discourses*

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will be dealing with the clash of discourses that occur when the primary and secondary discourses, which the students have brought from their home, schools and denominations are confronted by the tertiary discourse, represented by critical study of the Bible at university and the alienating discourse environment of the university itself. A university is an alienating discourse environment because the discourses which they confront in this new milieu are, usually, not represented in their primary and secondary socialisation. In these circumstances the students are forced to adapt themselves rapidly to the necessary changes they will be obliged to make in order to be successful. In his study of how people come to gain control of the discourses they require to function in social contexts, Gee makes a crucial technical distinction between the terms acquisition and learning (Krashen 1985a, 1985b in Gee 1995). According to his definitions, acquisition is a largely subconscious process of “exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching” (Pinker 1994 in Gee 1995) by means of which the skills and meanings necessary to belong to a community or a discourse are passed on from one generation of members to the next. The most commonplace examples of such acquisition are of the first language and the primary discourse. By contrast, learning is “a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) or through certain life-experiences that trigger conscious reflection” which leads to analysis of the details and attaining some meta-knowledge of the information that is being passed on (Gee 1995:138). Gee is however also quick to point out that such definitions should not be accepted unreservedly, but rather treated as two poles in a continuum in which the values and praxis of any given culture or discourse determine the emphasis given to one, the other, or a combination of both. Gee also recognises that positions along this continuum have different advantages namely that “we are better at performing what we acquire, but we consciously know more about what we have learned,” which when applied to discourses means that true mastery of a discourse comes through an accent on acquisition taking precedence over learning (Gee 1995:139).

In the previous chapter I have already outlined the problems that arise when a student's primary discourse, mostly acquired, does not prioritize the skills that are essential for their secondary and tertiary discourses( Heath 1983, Gee 1995) <sup>1</sup>. Also in support of the points I made in the previous chapter, Kapp (1998:23) argues that the alienating consequences of confronting a tertiary discourse are greatly compounded in a second or foreign language environment. In such an environment, often in spite of the lecturers' best intentions, the student's first language and primary discourse are consistently undervalued and reference to their resources actively discouraged, leading to frustration and powerlessness. In addition she shows that English, the language in which the tertiary discourse is presented, is learned rather than acquired by students in the school system, resulting in a situation which Cummins and Swain (1986 in Kapp 1998: 26) call subtractive bilingualism <sup>2</sup>. Gee (1995:133) also indicates the extent to which many tertiary discourses unreflectively assume that necessary skills have been acquired in the process of learning in previous discourses and therefore fail to be precise or explicit about the discourse skills of reading and writing that are prerequisite for success at this level. Furthermore, if in the attempt to attain the tertiary discourse the students also encounter a climate in which their faith is tested and the sacred text of the Bible is subjected to critical analysis then the combination of all these factors can lead to negative consequences.

In this chapter I will endeavour to illustrate the confrontation of discourses that occurs when students enter the School of Theology for the first time. The first section of the chapter will consider the first encounter between the students and the university discourse in their first semester, tracing their recollections of how they coped with the demands of the university including diversity of opinion, lecturers, living alone, assignments and examinations. Following this I will ponder the relationships within the School of Theology as a further example of the complexity of the new circumstances in which these students find themselves. These relationships will encompass those of the students with the staff and between the students themselves, Black and White, male and female and South African and foreign. The

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<sup>1</sup>See my argument at 4.1 and 4.3 in the previous chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See my argument on the problems of bilingual education at 4.4 in the previous chapter.

three final sections of the chapter deal with different aspects of the clash of discourses which arise when students engage with critical Biblical Studies at the university level. Finally in the conclusion of this chapter I will begin to make some suggestions for dealing with this situation of alienation.

## **5.2 First Encounters**

The first part of this chapter will be concerned with the students' first reactions to university, either as first years looking back on the semester they had just completed or as senior students looking back on traumatic events that had left tangible memories. I began by asking the students how they coped in general terms, before concentrating on their performance with respect to reading loads, written assignments and their first semester examinations. Through an evaluation of these initial engagements with the new tertiary discourse which they hoped to acquire I will illustrate the extent of the intellectual, psychological and spiritual challenges that the students face in their first weeks of university study.

Most of the students found the first weeks of the semester very difficult for a variety of reasons. For most it seemed that this was simply a case of acclimatising to the new environment, to the unfamiliar tasks and the burden of work that needed to be tackled.

AB: OK, basically this one, during the first few weeks it was hard. We were still new in the university. We didn't know how to get information, how to get books from the library. I think it was, in the first few weeks it was hard. It was a bit hard you know, to cope with your work.

On the other hand, the stress of fitting into this new discourse could be an exciting challenge for the student who was prepared to try and meet the new expectations of the university environment.

BMK: It was stressful, because I thought there would be too much for me, they expected of me. But I found it very interesting and it was truly exciting, yah.

But for most students any exhilaration in their new surroundings was obliterated by the thought uppermost in their minds, the terror of falling short of their own and the lecturers' expectations.

DS: It was quite confusing and frustrating I would say because it's like going to an upper level and then you don't know what's going on and you are expecting higher things and you don't know if you will cope with them or not, you are just trying to adjust yourself with the situation.

For more mature students the adjustments needed to accommodate themselves to academic discourse after years of working within other tertiary discourses had their own special challenges.

KK: It was terrible, the problem here was that it was after thirteen years after my completion of high school. I came from thirteen years out of that school, so I had been working all along doing all other things, so having to try and go back to that was tough, it was very tough.

JM: I think for the first two weeks I struggled, because it's like I had not been coming straight from school, I had been working for some years, so really coming to study again, I had to struggle for the first few weeks.

PZ: When I came to university I was thirty-one years, and the first semester was very difficult. I'm a single parent and I found the work just too much, and after working for such a long time I didn't know what hit me, you know.

While, for others, like this international student, the problem of adjusting to university was exacerbated by the delays in the South African immigration process, which forced him into late registration.



SD: Well the first year of university education was problematic for me in that I came really late. I got here on March 14 and university started in February, but that was due to my preparation to get here, because I had to fly home to do some other thing, come back to get a visa, and I fly here so that was problematic. But I got here, I had to do everything they did in February and to catch up, so it's like I was really under pressure, and then I had to look for accommodation, and then I had to understand the university, understand the library, so that was too much for me. It was really difficult but I was able to cope.

The most difficult cases, to hear in the interviews and to relive in the analysis of the data, were those students who experienced emotional trauma and illness as a result of beginning their studies in the School of Theology. For some, it was overwork that led to physical illness.

JW: I knuckled down to it, but I did also have a good time, I found the work different, but challenging. But I did push myself a little too hard and it resulted in me getting pneumonia over the exams.

Also, the new experience of living alone without the support of his primary discourse community and simultaneously having to manage a new discourse in the academic environment, was overwhelming for this student.

TM: Well it was very bad for me because it was for the first time to be exposed to this environment. Because I can remember, I'm from a township and if you look at the township schools, and the university you find that it is having a lot of differences. Like if you are here in the university there are some written reactions which are, which is new, and many things. And even to be by yourself, living in your own, without some parents, and meeting new friends, that was very tough.

Most distressing of all was the case of a student who suffered an emotional breakdown directly related to the insensitivity of other members of the School to her faith and her need to understand why it was being challenged.

CM: I think work wise I was fine, but emotionally, well I had a breakdown, so it was, on one level, it was personal issues. I think the move away from home was totally a shock. I had to cook my own food and that. But the other side was that I came here with a faith that was in the box being a Christian means this, this and this, you know it was all nicely set out, and then I came here and it just was attacked from every angle. Suddenly like, the question of other religions, can we accept them, or whatever, are they right? Which would never have been a question with my gran, because for me Christianity was the only way. So, just having Christianity questioned that was a knock. And then the next knock was that some Christians have sex before marriage, some Christians smoke, some Christians drink, and all that. And then also I was in a Biblical Studies tutorial once, and I asked, I don't know what we were talking about, but I said that Jesus is the son of God, and the tutor said no he isn't. And I was arguing that Jesus is God and the tutor was saying 'no he isn't' and they wouldn't explain why, they were just telling me that Jesus isn't God. And this in the first year, the first semester was totally and I just flipped. I just couldn't handle it, cause the next person I asked said the same thing and I just didn't understand because no one was giving me an explanation.

The emotional and psychological strains of the first few weeks are connected to the expectations of the students as they embarked on academic study. Most students had underestimated the amount of work that would be needed at university, in comparison to the workload expected in School.

BM: OK, so the workload was more than you expected?

SA: Ja, and they just expected you to come up with your own point of views and everything. I mean I don't mind that, but you know it was so different from school.

MR: I mean coming straight from the high school and getting to university, from the high school I had an environment where I knew that this would be provided for me, but at university you are told 'go to the library and look for the things yourself', so it

was very tough for me especially because I had to have a limited time here, bearing in mind that my transport was leaving at a certain time which was limiting.

The analogy of drowning, under the waves of work that confronted them, came to mind for some students.

PM: It always felt like you are going under water, you just have to keep, you know, surfacing.

The demands of particular subjects, especially the study of ancient languages required to read the original text of the Bible, exacerbated the feeling of being overpowered by the workload.

RS: With BTh, Greek really took up 75 percent of our time in the first year, but otherwise the workload wasn't too bad. It was just the Greek that really hammered us in the first year.

By contrast some of the students found that their expectation of the weight of academic work was unrealistically high when compared with the reality, and this proved to be a blessed relief for their worries.

JM: I think it was fair, because when I came here I thought there would be too much, beyond my coping, but it was actually less than I expected.

TM: Well I can say it was less than I expected, because some people told me stories, like hey, you're going to university, there's a lot of work there you work, work, work.

A major aspect of the workload at university is the amount of prescribed and extra reading that is expected from the students. For White students who had been schooled in privileged

educational environments<sup>3</sup> the issue of coping with what needed to be read was a case of working with or against their natural inclinations towards reading.

AS: I had quite a lot of reading because, well, Biblical Studies was a lot of reading and I was also doing a major in English, so that there were also a lot of novels to read, but I enjoy reading anyway.

BM: O.K. Did you do much of the extra reading?

JW: Yes, because I love being in libraries so....

RS: I've never been a person that reads a lot, and so it was a real challenge for me to read a fair amount, and I think there is certainly quite a bit of reading to do, especially in subjects like Systematic Theology, but also Biblical Studies, and I could cope more or less. I mean sometimes you just had to leave out what you thought was unimportant because there was too much to read.

But for Black students with a less privileged academic background<sup>4</sup> their obstacles to getting the required reading done, also meant negotiating with the unfamiliar world of libraries.

AB: I tried, I tried to do all the readings you know, but it was hard, it was hard, especially in the first semester, it was hard because we were not able, I mean I didn't have information of getting stuff to, I mean to have, to get books from the library. I was still struggling.

Their problems were exacerbated by having to read in their second or third language and with the additional difficulties of coping with the technical vocabulary and jargon of the tertiary discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> For clues on what I mean by this term see my argument at 4.3. and 4.4 in the previous chapter.

<sup>4</sup>See previous footnote.

DS: No I did all the readings, but some of them they were difficult to understand, like they were, the English was very much difficult.

PZ: No, The language was a problem.

BM: Right, O.K. So reading was very difficult.

PZ: It was, it took time for me to understand concepts.

Furthermore, the difficulties of coping with the reading load at university were compounded by the independent reading demands of four different courses.

MR: Yes, I would say so. That was not always the case, because sometimes I would find that I hadn't always read what I was supposed to read for today because I was reading something else that is also needed. And I was reading some other stuff, which is maybe an essay or something like that. So I couldn't always cope with the reading.

SD: Yeah, I was able to cope in that I had no rest, I was really working day in day out, day and night. I was working excessively, let me say that. Yeah, I really worked.

For all students, the amount of extra reading they did depended very much on the time left over from the most time demanding courses, especially, once again, the ancient languages.

MB: Hebrew, and Greek, just consumed all your time, because you have to do it every day. So, that takes up so much time and there's not much time for extra reading which would be great to do. So I don't do it.

BM: And you could do extra reading and stuff like that?

DW: No, I never really had the time unless it was holidays or something.

BM: What I mean is say there was a prescribed reading and then they said...

DW: Optional readings, no I never ever went into optional readings.

The issue of reading is an important one, given the frequent staffroom complaints that students do not do the reading they are supposed to. While this study cannot hope to be exhaustive in covering this issue, the opinion of the students surveyed here would suggest that most students find the first year reading-load to be excessive, unless they can combine high motivation with equally high levels of competence in reading skills. This perception by the students is an area of this research project that needs to be taken forward in further research to collect more solid data on which kinds of readings cause most trouble for students and how these readings can be better mediated by the staff.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, the students' perception of written assignments shows that many more believe that they were coping easily with the tasks that have been set. In some cases this is clearly the result of privilege and experience.

AS: I've already been to university before in Edinburgh, and I had a lot more work there than I do here, so relatively it doesn't seem too much.

Many students felt that their ability to handle written assignments was heavily dependent on understanding the expectations of the staff who set the assignments and asked that they be given clear guidelines and scaffolding to prevent them doing the wrong thing.

DAW: I'm not always sure what lecturers want, exactly what they want. It's not in terms of the difficulty, but it's just maybe in terms of expectations.

OS: Well, it was difficult to cope with because you find that some of the lecturers will not explain, I mean give a clear explanation of what is required, you see, and you only realise when the assignment is coming back, and start to hear the lecturers comment concerning the assignment. And you say to yourself, I wish that the lecturer could have you know, I mean, give us this kind of explanation before we go about the assignment, you see, so.

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<sup>5</sup> For some discussion of preliminary data on this issue see my discussion of Jackson (2001) at 7.2.

SA: Sometimes I didn't understand what they expected of us, you know. If there wasn't any like questions that specified something, I didn't really know what to write.

Often the assignment also called on unfamiliar academic skills, like analytic thinking and essayist prose, that were not taught in school and were not demonstrated for them by the lecturers.

EC: I think some were interesting, that's why I coped. I would find that I was learning to engage with my assignments, so I did cope somehow, although it was quite difficult, because I would be asked to engage with almost everything. It was not like when you have math's and you just have a principal in your mind. Everything that I was supposed to do was thinking, I had to react to it and put a lot of thinking into it, and time.

AB: I was able to cope with the assignments, but I think the problem I had is the one with the essay. I was not able to, I didn't know how to write an essay - an academic essay for university, you know.

A problem with a particular subject, usually ancient languages, was also a barrier to the successful completion of all assignments.

JW: I didn't have much problem with the assignments, however I did have problems with Greek.

BM: It was Greek to you?!

JW: Yes, absolutely!

Some students felt that they were coping well only to be outdone by the number of assignments, both the smaller assignments spread throughout the semester and the major assignments due just before the exams.

PM: There were many, I mean right up to the end we had to submit assignments and do essays, I mean there was no time to play, it was serious work.

ZN: Ya, and we were supposed to, after finishing the tough essays, and we were left with one week before the exam start.

LC: I notice that with Biblical Studies, especially at second year, you study over very wide scope. There is a lot of work to cover. You are finishing your lectures fairly close to the exams. You still are handing your assignments pretty close to the exams ... to reasonably expect you to actually learn all that stuff ...

PM: I think it was with the assignments. I can remember right up to the end there was something to submit here and there, you know. I mean I thought we would have time to relax and really go back to your notes, and read, read, read.

This resulted in many students finding it difficult to meet the deadlines imposed for the submission of assignments.

BM: OK, and were you able to cope with the assignments you were asked to do?

VM: Ja, like I said I usually had late submissions.

MR: I have difficulty submitting sometimes then I will submit a day later or something.

And when the assignments were returned the illusion of managing their studies was shattered by the realization that the marks for those assignments fell way short of their expectations.

NQ: Yes I was able to cope with my assignments, the material that is provided for you so there's nothing to complain about, and also it's the assignments are from the lecturers, the lecturer sort of explains what's to be done and that kind of thing. So you don't really have that much of a problem, you can just write assignments.

BM: So did you find your marks were OK for assignments?



NQ: No, that was problematic I always wondered why didn't I get what I expected, so I guess, I don't know.

In her study of post-graduate students within the School of Theology, Jackson (2001) makes some preliminary findings on this issue suggesting that the gap between the lecturers' and student expectations of assignments is partly due to insufficient explication of the tasks by lecturers. This finding is confirmed in the comments by students a little later in this chapter when they speak about the support they need to do better in exams<sup>6</sup>. However, like the problems of reading discussed above, the question of writing support is an area of my findings that deserves further, more focussed research.

The problem of expectations also arose in relation to the exam results at the end of the first semester. For some students their expectations were higher than their ability to cope with the new tertiary discourse or their application to their studies would allow.

AB: Not that much, you know because I only managed to get 50's, not 60's you know. I only got 50's - 59, 56, but that's not the way I expected I wanted to go with.

RS: I think, ya I was definitely, more or less. I would have liked to have done better, but that's always the case. You always want to, you always think afterwards that you could have done better, but I mean I coped quite well.

DAW: I'm not a great exam writer, I'm slow, I'm quite a slow writer, and in terms of the overall mark comparative to assignments and class mark, versus exam results, obviously I didn't do as well in exams as I could have.

EC: Not really, not really. I was happy because I didn't have to write again, I didn't fail, but I wasn't very happy with the standard I achieved.

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<sup>6</sup> See page 123-126.

Other students were aware enough of their weaknesses and limitations within the tertiary academic discourse, to see their results in a positive light.

KK: More or less, because at least I knew my weaknesses, I know my weak points, so more than just aiming to get an excellent mark or to pass or whatever I was only after trying to overcome my problem, my weakness which of course I had no control over. So whatever I got, especially if it was a pass, it was okay for me.

For some students a pass, of whatever standard, was a cause for great satisfaction in their ability to master an unfamiliar discourse sufficiently to move on to the next level.

BM: Right, and in your first semester were you satisfied with your exam results?

MAN: Yes I was satisfied, cause I managed to pass all my courses.

Many of the students were aware of problems that they faced in their first experience of university exams and elaborated on some of them in detail. The most common problem was anxiety about their potential performance in the exams and not knowing what would be expected of them. All the problems they had faced in adapting to the new and unfamiliar discourses were suddenly confronting them and they were no closer to understanding the workings of the discourse well enough to be confident about reproducing it under the alien conditions of the examination room.

DAW: I think I've got a mind set of never having really done well in exams, it's the same old thing that came up there. Am I doing the right stuff? Again, not having written exams here before. What is the expectation in terms of answers? Those were the three things that I struggled with. The volume preparation wise wasn't a problem.

DS: I can say I didn't know what kind of questions that would come in the exams, and how am I going to put them down, you know. Like I have never sat in the exam

room writing an essay, and those things, and it was hard for me to think of writing about an essay in the exam.

JM: I think my main problem was anxiety. I didn't know what to expect from these exams and I wasn't sure how you are examined at university level, so I was just anxious.

LZ: Ya the first one is that when I was at my first semester here at university you didn't know the structure of what you supposed to do at the examination. Then maybe that gives a little problem. And anxiety as well because you're not sure what you're expected in the exam.

TM: I think it's the anxiety. That context of the exam room makes you feel if you come to the exam, it makes for some shakings and panicking, all that stuff. And you find yourself daunted approaching the exam question as you are prepared.

The next most pressing issue identified by the students was time management. Again this was linked to the feeling that the time allocated for them to digest the demands of academic discourse was simply too short.

LZ: And then secondly that you don't know that this week for study is so small. You're just studying for four days and then the examination maybe taking three exam at the same two days, ya that cause problems.

NQ: It was again a shortage of time, given that we are only given one week to go and read a whole semesters work. That was very pressurizing in the sense you didn't know which one to begin with and that kind of thing. So time was really just problematic.

SM: I would say the problems that I faced that I was forced by exam pressure to, not to balance my work, because I have to attend certain subject, and so I haven't done much justice to all my subjects. That is the problem that I encountered.

Although in the case of the following student, that pressure was seen as an essential ingredient of the training and apprenticeship of students into the tertiary discourse of the university and beyond.

DW: I think basically you find that the university has a way of the different schools they tend to put more pressure on the students when it comes close to the examinations. They start with a demand for assignments and practicals and then there is a test, and such. I always reasoned that they're taking us and they're trying to train the children how to cope under a world of pressure because really what they bring out of here are leaders and leaders have to be able to survive with pressure and to welcome the pressure.

Faced with the enormity of coping with a tertiary discourse which fundamentally questioned much of their primary and secondary socialisation left many of the students feeling badly in need of some sort of support from their lecturers. In discussing the kind of support they would have liked, so as to do better in their exams, most students, from across the spectrum of ability and privilege, pinpointed the need to provide clear guidelines and apprenticeship on how to answer an exam question.

CM: Well the lecturers needed to explain more what they expected. Especially if they expect a certain format, I know some lecturers expect a certain format in the exams, and just things like that.

DAW: I think probably for me I would have liked to be able to see some kind of idea of a model answer, where they say this is the kind of stuff I'm expecting, these are the points, this is the kind of length, this is the kind of approach we do in exams.

LM: I think I needed maybe just to be given questions ... like in Biblical Studies we knew they were not all coming, but at least you could pin point areas to concentrated on.

LZ: I think what we need, we need a structure, sort of like structure from lecturers that maybe each lecturer would say what I need from your exam if you're writing an exam, I need this kind of approach, and then this one is this kind of approach because they seem to be different when it comes to examination. I think that's what we need.

Some students had a concrete suggestion for how exam problems could be dealt with by the staff through providing the students with exam skills' workshops and group discussions on exam strategy.

VM: Maybe having workshops on how to cope and how to, you know, because when you come to university you don't know anything.

DS: If we can maybe have some group discussion and maybe being taught how we can frame our way of answering the question, those kinds of things.

AS: Well I think some of the lecturers, are a different sort of culture from me and I can't understand their accent or the way they speak, I'm not used to it so I think if they would speak a bit slower it would help me to take in a bit more in class

Other students focussed on what the students could do to help themselves, through small group interaction with senior students who were more experienced in exam strategy and better apprenticed in university discourse.

JW: I lived in an environment where there were second and third years around, but it would have been nice to have had a structured thing once or twice just to meet about exams.

KK: The best thing was just to be in a study group and discuss the work we did. That's the only way, I think, I managed to actually go through and revise my papers, my assignments.

RS: I think group learning, small group learning really helped me, in which about five of us came together in a room, and after having prepared the questions for the examination, we would discuss the questions and work through the material together.

Some students argued that the effort to improve their exam results, by building their confidence in the tertiary discourse, would have to come from them.

DW: I don't think so, I think it will have to come from me, perhaps, well basically I'm a person I like working under pressure and I normally leave things till last, because if I start, let's say, if they gave us more days to study, if they gave us two weeks to study I won't study until two or three days before the examinations.

JM: Then I think I only needed self-confidence. There were a few - like when I wrote my first exams, I could not write as fast as I wanted to do because I think there was a fear or something in me. So I think if I build on my self-confidence.

For most of the students the first semester at university and their first set of university exams were clearly a stressful and problematic experience in their own right, quite apart from any challenges to faith that may have come as a result of studying the Bible with a critical and analytical frame of mind. In addition their sense of failure was increased by the ideological burden that they were somehow responsible for their results because they had not studied hard or long enough. This model of individual success arising from individual effort is an essential cultural myth of globalized and globalizing capitalism which explains why some get ahead while others do not, while omitting the crucial step of analysing the societal factors which make for success (see Gee 1995:84). The students who expressed these ideas do not realise that this model acts against their own best interests, mitigating against their need to seek help in order to cope with the alien discourse of academic study.

The other major pattern looming large within this data is the sense, expressed by students from all degrees of ability, of their desire for support in approaching their studies. This includes

modelling and apprenticeship in the requisite skills of the academic discourse for the benefit of all students: How to write within the essay genre? How to format exam questions? And how to form study groups to share knowledge? In addition the second language students articulated their difficulties with the academic language and jargon of the discourse and their consequent need for their reading tasks to be mediated and scaffolded for them by the lecturers. Academic support for reading is particularly important in the circumstances where students are confronted with the parallel demands of four different courses which do not attempt to coordinate when they will place the heaviest demands on students. As it turns out, many of the students reported a concern that all courses expect the largest assignments to be submitted near the end of the semester, which causes an unhelpful bottleneck of reading and assignments just as the added pressure of examinations is coming to the fore. Furthermore, there are the ancient languages which encumber the students with escalating work loads as the year progresses often necessitating them to neglect other courses in order to keep up.

In this section of the chapter I have been trying to identify some of the academic challenges that the students identified over their first semester. In the following sections I will show how this intellectual challenge is exacerbated by other, even more serious, challenges to the students' primary and secondary discourses which oblige them to question their inherited practices of race and gender relations and then critically analyse both their faith and their sacred text. In the conclusion of this chapter I will suggest some ways forward in supporting the students through these contested spaces to a new equilibrium.

## 5.3 Relationships Within the School of Theology

As part of a survey of how the students entered into their tertiary discourse with the School of Theology, I will now explore relationships within the School as an institution and between the people within the school, their lecturers and fellow students, taking note at the same time of the gender and racial dynamics at play in these relationships. The issue of student attitudes to race and gender is a particularly delicate terrain to traverse in a study such as this, being so deeply entwined with the acquisition of the students' primary and secondary discourses. I need to faithfully reflect the views and conflicts which the students have formulated and, hopefully, without value judgement to assess the nature of the strains the different stances place on the students who are already having to renegotiate the meaning of so much else that is significant in their frames of reference.

### 5.3.1 *Staff and Students*

In the light of the previous section of this chapter which has aired some of the complaints regarding the lecturers in the School of Theology, I thought it appropriate to begin this section on relationships within the School with the students' overall estimation of the openness and approachability of the staff. In the main, their appraisal of the staff's performance in this regard was overwhelmingly positive.

AS: I think it's very good. The lecturers seem to be quite open, and there's lots of discussion rather than just reading out notes, so I think the relationship is quite good. People tend to speak what they think.

BMK: I think that they getting along very well with each other, and their relationships are personal, they know the staff they know their students and there is participation by the students.

DW: I think it's better than what I expected because I always had this perception of you know when you have the professional, and you'll have the student, and it's like a kind of downwards respect or should I say upwards respect where you the student



who has all this respect for the professor and the professor will talk any time. But with the staff of the Theology department and generally most of the staff of the university, there's a very good level of communication. There's no gap between the two, I mean there's no disrespect or anything, but you'll find that they're very understanding, let's say for example that you're submitting something and you couldn't due to unforeseen circumstances, they're understanding. Basically I enjoy my relationship with the different Theology lecturers.

EC: I think it's the best relationship of authority and student that I've ever experienced from primary up to now. Because here at varsity we actually relate to our lecturers as friends you almost feel like it's your colleague, and yet it's not. It's quite good.

The negative comments were predominantly small quibbles: For instance, the following student, who felt that the good relationship between students and staff had been compromised by the need of the staff to restrict consultation times with students.

KK: It's not a bad one but the system at the School of Theology I think had a lot of impact to students and their relationship to staff. Whereby we had especially to get to the office, we had time restrictions and we had the restriction, yes. So we were actually made to feel that much as we were a part of the department, we were actually at a distance. It's changed everything. Because you know if I can't see someone before lunch you know then I can't see him again until tomorrow.

Another respondent felt that certain of the students, who had a working relationship with the staff in projects like the Institute for the Study of the Bible or the Worker Ministry Project, were closer to the staff than other students which could cause some jealousy.

MR: I would say that it differs because you know you have two kinds of students in the Theology, you know. The first ones are the ones I would call the student workers, the ones who are working together with the staff of the university, most of the time. And the others are just ordinary students who are interacting. The ones who are student

workers are more close to the staff. They feel like they are friends in as much as they are lecturers, but they feel maybe a bit equal. Whereas with the students, the ordinary students, you know some of my friends would say they feel as though he is out there and they are down here.

Another student recognized that no matter how positive the relationship between staff and students was, nevertheless it was restricted to life in the classroom and did not extend to more personal spheres.

SA: I think it's very relaxed. It's very easy and open relationship to an extent. There is always this invisible line that you just can't cross, I think that's always between teachers and students. But I mean I can speak to most of them, but I don't think I would want to share my problems with them.

In limited circumstances there could be problems in the relationship with staff caused by problems of communication.

LC: I think sometimes, there are people that are not meant to be actually lecturers, you see academically and stuff, they are quite sharp in their minds. They have probably done good research. But they are not the kind of person who have the kind of gift for communication you know what I'm saying? I only had a problem with one guy who lectured us in the first year, who gave us assignments but he was not telling us specifically what was expected, so all of us did work, he came back got angry, practically threw the work back at us, saying you shouldn't be writing like this. And at that we were actually confused as to what he was wanting but that was just one lecturer.

This largely positive assessment of the relationship between staff and students can be seen as a testament of the efforts of the staff in the School of Theology to be open to students' needs, especially with regard to their academic progress. However there must be some questions raised about whether the students could be really open and honest with me about their

relationship with staff, given their probable perception that I was a staff member rather than a fellow student. However within the limits of this study I must conclude that there was nothing so terrible in the relationship of the staff and students in the School of Theology that students would feel the need to disrupt the public transcript of their responses and in order to get it out into the open.

### *5.3.2 Race Relations*

In contrast to the generally positive view of relationships between staff and students, the perceptions of race relationships among students in the School were complicated by misunderstandings and conflicting agendas. I will begin with the views of some White students about the nature of their relationship with their Black colleagues. This first year student was somewhat annoyed by what she perceived as inappropriate behaviour by Black students in the classroom.

AS: Well there's only three White people in my class, and they seem to get on OK. I know it's often tense just because of different things like one of the Black people might make funny noises and get excited or start asking the wrong questions or start almost preaching to the rest of the class, and I know the other White people in the class get a bit upset about that.

A more mature student in the same class distanced himself from the racial analysis of the inappropriate behaviour, but then acknowledged a sense of disquiet with what he saw as repressed, underlying tensions in the class.

DAW: That's not an easy answer, I think it's quite a mixed bag. If I take it personally, I find that I'm friends with most people, there's one or two people I have a problem with, but just because they happen to be Black, it isn't because of that, it's because of their actual character. They're disruptive, they ask meaningless questions, you know, that kind of thing. I would say there are still some tensions, but not as much as I thought there would be.

In the third year class there were underlying problems in race relationships that burst out suddenly after two years in which the White students assumed that all was well.

CM: Between Black and White students I mean we all get on with one another but there's still an underlying, there's still underlying things that need to be said that no one actually says, you know. Which actually came out in a lecture we once had, for another subject where the lecturer wasn't there and we needed to discuss something so we just thrashed it out and we just discussed, and there were so many things that came out in those discussions that haven't come out before, in all the three years I've studied.

By contrast the Black South African students felt that the wounds and mistrust of the past were still very present in their relationships with their White colleagues. Furthermore they had the perception that nothing has really changed to lessen the mistrust that had built up over these years.

DS: Within the school in general, I think there is this tension between the two, between the Black and Whites, and because of that they are not like relaxed when they are with each other, because when you're like sitting with a White person you don't know what he's thinking, he or she is thinking about you as a Black person, you know.

KK: Mostly, what has been happening in South Africa, the political situation in this country. And this justice will not happen overnight and it's there, and it will be there until I don't know until when. Blacks are Blacks, Whites are Whites and they meet for those common issues but after that they remain White they don't remain Black, and that is it.

The responses of other students however, emphasized that this was a South African problem and not inherent to race relations within the School, because students from other countries in Africa had a less complex relationship with White students.

LZ: I think in the School of Theology it's better, it's not that bad, but you know there's that tension. Understand it's like if a student is from America or somewhere outside South Africa, it's better, they communicate better with the Whites, but for South Africans, it's still not that easy, there's that tension, but it's so, so I can say. We communicate, but not very well.

Although as this Zimbabwean student pointed out, this more open racial understanding and contact was limited to the classroom sphere alone.

EC: I think it would be difficult to draw the line from a class perspective because we have very few Whites in our class. We have very few clues such that we don't get the feel of how real the relationship is between us. We only meet in a class, we all have the same goal. There's not much of a relationship between us, there are few anyway, you know. But on a larger scale on the university, personally I feel that there is still some struggle, still some struggle in accepting one another, in shifting blame to one another they always have it, we don't have it you know all that. I feel it's still a struggle.

This pattern of mutual distrust among the races in the School of Theology is thoroughly predictable given the history of South Africa and the still unresolved issues in race relations within the country as a whole. In the School of Theology the fact that the majority of the students are Black, a pattern that is not repeated throughout the university of Natal, may have some bearing on the confidence of Black students and the relative wariness of White students. It is even possible that the racial tensions in the School of Theology may have been understated in deference to my status as a White male lecturer. Whatever the case it does seem that the primary discourse, of racial distrust, remains strong, even when it has been papered over by years of accommodation and politeness there are always the underlying tensions that most students expressed in their responses.

### 5.3.3 Gender Relations

Gender politics in the classroom were starkly portrayed in many of the responses from students. In many cases the male students felt very threatened by feminist issues being raised in class and they believed that female students were responsible for worsening relations between men and women in the School of Theology. The fact that the male students are mainly Black South Africans is probably only due to the circumstances of the sample where they are in the majority. It is my experience, in other contexts, that in a class including young males from diverse cultural backgrounds, similar attitudes will surface.

BMK: But now then, some of the ladies I think they are feminists, and they are very suspicious, they are very sceptical of men and that causes some problems, because they are in a bad mood, you know, like they want to oppose anything that you say which seems to be you know degrading their status as women.

KK: I have discovered women are a threat to men in the School of Theology, they are a threat to men. They are more liberal and they are free to voice their views and that is a threat to men and most of them seem to support the feminist theologians. That's the only thing men see in a woman if a woman is saying something or doing something out of good will, the only thing they say is "oh it's a woman again, she's trying to force through, to push back, to prove that they are good." Even when they are not even thinking of it, so they are a threat to me and they end up themselves having to react to men's behaviour cause that is what they get!

In general the attitude of women students toward their male colleagues were equally combative, blaming male arrogance and feelings of superiority for the state of gender relations.

CM: I mean from a women's perspective I think like some men really still live in this idea that they are higher than women, you know, and they can down talk any women's issue, you know. Like if you talk about the issue of rape, then it's well, men also get raped. They don't see the difference in numbers between the two parties, so they

have this ability to just downplay women's issues and gender issues. But we just get along for the sake of getting along.

There was anger at the lip-service given to equality by men in the School, which was not followed up with meaningful or concrete results.

PZ: Most of the time it felt very artificial or superficial, I felt that people told you that you were equal, but when the tire hit the road you got a different message. This is because I'm that kind of person, I question issues, especially concerning women's issues and women's rights. There were times when people felt that I was overdoing things.

This attitude was even carried forward into the attitude of some of the male students to female lecturers who were not accorded the same respect as their male colleagues.

JM: Though at times I feel like when we have a woman lecturer, they have, I can sense they have developed an attitude, you know. It's like when a guy does something, I feel they think because she is a female lecturer, the guys can behave in such kind of a way. But I sense that some people, that's the way they behave whether before a woman, with a male lecturer or whatever.

However, there were also some women who felt some sympathy for their male colleagues struggling with the challenge studying in the School of Theology presented to their patriarchal culture.

NQ: Even with that I don't see a problem excepting in some cases when maybe we are discussing things pertaining to gender issues like in Bib Studs we were dealing with the Book of Exodus and the lecturer was sort of wanting us to hear the voice of the women in that story. Now some of our fellow students come from patriarchal societies and often find it problematic to cope with those feminist issues raised there.

There was even a female student who felt that the feminist line in the lectures had been pushed too far for her comfort and was alienating the male students unnecessarily.

PM: The relationship is good, except I've noticed one thing with the female students and members of staff, they really want to make their presence felt. It's like they are fed up of this patriarchal system and really want to put themselves there. They'll say negative things about men, and wherever there's something bad said about men, they'll be yes, yes, yes.

The mixture of cultures, races and gender in the School of Theology<sup>7</sup> raises the potential for conflict and criticism between students, but also some hope when, like this mature student, people can provide analysis of the situation from an outside perspective.

DAW: I think that the Black men are still pretty chauvinistic, they're struggling with some of the concepts that they're being exposed to here. Just also traditionally I mean the majority of the people in the department are men, so there's still some historical conflict there, but I think it's changing.

Once again there is nothing new or strange in the patterns that have arisen from this data. The views expressed by male and female students could no doubt be reproduced by any group of students in any discipline. However where this sample might be different from other similar samples in other disciplines is that certain of the lecturers are identified as having a particular feminist slant and that hearing the voice of female characters in the Bible is very threatening and challenging for male students who are more used to hearing their views reflected from the Bible. The issue of student reactions to the way the Bible is read and interpreted in the School of Theology is the subject of later parts of this chapter, however, the specific issue of gender bias by both staff and students is not discussed further and is perhaps another area for further research in the School of Theology.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix Three page 318-19 and my discussion of the student profiles at 3.4 and 4.2.



### 5.3.4 Xenophobia

Added to the relationship mixture within the School of Theology is the issue of foreign students and their welcome by the South African students. Most students from other African countries did not experience active discrimination within the School of Theology, but were somewhat unsettled by the xenophobia in the rest of society.

JM: At this school I think everyone is OK, though sometimes I felt that fear you know when you hear of all the crimes against foreigners. Sometimes you just feel insecure.

But some other foreign students found themselves the victims of particularly South African racial prejudices against people of mixed race.

SD: Back home I didn't really grow up in let me say in, how can I term it? Like apartheid, I didn't grow up understanding apartheid. We knew about apartheid because of South Africa, but I didn't really grow up in that experience, OK. And when I got here I thought it was the same even though here I am what is called coloured, because back home we're mixed and we do things together just like that, but when I got here I thought it was going to be the same, tried to mingle with Black students, they my friends, I consider myself to be Black, OK, tried to mingle, and there was time people just shun me, and back off, speak to someone, and both male and females students, just back off, just keep studying, just look at you like that.

These patterns of racial, gender and xenophobic attitudes, expressed or experienced by the students in the School of Theology are well attested in media reports and in political commentary in South Africa<sup>8</sup> and should therefore come as no surprise to informed readers of

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<sup>8</sup> The issue of the racialisation of politics in South Africa and race relations in general is a frequent source of comment in such media as the *Weekly Mail* and *Guardian* or *Safm*. The incidence of rape and violence against women is also frequently cause for comment by the media often in the context of male attitudes to women and gender relations in general. For references to the climate of xenophobia in South Africa one need look no further than the multiple media reports of 2001 alone, including the notorious police dog training video and riots in informal settlements in Gauteng to drive out Zimbabwean residents.

this thesis. However, the most interesting pattern to emerge from this data on relationships is reflected in the responses of a large minority of students who expressed no worries about either racial or gender conflict and seemed happily oblivious to the concerns of their fellow students.

RS: Well I find that in our class the relationship between Black and White is actually very good. I have a lot of Black friends in my class and the fact that I can speak Zulu makes that easier. And I think among the staff members there seems to be a good relationship as well. I think especially because this university is a gender equal university well at least among the staff, especially the School of Theology gender equality is important, so even the class there is no problem with one gender dominating another.

TT: I haven't experienced anything like that, there might be tension between a female student and a male student but its nothing like men and women in general have anything going on.

SM: On that note I would say I didn't yet encountered conflicts between the groups, and if perhaps maybe I suppressed, but for the time being I haven't yet. Because Black and White students they have created friendships and even lecturers in the School of Theology.

NN: I think there's a lot of joking about some being balanced and others being not balanced. But it's more in a joking way, it's not tense.

Any analysis of the patterns arising from this data must be qualified by the observation that the data in this section of the chapter is limited to the remarks made in answer to two questions in my questionnaire and does not therefore represent a thorough going survey of the sentiments of students' within the School of Theology. Equally it cannot hope to account for the structures of power and patriarchy which have constructed the discourses of race and gender represented here by the students' words (See Weedon 1997:13f, Malik 1996:71f).

There are, however, two separate patterns emanating from this data that I will comment on. The first pattern could be broadly termed positive and related to the students' comments on the approachability of the staff and to xenophobia. In these two cases the School of Theology seems to have achieved uncommon levels of openness and tolerance. But, this positive pattern must be immediately balanced by the articulation of all too common racial and gender tensions, which show that attitudes in the School of Theology are consistent with the social context. The difference which distinguishes the experience of most School of Theology students from their peers in other disciplines is that other tertiary discourses may not underscore their teaching with an explicit agenda to challenge racial and gender prejudice and thereby to bring these tensions to the fore in the classroom. While this agenda of the lecturing staff can only be lauded from the standpoint of raising the students' awareness of important issues of racial and gender equality, in the context where students are facing multiple challenges to their primary and secondary discourse this policy might be construed as needlessly provocative, unless it is carefully managed and scaffolded by the lecturers.

In the previous section I have outlined the academic challenges facing the students and in the following sections the intellectual and spiritual challenges which confront the students' from the tertiary discourse of the critical study of the Bible will be set forth in the hope that the total vicissitudes of their discourse environment in the School of Theology will be made clear.

## 5.4 The School of Theology and the Bible

Having assessed the impact of arriving in the School of Theology in two general sections, which mapped the way the students in my sample coped with their first semester of tertiary study and illustrated the difficulties presented by relationships within the School of Theology, I will turn now, in the following sections of the chapter to probe further the attitudes of students to the way that the School approached the Bible. The study of the Bible is a crucial component in any theology course, because the Bible is the foundation document of the Christian religion. At the same time it is also the most controversial because if the teachers of Biblical Studies opt to teach the discipline within any of the critical, historical or contextual methods, which make the structure or ideological stance of the Biblical text a focus for analysis, this can lead to a conflict of interest between the lecturers and the students and between the staff of the School of Theology and the church leaders who send their students to be trained there. In such circumstances the impact of Biblical Studies on the students' faith, which is the result of their primary and secondary discourses, can be enormous. I will gauge the impact of the tertiary discourses of critical Biblical studies taught by the staff in the School of Theology over the next three sections, which will cover the students' attitude to how Biblical Studies is taught in the School of Theology, followed by their judgement of the repercussions of these studies for their faith and ministry and ending with an important example of their tenacity in holding onto their primary discourses, their continued faith in miracles.

The students' attitudes to the way the Bible was handled in the School of Theology showed a fairly even three-way split, between positive, negative and uncommitted. Among the positive responses there were some enthusiastic responses from first years who appreciated the wider horizons offered to them by non doctrinal study of the Bible. In reading the students comments in this section it is important to realise that they are first year undergraduates and are often not aware of the polysemous and technical nature of some of the terminology they are using.

EC: I think it's good. I think it's good because it doesn't put blinkers on us, you know, like giving us one focus. It makes us interact with the Bible and think for ourselves, you know, actually react to what the Bible is saying, not just taking it being very dogmatic. It's quite liberal, I think I like it.

NQ: It's very liberal, and quite honestly I enjoy it, it's sort of opens eyes as to what the Bible really is, and I think it serves the purpose of making the Word of God alive as it were, rather than - it allows you to see two sides of the coin to it, rather than give one part of it and say this is it, and nothing more.

DW: I really enjoy it because, I like it because basically they don't have, there's no denomination or doctrine being imposed upon you, but there's like a neutral stance. Not neutral, in the fact that whoever's teaching the subject doesn't believe in Christ, they believe in Christ, but when they speak, they just speak about Christ and everyone but the things they teach are objective things, and each person can take that and they will assimilate it into their own understanding of how they do things, so I enjoy their approach.

DAW: I have enjoyed it, I think that it's really been challenging, I like the idea that we need to become critical thinkers, that's my own background is very narrow, very prescriptive, so ya, I have enjoyed thinking where I can look at a thing and make up my own mind.

VM: I think it's useful because it allows us to really look at the Bible as it really is, and not come with our doctrines and impose them on biblical text, but to be able to extract from the Bible that which is useful for us. Like, look at the Old Testament and the political, social background and everything, which is something I didn't know because of my background, you always look at the Bible as a spiritual text, applying it to concepts like sin, repentance, and all of that, but not looking at other aspects like the political, and everything.

This uniformity in the positive response of the students to the teaching in the School of Theology had been diversified in the response of the senior students to emphasise their individual concerns and enthusiasms for various themes and programmes within the Biblical Studies discipline. In the following case the student was commenting on her work with the

Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB), a special project within the School which studies the interpretation of ordinary readers (See West 1991, 1996, 1999, 2000).

CM: I love it. I get really excited about it, cause like, well because it is an open way of interpreting the Bible and I also like the fact that it's linked to the ISB. Our work that we do with the interpretation of the Bible is working in communities as well, you know, so I really like that approach. I'm really fond of the literary approach to the Bible the stuff that Gerald West does, although I tend to also take in some of the historical methods sometimes, so I really think it's brilliant.

Other students had found their niche within the School through their concern for Feminist Theology.

PZ: I find it very liberating. One of the reasons why I wanted to study was the fact that I was so tired of the White and male God that was preached to me and I wanted to find other ways of interpreting the Bible and the School of Theology did that for me, I was equipped with skills of reading the Bible in my own way.

However these positive appraisals of the way Biblical Studies was taught were equally balanced with negative reactions. In contrast to earlier comments that lecturers in the School showed a distinct commitment to Christ, some other first year students registered protests at the irreligious and intellectual nature of Biblical Studies and made a plea for a devotional approach to the Bible as sacred text.

BH: Well, I think its too intellectually done. For me I think the Bible should be approached in a more personal type of way and I found that here it was a bit too much based on the context of the time of the Bible was written and not really concentrated much on the relevance now because it's got a lot of relevance now, and I felt a bit.....not angry, but a bit put out by the, the way that they kept on stressing the context of where it was written.

In other cases the negative attitude to Biblical Studies was expressed in less diplomatic language with students raging against supposed inaccuracies in the teaching of Biblical Studies.

AS: I think they stretch it far more than it's supposed to be. They teach us things that aren't actually true, I mean we've been taught about having human sacrifice in the Bible and stuff like that, and I don't actually believe that happened. And also about the accepted things about the development of the Old Testament, all about the JEPD theory, and I know my father's just done a degree and he said when they were taught it that they were told that it's not even the accepted view anymore, that there's actually other things that are more accepted these days than that. But that wasn't actually mentioned when we were taught it. But other things, being read into too deeply to try and split it up and work out who wrote which bit I don't think it really matters that we know.

Other students expressed their negative attitudes in terms of misgivings at the effect of "critical" study of the Bible on their faith.

JM: I think it's very challenging, and critical and I can say it sometimes it injured my soul and it injured my faith.

Some senior students expressed the same fears as the first years, echoing an unease they had felt from the beginning of their studies.

SA: It's very critical, analytical. I think, ya, it's OK. Sometimes I feel they dissect the scripture so much that sometimes, not always, the scripture loses its meaning. I mean, as a Pentecostal, I see the word as inspired, and you know, we tend to see God writing, instead of all these people having all their influences. And sometimes I just say OK, Paul said this to the church about women and stuff like that, but sometimes it doesn't make sense, I don't know.

RS: That is a question that I've been trying to dig into and I've been asking some lecturers about. I think that you know, the problem of faith comes up again and again. How, you know, what is the Bible to me as a Christian. Ja, it's not an easy question. I mean many people, there are people outside that are critical of the way they perceive the way university lecturers or Theology lecturers see the Bible, but I don't know. I'm a bit confused on this issue. I must admit that I didn't know the Bible very well when I came here and I thought that would be one of the things I would do, but I discovered that there is not that much Bible reading done at the university. It's more a study of what people have said, or are saying about the Bible, and their study of the Bible.

LC: I think for what they want to do, I guess it's okay because we know that they saying that this is a kind of secular approach or it's a kind of critical approach. So, from their point of view that 's fine, but I think what they can do is, I think they can add more sort of an apologetic content, you know what I'm saying, because what is happening is a lot of tearing down at least in the first year in the minds of the students that come here.

There were however a sizable number of students whose attitude to the way they had been taught in Biblical Studies was decidedly, even monosyllabically noncommittal.

ZN: It is fine.

BM: Is there anything you particularly like?

ZN: I don't know, it is fine.

Many of the other students did not reveal quite the same level of disengagement, but their replies to questions about their attitude to the way Biblical Studies was taught betrayed neither the spark of enthusiasm, nor the anger of dissent nor even the level of concerned engagement which would express misgivings.



DS: I think it's quite nice because we look at the Bible itself and even the context, we look at how our community, even our country has done the things before now, you know.

RN: Well to me this is just, I would call it an addition, or a revival, of some sort, or a reminder of what one is expected to do when dealing with the Bible.

The positive and negative responses to the way Biblical Studies is taught are not surprising. The positive responses reflect my own experience as a student of theology and are the kind of response which teachers of theological disciplines hope to generate in their students. The negative responses are also quite familiar, they are commonly aired within denominations amid concerns that studying Theology at university will erode their ordinands' faith. Therefore it is the uncommitted response from the students which hold the most interest for this study of how students cope with entering the tertiary discourse of critical Biblical Studies. My analysis is that such noncommittal responses are in fact unexpressed misgivings with the approach to the Bible in the School of Theology. However, either because they do not feel comfortable revealing these concerns to me as a member of staff or because they find it too challenging to openly acknowledge the level at which their primary discourses are being threatened, the students cope with their concerns by expressing bland agreement with the aims of the course. The question whether these misgivings expressed by the students and church authorities are justified is a very complicated one. While there can be no doubt about many of the students' initial misgivings there is also evidence in the data from senior students that they grow into and revel in the approach taken by the School of Theology. In the final chapter of this thesis I will return to this issue again with two case studies of students who participated in this study as first years and who are currently about to graduate. By this method I hope to make some more final assessment of the longitudinal affects of studying the Bible in the School of Theology.

The bland agreement with the aims of the Biblical Studies course should be contrasted with the passions that were aroused from the students when I questioned them concerning the type of challenges they face in their studies with School of Theology. In giving these examples below I have in my mind the vocation of the critical exegete as described by Daniel Patte (1995:75) in

which he outlines their determination to challenge and combat fundamentalist beliefs. While my experience of the School of Theology is that the staff would not seek to take such a hard line on challenging the students faith, a certain element of challenging students' faith is inherent in the critical study of the Bible.

For a few students the most sustained challenge they faced throughout their studies in the School of Theology was this fact that their studies necessarily undercut their naive faith in the Bible and their fundamentalist doctrines and the impact of this sort of challenge had not been lessened by years of exposure.

CM: Absolutely! Well in the first year that was definitely a whack, you know. I mean I'm a bit more open now I don't want to fall as hard as I used to. So I just like, let everything seep in, and think it through, but I just recently had a lecture which challenged my faith again, in the concept of Jesus yet again. Ja, but it's, or even just understanding what the Bible is whether it's a book or inspired word or, you know, challenges like that.

MR: Yes, I would say that, because like there are things that I knew and I've expected it, but I would say that though I didn't accept them, not though I didn't accept them, though I didn't want to convince myself so much, but sometimes I found them challenging and asking yourself, do you still really need to be a Christian or what, but then with the interpretation of the Bible and with the life it been giving you, you also can't really say no I can still be a Christian.

The critical study of the Bible was a major challenge for many students, in as much as it overturned many of the dearly held beliefs about the status of the Bible as the inspired word of God which the students had inherited from their primary socialisation.

VM: Like the first thing I learnt which was really a challenge to my faith was the whole question of whether the Bible is inspired, inerrant, you know. That was my essay, I wrote an essay in that, and hearing the different views and seeing you know, we

used to think the Bible is just this chunk of truth that came from heaven, but when you realize so much process is involved in the writing of the Bible, especially when we learnt about the oral traditions and editing, and you know, it was a challenge.

Many of the first year students responded to this question by describing the major challenge which faced them at the time they were being interviewed, which was a series of lectures on the Old Testament which presented a different view of everything they been taught about the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament in their primary and secondary discourses.

AS: I think they are, because there's a lot of things that I wouldn't have thought of before like the Old Testament being edited by some people and people taking things out and putting things in things that maybe didn't even happen. About how the priest just made up the first chapter of Genesis and things like that, that I've always just accepted as the truth.

DAW: It's a bit unsettling, in terms of things that were fixed, particularly Old Testament stuff. I mean you had the old Sunday School Bible approach, which only brought out a very limited aspect of the whole thing. I think it's making me not re-evaluate my faith, but, and it's not weakening my faith, it's just making me say well, I've just accepted far too much.

JM: Like you know when we are doing Bib Studs, you know like this semester when we are dealing with the Old Testament, and the effect of, you have that awareness that there is not much historical evidence to the Bible stories or whatever. It really made me worry because to me the Bible is, what can I say, it is the centre of my faith, it is the centre of my belief. And I was saying to myself, lets say if all these are stories, maybe which never happened, does that mean I'm all alone in following an example that is not really meaningful.

MB: I think, well just to pick up on this Old Testament, that's a good example. So if it said that maybe, let's just say maybe there was no Moses or Jonah never swallowed

anyone, I mean the whale never swallowed Jonah, you know, we have been taught differently. If you've come out of a Sunday School background, you've never questioned that I've never questioned that so now it's a matter of going to re-look that and rethink that and say, look what's going on here. So that has been a challenge.

NQ: Like for example the issue of Moses having not written any books the thing about the JEPD tradition that was quite challenging. I mean it was almost as though there's only the human dimension to this thing, to the writing of the Pentateuch whereas all along I have the idea that it was the spirit of God, like taking control over the whole thing. I mean Moses going up to the mountain and coming back with the table of stones, now when I come here and I've been told that the Yahwist or someone like the Deuteronomist wrote the thing, it's quite challenging. You really begin to wonder, where is the hand of God in all of this, you know.

PM: At first I was really getting shaken up, but then I realized I stand on a solid foundation and it's important to learn all these things, but what I can say it's not what I really expected and sometimes you really feel low. For instance when we did the story of Joseph, right, Joseph was like a role model to me, a very perfect person, and then when we look deeply at the text, and realize he might have been involved in exploitation and oppression, and you really get startled.

Other disciplines within the School also presented peculiar challenges to the students' grip on their faith.

BMK: Yes, they are, especially dealing with Systematic Theology and Process Theology that questions the omnipotence of God and all that, and they say God might not be all powerful whereas as a Christian I always believe that God is all powerful, so my faith is challenged a lot.

Some students found that in the changes of attitude, towards the role of women or other religions for instance, which they felt needed to be made as a result of what they had studied, their primary discourse was being overwhelmed by the tertiary discourse.

KK: Yes, they are a challenge, they are a challenge, like I said, the idea of women being given their position, not women over ruling men, but given their rightful position. I think it's a good challenge for men. Maybe I support it I don't know?

MAN: Yes, they are very challenging to my faith, because they make me to accept even other approaches like from African Traditional Religion and other religions. Not just looking at the other religion as the enemy but just to see that there's something good and something bad in that religion, even within my own Christianity, to see that there are things that I can get involved with, and then there are things that I can move a little bit, and just look at that so that I can find the reality of that.

However for a minority of the students the challenge to their faith, although it was very real, was also exhilarating.

EC: Yes, yes, like now I find that the things, that my church really believes in, is not all right. So it's a challenge in a positive way, to my faith, because now I can, with the studies in the School of Theology, my approach is all different, my belief you know, it's shaped in a different way, so it's a challenge in a positive way for me.

JW: At first I found them a great shock, when I first arrived, but I've actually seen the challenge as excitement now. There are challenges to my faith as I go through it is the ride but definitely exciting now, and one that I've learnt to enjoy, both the challenges as well as learning to grow from it?

Other students expressed their positive assessment of the challenges faced in studying Theology in terms of having reached an even keel after weathering the storms that had threatened to swamp their primary socialisation.

LZ: I think now it's a positive challenge. Like I have to read the scriptures more careful now and see how they impacted my faith. When I came like I thought they were falsifying the scriptures, so that affected my faith really. For instance like I was going down, really going down. It was even easy that I can even go and do some things outside without a problem of my conscience. I was not like before when I came at university, so that to be afraid of doing something just vanished for somehow. But when I'm continuing reading using these methods I saw, something just came up that said no, it's still faith, it's still there, you have to. So now interpretation was more relevant to my practical experiences.

Many of the students, while appreciating the widening of their perspective on the Bible, found the need to be critical of the level of support in the School for their faith needs as students.

RS: Yes they are definitely a challenge to my faith. I think this sort of training in the School of Theology has widened my view, in trying to understand the Bible for what it is. It is a complex book, it's not as easy as sometimes people make it to be, and so to understand the Bible correctly from a historical perspective is important. But faith, the other side of the whole story is, where does our faith grow, because it certainly doesn't grow here at the university. It's not like a fellowship, or a place of fellowship where faith is encouraged to grow. It's more of a critical analysis of faith, that's my position.

Another telling criticism raised by the students is the way that a training in tertiary discourse by the School of Theology isolates the students from the discourses of their faith communities.

TT: It challenges everything you know, and it makes it difficult when you go back to your church and you have all these different ideas of the Bible. Because everything conflicts, you conflict with everyone. They say one thing and you think "no, that's not it" or "that's not completely it". But then they wouldn't be able to accept what you say, you then become sort of an outcast, you don't feel in place in your church.

However, even in the face of the sometimes overwhelming challenges of studying in the School of Theology the students were able to look on the bright side. On the one hand they found themselves profoundly unsettled by the whole experience, but on the other hand they could see some positive benefits to this position. The comment by the first student in the next set of stories is most telling because in the course of her three years studying theology she had moved from nervous collapse, through enthusiasm for the work of the School of Theology, to a realisation of how far the experience of studying theology had moved her. The second student is also remarkable for having come to some accommodation with the challenges of the tertiary discourse within the first semester of studying theology. I will follow this particular student up in the final chapter of this thesis, by which time she has reached her third year and a more nuanced sense of her response to studying theology.

CM: But I do think that one needs to have challenges like that. Otherwise you just live in this spiritual thing where our faith is over here and it's got nothing to do with down here, especially if you come from a White Lutheran congregation.

JM: I think this challenge is useful because so far it has really equipped me, it has like deepened my faith. There was a time I was shaken but I say to myself, isn't this an approach to understanding the Bible more? And it's just given me the courage that out of my church, out of my congregation I will find some challenging people like this, and this has equipped me to face that fear of feeling inferior.

Many students, by contrast could not bring themselves to respond positively to the challenges of the tertiary discourse. In the course of the interviews conducted for this study I gave the students an opportunity to give their recommendations of how the School of Theology should change in order to maximise the benefits of challenges of study. What follows is a selection of their comments, beginning with the inevitable plea for the intellectual and critical approach to the study of the Bible to be changed. The first comment is interesting because it was made by a Bachelor of Arts student who abandoned Biblical Studies after the first semester. However the other comments are perhaps more significant because they come from senior students who had

come to the end of their studies without a sense that the knowledge gained from their studies was practicable in their ministry.

BH: Well as I said just now about it being too intellectual and too context oriented, maybe they should bring in more personal.

LC: Yes, I think, I think the lecturers can at times step out of this kind of critical academic approach I think they need to step out that. I think very often, lecturers will come they give us stuff, then they leave it there and students are left hanging from that basically, from that point of view. If your faith level is not strong and also if you don't have a mind that can reconcile everything you could be lost.

RS: Yes, well my attitude to this is that I feel that we are missing out on the practical aspects of applying what we have learnt in the real world. We are being too theoretical and too academic in let's say three years. There's so much work that we need to do academically that we find almost no time to actually apply these things practically that is my experience. And therefore, we tend to lose our faith in the process. I would prefer seeing, one day a week set aside for practical implication into the community, the surrounding community, so that we can see the fruits of what we have learnt because if we cannot practically implement what we have learnt, it's of no use to us.

Given their own traumas in dealing with their own experience of dealing with the tertiary discourse of academic Theology, some of the senior students suggested a greater level of sensitivity to the impact of this discourse on the new students. The first student, having just expressed her own accommodation to the impact of this discourse, is nevertheless keen to help new students avoid the breakdown she suffered.

CM: Well they definitely should encourage tutors to encourage the students and not play with the knowledge they've got to put down first year students, because they are vulnerable, you know. And I didn't understand what they were talking about, and



they wouldn't explain to me what they were talking about, they just left it hanging in the air, you know. So I think if you are a tutor you just need to be aware of that, and that you can't hit that hard. Because it is a blow to the system that Jesus is not God.

JW: I think personally I think there should have been a bit more of a bridging, trying to explain to students, why there is the understanding, why there is their certain understandings and perceptions and from that build on the new views, you know of authorship and contextualisation and all the rest of it.

Another senior student called for the lecturers to be honest about their own faith commitments and which perspective they are using to approaching the study of the Bible, in order to help the students orient themselves in the discourse they are facing.

LZ: I think what I can prefer is for the lecturers to state their objectives very clearly, before they can teach the course. Because now if for example when a person can just come and teach, and you don't know whether that person is a Christian or not, you end up with yourself not being sure which direction you should follow. But I think when they can say, the path, what they want out of their course, what they are aiming to, I think it should be better for the students.

The pattern that emerges from the data in the first three sections of this chapter is that many of the students are profoundly disturbed by the demands of the academic workload in the School of Theology. This workload is then coupled with being forced to endure further challenges to their primary and secondary socialisation in the form of unfamiliar race and gender relationships, and to crown these stresses they are confronted with a tertiary discourse which alienates them from their faith and their community. In the light of these multifaceted challenges the students' recommendations to the staff deserve some endorsement. It is imperative that staff should be sensitive to the potential of their words and teaching to wound deeply the impressionable minds and faith of the students. To draw an analogy with ritual process (cf. Turner 1991:95f.), the students entering the School of Theology are in the vulnerable position of neophytes brought into the liminal space of the university to be

instructed in the mysteries of Theological Discourse by the ritual elders who are the lecturers. In this dangerous position, where the rules and discourses which governed their life so far are questioned, the possibilities for damage are considerable.

Therefore it is of pressing importance for the staff, especially those who are White and male, to acknowledge that much of the exegesis they are teaching is one dimensional, critical discourse which does not take into account the possibilities of difference (Patte 1995:24). It is not the place of theology teachers to assume that they must routinely undermine the primary discourses of the students in their courses. True ritual elders initiate the neophytes into the ritual system gently and scaffold their teaching with explicit references to their own faith and experience. It is only when the ritual has become an empty shell of its former self and has become a money making racket, like “traditional” circumcision schools in waste ground around townships rather than in the village sacred forest or traditional sanctuaries that have been used for generations, that violence and death become part of initiation. As Turner writes, liminality should lead to *communitas* and egalitarian relationships (Turner 1969:96). Also the ritual should lead the person to a point where they can go back into society with new knowledge that can be used and appreciated by their community outside. Daniel Patte warns that when we treat the study of the Bible as an intellectual exercise we lose the people we are speaking to and increasingly we lose ourselves (Patte 1995:83). To explore this process further I will move on in the next section to allow the students to analyse how their method of reading the Bible has changed in the course of their studies.

## **5.5 Biblical Discourses in Conflict**

In this section of the chapter I will consider the students’ analysis of the way they read the Bible, in which they account for their method of reading before they came to University and how it is changing under the influence of their studies. This is an important gauge of the gap that exists between the primary faith discourse of their home, the secondary faith discourse of growing up within a particular denomination and the critical tertiary discourse to which they are exposed in their university studies. Through this process and assessing their interpretation of miracles in the next section of the chapter, I hope to show the extent of the clash of discourses and the resulting alienation from their primary and secondary discourses that the students suffer.

In reviewing their method of reading the Bible before they came to university many of the students described a pattern of pre-critical interpretation of the text <sup>9</sup>.

AB: You know I was just taking the Bible as simple. I was just reading the Bible then, just to read the Bible, then I thought that I understand the Bible. I was just reading the Bible simple

BH: Well, I've always just read the Bible and underlined what's important to me and written in the Bible and that sort of thing.

CM: Well it was basically just open the Bible and read a passage from the Bible and if it speaks to you, well then you go, you know. Well sometimes I would even go, I would literally just flip, open like this, and wherever it stops just like read a verse.

LZ: As I said that I took the Bible as the inspired word of God, so I read it as the word of God, that God is speaking to us through the Bible, so I used to read it and take it exactly as it is from the scriptures.

Many students also related their technique of reading the Bible before coming to university to the context of their personal and corporate devotions, and contrasted this experience with that of reading the Bible at university.

DAW: I think it was, and remains, in terms of my personal time with the Bible, you know it's very simple, kind of I've always followed some kind of system very badly, I'm not a consistent person, but a kind of a reading and application personal application where possible, particularly the New Testament reading. And then I've tried to kind of read through bigger sections but not as effectively as I probably will do as a result of my time spent here. But personal devotion to me is always a need for a simple method of read and apply.

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<sup>9</sup> I use these terms here to refer to the way ordinary readers read the text. See West and Dube 1996 and my argument at 3.3.

JM: Let's say like we are doing Bible Studies, we would just pick up a passage from the Bible, and read it, and discuss it. But the discussion was different from the way we do it at university, in the sense that we could discuss, maybe let's say summarize, what's happening in the passage and try to look for the meaning of that passage to us, or to me as an individual. We never like dug deep, looking at the text critically and trying to find what really the text means as it is written, so usually you find you won't engage with the text. You always find you look for what the text means to you theologically.

The responses of some students continued to convey a deep suspicion of the university methods of reading the Bible. Through their critique they were trying to hold onto a pre-critical method of interpretation, even when approaching class exercises.

AS: I think I've been able to read it more as a story like we had to read the whole of the Pentateuch in one reading, and I would never have it would probably have taken me weeks just to read one of the books but I've realized that you can actually sit down and read a whole book as you would read a novel, a normal book, so it's made it a bit easier to read the Bible. But, I would tend to want to read it and believe just what's written. I've always found that if you read too deeply into it then you can find things that aren't quite right, or don't quite line up, and I think I'd rather just believe it at face value.

BH: I think initially during the course I found myself being much more intellectual and looking at the context more, and it just irritated me, I didn't want to do that. But after I became conscious of it, you know, I think I went back to how I used to do it. I think taking more note than I used to, of the context and the intellectual stuff and that. But still adding it to my personal feeling. I still keep what I believe, I still hold onto it, I'm not just going to suddenly change it because someone else says something else. But I'm open to hearing other interpretations.

Even so, while most of the students admitted that their understanding of the Bible before coming to university was firmly fixed and pre-critical, a small number of students emphasized that their questioning and even critical response to the Bible, in the face of sanctions from their denomination, predated their university experience.

LM: Usually I would read say a whole paragraph or a whole chapter and then try and find the teaching, and also try and connect with other verses, or other passages.

DS: I can say I was just reading the Bible literally, like taking whatever it's there even though it was hard to follow. But when I was reading I was reading it as it is, but inside I was just questioning some of the things but I didn't want to talk about them because we had been told that we are not supposed to question the Bible.

JW: I would say on the whole it was relatively literal, but there were, but that caused a problem for me because I often found myself questioning what was in the Bible and so I didn't know how to match what I understood from the Bible to my questions.

JM: I don't really know how to put this because I can't say fixed, as far as I can remember we used to have some radical discussions about the Bible, but then you didn't, I didn't know how to address those things. I would say it was open.

VM: Kind of both because it was firm in a sense that you view truth as something established, as something already given in the Bible, but flexible in a sense like what I'm saying, that interpretation, people can interpret the same verse in different ways.

In developing and administering this questionnaire, I had been hoping to find some clues which would explain why students like those quoted above should be more flexible in their pre-university reading of the Bible than others. As it has turned out, I have been unable to find any patterns in the students' primary discourses which would predict which students would have more of an affinity for critical theology than others. I therefore conclude that there must have been some influence from their secondary discourses, in the form of a teacher or a pastor,

which had prepared them for critical exegesis of the Bible. This pattern makes clear the importance the recognition of at least three main layers of discourse, each with its own subdivisions, within the makeup of the psyche of any student who has studied at University for a particular period of time, perhaps even as short as a single semester. It has also become apparent from my analysis so far that the articulation and the transitions between these discourses are far from easy for the students to negotiate. In this light further research is crucial into the primary and secondary discourses of students entering the School of Theology to begin to map those elements of their previous discourse which could be predictors of students' success in the tertiary discourse.

In the case of the following quote however, the reason for the student's openness to the tertiary discourse of critical study of the Bible is clear; his previous training in critical discourse by the Young Christian Workers.

MR: I would say that for instance in the YCW that is where we used it a lot. We would look at our situation first that is the situation within the area that we are living in, that is when we are planning an action. That is in the See part, in the Judge part we would look at the consequences of that situation that we had discussed and we would look for something relevant for that situation in the Bible and see if it can help us, does it actually encourage us to take that action, or what does it say about this?

Whatever their feelings towards the critical study of the Bible, most students noted a growing level of flexibility of interpretation and critical thinking pervading their reading of the biblical text over the duration of their time at university. These changes or shifts had occurred in the process of their training in different modes of reading the Bible.

BMK: Now, it has changed in the sense that I am now more flexible and I can, I can entertain other perspectives or other interpretations of the Bible and its helped me to see that there is no absolute way of interpreting the Bible.

NN: I think it's still in a process of changing. I can't say that I'm open and flexible with the Bible, I still have my reservations. But I'm on my way towards learning to be more open about things and to open myself to learning new ways of thinking about it.

VM: It has changed significantly in a sense that I no longer see the Bible as a spiritual chunk of truth, but I also see it in a very concrete way in that it stems out of concrete cultural, political context, so, and even when I contextualise it I'm not only going to apply it on spiritual life in a strict sense, but even the political, looking at the South African situation and all that.

**But most students had noticed that this shift in their method of interpreting the Bible, as a result of the time they had been studying in the School of Theology, was most often achieved at a high personal cost, even when this was balanced with some unexpected benefits.**

CM: Well it's definitely not just flip open your Bible and then go. I realize that reading the Bible is hard work, and perhaps that's one of the reasons I don't read it as much anymore, because I really do feel that you need to sit down with the text, and read it, and read the passages before and after, and get a whole sense of the book perhaps even. So that's sort of my approach to it now.

RS: Well I look at it, I normally give this example, when I came to university I was looking for this perfect crystal of absolute truth which I was going to take out to the people in the congregation and explain as such. However I discovered that it is a very slippery concept, and that this absolute crystal doesn't really exist, but it is a changing crystal with changing times, with new discoveries.

LC: I think, I have to admit, when I read the Bible now I read it with more caution now. But there has been a part of me that has been taken away, there is almost innocence, that has been taken away. To be honest with you sometimes I will read now, the conviction is not as strong like I used to have. Sometimes when I approach

the congregation, I'm not a man of conviction as I think as I used to be. But, also when I do minister now a lot of people say that I teach and minister in a way which they would normally never hear, and it's fairly deep and very informative. And I would not have that if I did not come to the university, I know that.

NQ: Yes, I allow myself, questions that come up in my head I allow them to come through, I don't suppress them anymore, and when I do that sometimes I do not always get answers from the text that I'm doing, but sometimes I do.

The personal cost involved in the critical study of theology is well expressed in the responses of these students. It means abandoning comfortable, familiar and even pleasurable methods of reading the Bible in favour of the hard work and uncertainty of critical exegesis. It means abandoning all hope of finding the ultimate universal truth, no matter how unrealistic that hope may have been. It means abandoning convictions and standing before a congregation, gathered in the expectation of receiving your wisdom, with more doubts than you are able to express. These costs are familiar to me as a critical exegete, as they are familiar to most of our teachers who have undergone this process. Knowing the pain of loss of exegetical innocence it is surprising that more teachers of Biblical Studies are not more honest about their personal sufferings in order to assure their students that they are not alone and that the loss is an inevitable result of studying theology at university.

In order to probe further into the gap between their primary, secondary and tertiary discourse I asked the students to evaluate the level at which their expectations of studying the Bible at university had been met. A sizable group of ten students claimed that their expectations had been matched by their experience of university.

JM: So far it has, but this is my first year I don't know what we will do in the second year, and third year but so far I'm really grateful that I did it.

LM: Yes, so far it has met the expectations in the way that when I came I expected to get to know more, and to broaden up in extracting meanings from passages and from



happenings, but I didn't have the sort of tools to be able to extract, and connect things. I only read it that this says that, the way I have been told.

In the case of eighteen other students, the School of Theology Biblical Studies programme had far exceeded the expectations which they had entertained before coming to university.

EC: It has enlightened my mind so much. I have a different outlook altogether to ministry, to reading the Bible like I was just saying now, you know. I think it really has, and I think it still is going to do that.

BMK: I had other expectations, I thought I would come here to know the Bible, chapters and verses, and all these but what the School of Theology did in Biblical Studies is that I became aware, I knew the Bible, the history of the Bible, and the ideologies, more than the lines and verses and it gave me a broader perspective of looking at the Bible and it helped me in the sense that I can now interpret any part of the text according to the history. So it did not meet my expectations, but I think what I found was much more valuable than what I expected.

DAW: I think I wanted to be challenged, and that's happened, but I think my initial expectation, which was not necessarily correct, but I kind of thought I would gain a lot more knowledge, more like maybe Bible College type approach to Old and New Testament. That is what I was looking for and I think I've got that as a spin off, but it's not what I expected it would be. But, the challenge has definitely come through strongly.

SA: I guess not, because I was expecting something quite different. I was expecting a Pentecostal way of interpreting the Bible, and this was very critical. But learning about the Bible this way, has opened my mind to so many issues that are in the Bible, that I cannot just accept that God wrote it himself. I mean I can accept that fact now, and it's taught me so many tools to read the Bible, there's not just this way of reading the Bible.

For many students their expectations of a course in the School of Theology had been coloured by dire warnings of the affect that academic Biblical Studies would have on their faith.

CM: Well again, I didn't know what expectations to have, you know. I just had this pastor warning me about Theology in general and I didn't quite understand the warning until I got here. But I think if I look back, I think it's been a good course, or a really good course.

DW: I think it's met beyond those expectations because I for one, I was advised not to do Theology or even Biblical Studies, in the university because there's always this negative stigma amongst Pentecostal circles and such, in doing studies through an institution. But I found that when I came, I came as a skeptic, but I found that they didn't come to try, their whole approach wasn't to deny that God exists, or that you make you believe or begin to waver in your faith, but what they really did was to bring the intellectual aspect into the thing so that you can have a solid, and a grounded faith. So it's met way beyond what I expected.

Having had their expectations met or even exceeded by the reality of studying in the School of Theology, many students formulated their response with sentiments that were coloured by their ambivalence towards their experience.

LC: I came here because I wanted Biblical Studies to help me to be a better minister. And to minister, in terms of the content, Biblical Studies has helped me much more. Now I have the information to read behind the text, on the text etc. But from, like I said, from the spiritual point of view something has changed. But at the same time, I think it's also made me realise and examine what type of conviction and faith I have in the spiritual.

MB: I didn't, you know, I didn't really know what to expect, but I probably did expect us to look at it from another perspective than what we are doing, and I think

somewhere along the line I was hoping that we would also look at it like, maybe more as Bible Study, more relevant to your life and that kind of stuff. So in that way it probably hasn't met an expectation, but in terms of looking at it differently, and with other sources, that has been positive.

PM: More, than, it's more than I expected. I didn't think we would sit down and start to analyse the book which I thought was holy, I didn't think we would look at it and tear it apart, trying to find out what they meant here, you know, the inconsistencies and all that. It was more than I expected.

In analysing the pattern emerging from the above responses and in reviewing my own representation of the students' data I cannot help but notice that the word I use most often, to express the students feelings about the School of Theology and how studying critical biblical exegesis has affected their lives, is ambivalence. Once again this is a feeling I overwhelmingly endorse and one which I am sure many fellow critical biblical scholars can recognise. Once again it therefore surprises me that in the light of our recognition of student ambivalence, we as Biblical Studies teachers cannot honestly tell the students that we share their experience.

Naturally, when these levels of ambivalence among the students are taken into account, I was not astounded when some students who were asked to appraise whether Biblical Studies had any kind of positive effect on their ministry or in their personal lives, they answered in the negative.

AS: It's difficult because I can hear in the Bible Study I go to, people discussing things, and the whole time I'm thinking; that's not actually right that didn't happen. But then when I tell them that they don't want to know about it, so I don't think it's particularly made me a better person.

In the light of the above it was perhaps more unexpected that most other students considered that there was a great deal to be gained from Biblical Studies for their future ministry. Firstly, because it provided a method for interpreting the Bible in their social context.

- CM: I think so, definitely from a Bible study point of view and also interpreting the Bible well not being afraid to interpret the Bible from perhaps a social point of view even in some cases. You know, and not just have a spiritual outcome of each passage in the Bible. I'm really encouraged by the method used here, for Bible study, which is not used in the church, so from that perspective, I think there are quite a few things that I've learnt church wise.
- BMK: Because, It makes me know how to reach to people especially when they are reading the gospels and the way they are reading you know the communities they are reading for. So I knew that it's important for any pastor or any preacher to know the community they are going to preach to before they say anything, so the way I can formulate my sermons the way I can formulate my approach has got the community, the particular community, in mind, so I think its helped me to become more effective in addressing the issues of the people.
- EC: Well yes, in Biblical Studies we study of the narrations in the Bible as something that happened that time, and how it would help me is to think of the situation when the stories were written how it happened at that time and what was happening then, you know that's what Biblical Studies provides for me. It helps me to relate with situations that I'm in now and bring things in my own context.
- JM: With the connection with the ISB and the whole idea of trying to take the theory that we learn and instead of just discarding it, trying to incorporate it into our daily lives, you know and instead of talking above everybody's heads, endeavouring to make the Bible alive, you know with what we've learnt from the community.
- NQ: In a sense that when I, I normally relate my faith and Christianity to a separate sphere of my life as I used to do, I understand it as now being a whole thing put together. Take for instance the issue of the Israelites coming out of Egypt, I mean that was a political issue, but in the church it's always spiritualised in a way, in that the coming out of Egypt was release from sin and that kind of stuff. So now I know

that as a person I'm a whole human being, I'm not only a spiritual person but I'm also a physical person, I have emotions, a mind.

**Secondly, students could see improvements in their stance towards other people in terms of being more open to other possibilities and ideas.**

NN: I find that I'm less judgmental of the way people live their lives. For example, people who engage with the Bible, while I see Black and White, I'm more willing to listen to them, which I never used to do before. I never used to believe and respect someone who didn't think of the Bible as this holy book. So, I'm less judgmental.

SM: I'm saying that for instance when I have a text that I had interpretations for them, but now I can listen to the voices that are speaking to the text. For instance today I'm able to listen to the voices of the women in the Bible, whereas before it was hard for me to listen to those voices.

**Thirdly, students could attest to an enrichment of their teaching and their personal ministry arising from their study of the Bible in the School of Theology.**

DW: I preach, you understand, in church, at times, I preach in cell meetings and different places, and I believe it helps me in that when I speak to whoever my listeners are, I've got a background of what I'm speaking about so I can bring them into an understanding about what I'm speaking about, so they can see and they can actually take the thing and put themselves into the context of what's been spoken, so it really has done a lot.

LZ: I think the resources, I can even see when I am preaching to the church. Before I can go and say something to the people, I have to sit down and try to use the resources that I have from the School of Theology, especially from Biblical Studies, and reflect it to my context, to my church.

PZ: I come from a church that still reads the Bible in a very firm and fixed way, as you said, I have learnt ways of challenging them, such that I can empower them and other people in the church as well. And the fact that before coming in I had a lot of questions and I could work through my own questions and also help others who had the same questions.

MAN: If I look at it now, I'm more objective, and even in the church, when I'm preaching now, many people will come to me, even those who are coming from other religions or from AIC's, they will come to me and say 'hey, your sermon, I liked it, I never maybe listen to a Christian when he's preaching. But now, the way you preach, it makes me to want to get more from you, to listen to you, whether you are a Christian.'

SD: It has helped me a lot, and actually I see myself as someone who is actually going to be useful to the church, who is going to be a better person tomorrow, after I'm come from here. My greatest desire I think is becoming fulfilled because my desire is to help the people out there to speak as a Bible reader, a biblical scholar. So yes, actually it has been useful to me, to be a better person.

TT: As a woman, I've found that there are some things that affirm me as a women and as a person, that make me feel good, that make me feel proud and that make me feel like I want to make a difference someday.

Once again it is important to acknowledge that Biblical Studies tools are not achieved and retained without cost. This is especially true with regard to the relationship between the students and their communities who are unfamiliar with and even wary of the tertiary discourse represented by Academic Theology.

DAW: I think that as a pastor, the difficulty that I will experience, now and before was, whilst I said to you I like a simplistic approach of read and apply, I think it will be difficult to deal with people, more difficult to deal with people on a simplistic level.

Particularly people who put a lot of faith in stuff fundamentally, so that might cause some difficulties as a pastor. But I think it will enable me to be a better pastor in that it will enrich the way I teach,

In this section of the chapter I have been trying to assess the processes and the costs of the transformation in the students' primary and secondary discourses as they attempt to grapple with the demands made by their tertiary discourse. The major pattern that has emerged from this data is that while most students accepted, even embraced, the inevitable changes in their earlier discourses that have come about as a result of studying with the School of Theology, such accommodation is tinged with regret and loss and accompanied by fears of alienation from their communities. Therefore the accommodation of the students to this new discourse involves the students in a significant sacrifice of those parts of their identity that are bound up with their primary discourses. This change may force them into the uncomfortable situation where they must become bi-discoursal people, who can hold in tension the often inimical subjectivities of being a Christian and a biblical scholar or the even more formidable task of infusing their Biblical Studies with their faith and vice versa (See Gee 1995:135-6, Weedon 1997:83). I have also begun to voice my conviction that the role of theology teachers, should be to carefully and sensitively support the students through the traumatic and painful changes that they must make in order to enter the discourse of tertiary theological studies.

In the final section of data presentation in this chapter before the conclusion, I will consider student reactions to an aspect of Christian Faith that causes a great deal of controversy for biblical scholars, the belief in miracles and the miraculous deeds of Jesus. In the light of this section of the chapter it will be important to appraise the creative tensions that arise as the students cling tenaciously to this quintessentially Christian belief in the face of the skepticism of their lecturers and the scholars they are reading who represent the orthodoxy of the tertiary discourse.

## 5.6 Students and Miracles

In this section I will try to gauge how far the students in my sample have retained their belief in the miraculous, using this as an example of the survival of primary and secondary discourse in the face of the onslaught by the tertiary discourse. This is particularly important when in the next chapter I will be dealing with student reaction to Mark 4:35ff, which is an account of an unavoidably miraculous nature. Before I do this, however, I would like to make a brief excursion into the meaning of miracles within Christianity. This will give me an opportunity to explain something of my journey of exploration with regard to miracles and to show the changes that have come about in that meaning in the light of modernity. If in the process I seem to highlight my own view of miracles, at the expense of the students, this is unintentional. My intention is rather to show my sympathy with the students by revealing my own journey.

For fifteen hundred years the phenomena of signs and wonders were at the very centre of Christian Apologetics. From the writer of Acts to Reformers many of the finest theological minds understood that miracles were self-evident proofs of the nature of God and the claims of the Church (Brown 1985: 3-6). But in the sceptical atmosphere generated by the revival of secular learning in the Renaissance, and its expansion in the scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment, it became increasingly clear that these self-evident proofs rested on the flimsiest of evidence, the hearsay of ancient texts (Brown 1985:7). Since the Enlightenment therefore, a cloud of disbelief has settled over the discourse on miracles most ably expressed in the classical objections to miracles which arose in this period. Firstly there was Spinoza's argument against miracles, founded on his belief in the absolute rationality of the cosmos. This led him to identify two basic errors in the approach of his contemporaries towards miracles, namely that anything that could not be understood was attributed to the miraculous work of God and that the everyday wonders of nature were not. For Spinoza these errors represented a basic misunderstanding of both nature and God who he viewed as bound into a rational system governed by perfect and inviolable laws of nature (Brown 1985:8). Therefore miracles which seemed to break the laws of nature would be impossible because they would be against the rational nature of God (Brown 1985:9). Secondly there is Hume's argument, which supports Spinoza by establishing the classic definition of a miracle: "A transgression of a law of nature



by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of an invisible agent” (Davis 1993:2). This definition is not without its own problems, as I shall point out later, but it has gained wide credence in the popular critique of miracles ever since. However Hume's argument goes much further and points out the lack of scientific evidence to support the belief in miracles by a reasonable person. In the first part of his argument Hume observed that in the case of the report of a miracle the evidence is likely to be of two kinds, the testimony in favour of a miracle would come from eyewitnesses who purported to have seen the miracle performed, while the testimony against would come from careful observation of the normal processes of nature. The first body of evidence is inherently suspect because it is probably going to be contradictory or clearly rehearsed and expanded by those who have something to gain from the report of a miracle. The second body of evidence, arising as it did from scientific observation, is inherently more trustworthy and is consistent with the uniform experience of people everywhere. This establishes the epistemological principle that the more unusual, and miraculous, an occurrence is the less it is rational to believe in it (Davis 1993:3). In the second part of his argument Hume attempts to show that, despite many claims of specific miracles, none has ever been established as having occurred by scientific method or even by the uncontradicted testimony of a sufficient number of people whose integrity makes them believable. Taken together these two arguments convinced Hume that it is never rational to believe that a miracle, which violates the laws of nature, has occurred (Davis 1993:4).

It can be fairly stated that between them, Spinoza and Hume took the wind out of the sails of glib Christian apologetics. Yet it is by no means established that they have won the argument as to the reasonableness of belief in miracles. In Davis' opinion Hume is overstating the case against miracles when he states that there never has nor ever will be evidence enough to convince a reasonable person that a miracle has occurred. Hume's mistake is to base his argument solely on an idea of reality, founded on a past experience of the world, and to discount the possibility that circumstances may arise when this construction of reality is inadequate (Davis 1993:5). Furthermore, Davis also notes that scientific research is showing that the laws of nature, in which Hume and Spinoza placed so much confidence, are bendable and even expendable (Davis 1993:5). Bruce Gregory is one of a growing body of writers with a background in the physical sciences who emphasize the constructedness of the language and

models that scientists use to explain reality. He explains this insight in his introduction in the following way.

Physics has been so immensely successful that it is difficult to avoid the conviction that what physicists have done over the past 300 years is to slowly draw back the veil that stands between us and the world as it really is that physics, and every science, is the discovery of a ready-made world. As powerful as this metaphor is, it is useful to keep in mind that it is a metaphor (Gregory 1990:v).

The result of this development in the philosophy of scientific thought means that it is no longer possible to simply rely on the laws of nature to refute miracles. Both may be shown to be equally reasonable constructions of reality and a person may choose whether to attribute a given event to the work of God or to some process consistent with the scientific laws of nature (Davis 1993:12-13).

Colin Brown argues for the reasonableness of belief in miracles from a different angle. His approach is to examine the reports of the miracles in the gospel accounts of the work of Jesus. He argues that Jesus' miracles functioned in various ways: They are signs, which embellish, reinforce and embody the message of Jesus that the reign of God is present (c.f. Mt 12:28, Lk 11:20, Brown 1985:163, Hendricxx 1987:11-12). They are part of the combat to establish the reign of God and as such they often act to release people from bondage to Satan (Brown 1985:164, Hendricxx 1987:13). They are not performed with the use of magical formulae or ritualistic techniques and are calculated to the needs of the recipients and not the effect on the crowds (Brown 1985:167, cf. Hendricxx 1987:10). They require faith in God which acts to re-establish a covenantal relationship between God and the people (Brown 1985:168, Hendricxx 1987:16-17). Therefore his answer to the classical objection to miracles is to argue that the miracles of Jesus should not be viewed as random, meaningless violations of nature, but as purposeful actions which bring real benefits to those who experience them (Brown 1985:73). Taking a more historical angle, Borg and Hendricxx claim that if Jesus had not performed miracles he would not have been recognised as a religious figure of his time, because miracles were a necessary part of the religious vocabulary of his time (Hendricxx 1987:22). Borg

advances the example of Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa, famous healers and rainmakers who are contemporary to Jesus. They, like Jesus, were compared with Elijah and were heralded by heavenly voices as "sons of God." Borg accounts for this proliferation of healers by describing the dual reality constructed by the Jewish world into which Jesus was born.

In addition to the visible material world disclosed to us by ordinary sense perception (and modern science), there is another level of reality, a second world of nonmaterial reality, charged with energy and power... the "other world" -the world of Spirit - is seen as "more" real than "this world." Indeed, the "other reality" is the source and the ground of "this world" (Borg1987: 26).

His argument continues that "at the heart of the Jewish tradition, indeed constituting it, was Israel's story of the intersection between the world of the Spirit and the world of ordinary experience. For that is what Israel's scriptures were. The Hebrew Bible is Israel's story of events which were seen as disclosures of the Spirit, of people who were perceived as mediators of the Spirit, of laws and prophetic utterances which were believed to have been given by the Spirit" (Borg 1987:27). Even though I feel that Borg may be attributing more influence to the Trinitarian Holy Spirit than is justified by the Hebrew Scriptures, I find his examples useful. They emphasise the deep connections between the physical and spiritual, the personal and the divine. They also show that the world, in which Jesus lived, was constructed in a way very different from our own, accepting many things which our present world view finds unacceptable. I would argue that an accurate view of Jesus' miracles demands, at the very least, a theoretical acceptance of the construction of reality in the primordial society where they took place. Herman Waetjen agrees that the miraculous acts of Jesus are central to the understanding of the reality of the miraculous in our own experience. But he refuses to rely on any historical reconstruction of Jesus which he believes is still captive to the limitations of Kantian epistemology where Christians are exhorted to "live by the little that they really believe, not by the much that they take pains to believe" (Luedemann in Waetjen 1996:294). He demands that Jesus miracles have an objective reality, based in the creative forces of the new moral order which will come into being at the eschaton. Miracles, whether performed by

Jesus or his followers, are emblematic of a fundamental reordering of power in favour of those who are socially, politically and economically disenfranchised (Waetjen 1996:297). So the miracles of Jesus are there to inspire us to follow him by embracing the forces which are actively recreating our reality into the shape that it will take under the reign of God (Waetjen 1996:302).

With the help of this summary of my own position on miracles it is now possible for us to approach the students' posture on miracles with something less than a cynical frame of mind. First I asked students for their definition of a miracle to get some idea of how their primary discourse had inculcated their belief in miracles. The responses were diverse, however, the largest group of definitions held that a miracle was anything beyond human capacity or knowledge or variations on that theme.

BMK: A miracle, according to my understanding is something that happens and that is beyond human capabilities, that has no explanation that just happens, that has got no human explanation.

MAN: If I can define a miracle, a miracle is something that happens beyond human powers, that's the miracle. If it's something that can happen and we cannot interpret it in our human terms that something like this can happen. So it's beyond our understanding, that's a miracle.

VM: I think it's an occurrence which defies all what we know as the laws of nature.

KK: A miracle? A miracle is an act, its an act, that could not happen just under normal circumstances or be done just by an ordinary person, or under ordinary situations.

In some cases the students choose to emphasize the specific role of Jesus as a worker of miracles in their definitions.

RN: It is a performance that is meant to challenge people to reason and to see who Jesus is.

RS: A miracle is a supernatural act which has been done by supernatural entity, somebody like Jesus, or somebody who has power beyond the human limitations that we experience.

ZN: A miracle is what has Jesus done trying to show His faith and His power.

**Other definitions concentrated on the character of miracles to come in the form of divine intervention (usually in a time of disaster).**

SA: I think in a situation, a personal situation, where there is no hope, God just casts a shadow up into that situation.

SD: Well from my own experience of them before I came to varsity, my definition of miracle I think a miracle is basically God's divine intervention in a life a human disaster, a disaster. Something that a human being cannot do then whatever happens in that state then probably is a miracle, is God's intervention, trying to help, you see.

NQ: I think it's when a hopeless situation, in need of instant help, and something outrageous happens and instant help comes along unexpectedly.

PZ: A miracle, I would define it as something positive that comes up in a bad situation and it's least expected, when you least expect a positive outcome in a situation, a bad situation.

**For some of the students their definitions of what constituted a miracle could include the interaction of people in avoiding disasters. For other students even everyday events could fall under the definition of a miracle.**

JW: I believe that miracles can come in many forms, a miracle can be a simple interaction between two people that makes a difference to one or both of the people, that for me can be a miracle because it is being an advantage out of a possible hopeless situation just through interaction and talking. A miracle can also be a person stopping on the side of the road and something happens and somebody drives past round about that time and stops to help that person, using their skills, their knowledge to help another person in trouble with a broken down car or run over, various variations thereof.

DS: A miracle I can say, it's everything for me, to wake up in the morning it's a miracle.

CM: I'm not sure that I have one. I think it's relative to people. I struggle to find miracles. Perhaps my definition would just be, the small things in life that happen out of the blue. But I think it's relative whether they do happen or not, to people.

What is perhaps most significant is that apart from this one student above, none of the students seemed to entertain any doubts regarding the existence of miracles. This faith in the miraculous extended beyond the time of Jesus or theoretical possibilities to contemplate the question whether miracles still happen today. For fifteen of the students the answer to the question was as definite and sure as the ones below.

BM: Do miracles still happen today?

BH: Yes. Definitely.

BM: Miracles happened in the Bible, do miracles still happen today?

MR: Yes, of course.

For a further seven students the answer to the question of the present occurrence of miracles followed the pattern of the following response, a little more hesitant than those above but essentially positive.

BM: Miracles happen in the Bible, but do they still happen today?

EC: As we're still breathing I think they do.

BM: But I mean miracles like in the Bible?

EC: I think they do, I've seen they do, yes.

For a number of other students the question of miracles was more doubtful, but they were by no means dismissive of the phenomenon.

NQ: Yes they do, especially in charismatic churches.

BM: OK, so particular kinds of churches have more miracles than others?

BM: Do miracles still happen today?

BMK: I have not witnessed any miracle happening. My friends usually tell me that they have witnessed miracles happening, but I haven't.

DAW: I'm sure they do. I haven't seen too many. I would love to see some. I think miracles happen, I would also say because it is as much supernatural, where people learn to live and work with each other before, I think that's a miracle, because I think there's a supernatural aspect to that too.

LM: In the Bible they were more spectacular, they were clear, they were easily visible as a miracle, but these days it's more hidden. Like if you go to the hospital and you pray for somebody to be healed, maybe that person is healed by your prayer but you are also believing in the tablets, and taking them, so it's not the same.

The pattern of the data so far shows a complex blending of modernist definitions of miracles closely resembling Hume, with reflections of a pre-modern African world view approximating the description of the Jewish world view given by Marcus Borg, added to Christian apologetics as outlined by Colin Brown. Yet the most compelling data is not the variety of the definitions of miracles but the consistency and tenacity with which most students continue to believe in miracles in the face of scholarly scepticism. Given the students' strong endorsement of the

existence of miracles I felt the need to enquire further into the emphasis that miracles and the miraculous had received in their secondary discourse, focussing my attention on the extent to which teaching in their denominations touched on miracles. The experience of all the students is that their denomination did give some teaching on miracles. For some miracles were an unquestioned and taken for granted part of the atmosphere and lived experience of their denominational discourse.

AS: Well we have had a sermon on miracles, but I think it's just generally accepted that a miracle is a miracle and people know what it is.

TT: Although it is something that I think is taken for granted, its not much talked about but its something that everybody knows about and that it happens.

For a minority of the students, however, teaching on miracles was a rare occurrence in their congregation. Given the centrality of the biblical miracles in the doctrine and faith of Christianity I have, for the purposes of this analysis, presumed that this is evidence of a lack of emphasis, rather than as lack of belief, on contemporary miracles in certain denominations.

BM: Right. Does your church give much teaching on miracles?

JM: Not really, but I think they believe in miracles.

BM: Does your church give much teaching on miracles?

JW: To an extent, yes but not really, they're more focussed on the gospel teaching parables.

Many denominations attended by our students, focussed any teaching on the miracles performed by Jesus in the Gospel accounts.

SM: No, miracles of Jesus, not miracles that are, but they're directing miracles that are happening today they're attaching them to Jesus.



VM: It wasn't on the miracles now, but the implication was if Jesus could do that and say we could do greater things than He did then they should happen now.

CM: Well I think they give a little bit of teaching on miracles, especially like they would give teaching on the miracles of Jesus, you know, but I don't know if they would bring it back to today.

While other traditions had their focus clearly and squarely on miracles performed by people in the present day.

MAN: They talk about miracles that happen today, yes, within the church, but in the Evangelist tents, but when it comes to church where they are just pastors or teachers, the person has got a teaching ministry, they don't talk about miracles mostly, they just talk about teaching the Christians about the Bible, things like that, it's only that.

PM: It's about miracles happening today, like healing, faith, people being converted, maybe a murderer being converted into the Christian faith and becoming a better person.

For most traditions both aspects of miracles were given equal weight in the preaching and life of the denomination.

BH: Well, both, we have healing...like healing days at the church where people come and tell their stories about getting healed and that sort of thing.

DW: The miracles of Jesus, and how they are happening today because Jesus even said, these signs and greater things than I have done shall you do also.

JW: A mixture of both. Because for example we had a guest speaker a couple of months ago who spoke of his own miraculous healing after having a spinal injury in a car accident and the doctors, through everything, managed to somehow find the right node to connect and that was a miracle for him. So a mixture of both.

It is interesting to note how the personal preferences and gifts of individual pastors could sway the emphasis on miracles in a particular direction. This was shown in the experience of the following student, the pastor of an independent congregation, who taught on miracles but did not see them as part of his gifts.

LC: Normally what I do is, I would use the text, the miracles of Jesus and but I always notice whenever I've used miracles that are in the present day, you can actually see the ears of the congregation open, at that point you can actually see them taking interest, because I think that they have read the miracles of Jesus and they want to see it happening today. They want to see it in real life. So, what I do is look at miracles that are happening in congregation, and not necessarily major, physical healings, for example someone who battled for a job for a long time we prayed and that was a miracle for us. Whenever I start to bring in things that have happened to people in the congregation elsewhere, almost always you would really see suddenly people come alive and very receptive. Not that I think that this is happening to a larger extent, I think it is a reflection maybe of where I see my gifting. And at a place that I'm studying now I'm getting knowledge to like spirituality, psychology, counselling. I think that's reflection of my ministry, because I'm dealing more with issues like that, you know relationships and state of the mind, and things like that rather than miracles.

Therefore the major pattern that is emerging from this data is that some credence to the belief in miracles is given by the primary discourse of most students, represented by their personal beliefs, as well as their secondary discourse, represented by the type of teaching in their denominations. In this light I asked the students whether they thought any members of staff in the School of Theology, the representatives of the tertiary discourse, believed in miracles. The largest group of students felt that staff in general did not believe in miracles or else that they had reductionist views on the phenomenon.

BMK: I really don't know. But I think the attitude of staff to miracles in the school of Theology is that miracles do not happen.

DS: I think there is this that people they believe that miracles are there but they don't think they are happening now, you know, even though they are happening. Like they saying, you can't be healed from cancer and you can't be healed from AIDS, it symbolize that those people do not believe that miracles are still happening even now, people can be healed from AIDS and even cancer, you know they are specific diseases, those diseases that can't be healed, so miracles.

LM: I feel maybe they sort of reduce their powers, they sort of put a reduction on the power of the miracles. Like sort of saying they are just natural happenings. For instance like the ten plagues are taken like just a process of disasters that just come like today we are having disasters.

MAN: I never heard even one lecturer specifying that 'I believe in miracles', so I suppose that they don't believe in miracles although I never heard them saying it verbally.

This feeling is complemented by the accusation that School of Theology staff take an overly intellectual approach to miracles, as they do to the Bible.

NQ: I don't know, but as intellectuals I think they sort of dismiss the fact that the idea of miracles, like all intellectuals do.

AS: I haven't really discussed it too much, but I feel that it's not really accepted as just a miracle. It always has to be, like symbolic of something else, or it was there for some deep reason, rather than God just giving a miracle.

CM: I think they take a very critical approach to it. I think one or two lecturers believe strongly, but I still get the sense that they look at it from a critical approach. I don't know if that means they do believe in miracles, or whether they don't believe in miracles, I just think that they think more critically about what a miracle is.

NN: I think there's a tendency to always wanting to give logic behind the miracles. So, ya, it's almost like you have to try and understand it, even though it's not easy to understand.

What troubled the students more than the idea that staff considered miracles from an intellectual rather than a faith perspective was that this position was not made clear to the students who would have appreciated an honest answer about the uncertainties and ambiguities of their teachers' position, rather than silence.

LZ: I think that's a problem, as I told you that you don't know their stand when they are teaching about this miracle stories, but you just don't know whether they agree or disagree with the miracles.

The students also attributed a negative attitude towards miracles to biblical scholars in general and especially to those writers who produced the commentaries on Mark 4:35ff, the text that will be the focus of the next chapter.

JM: I think those authors don't take miracles as something that can happen, really happen. Because if you analyse their articles on miracles, they're just taking them as stories, and they always attach a meaning, or suggest a meaning, to the real miracle. Like the other author said, to him the stilling of the storm was like it's symbolic to the resistance of the disciples', you know. So I think deep down in him, it wasn't a miracle, it was like just Jesus was trying to portray a message about the characteristics of the disciples' strength.

LZ: I think most of them they're not, I don't know, I don't really know, their interpretation of miracles but it seems as if like they make it too reasonable, not to be something that you cannot explain, they try to come with a logical explanation. So I think they try to simplify it by explaining it, why is that happening. I remember that some of them they even try to come with psychological answers to try to back up their answers.

Having sketched many students' generally adverse evaluation of the approach that the tertiary discourse of academic Biblical Studies takes to the study of miracles, it is now necessary to record the occasional favourable comments that students made on the subject.

PZ: I feel its been, its very positive, I've learnt to interpret miracles in many different ways and all of them have a positive message for different groups of people. Like reading the story of the Samaritan women, what it means to her as a woman. So its things like those the changing of water into wine it has taken a totally different message for me as a woman, so it has been empowering. Most of them the way they interpret the miracles its been very empowering.

DAW: I think they were trying to explain them in other times, rather than just a straightforward miracle, the whole idea that it was symbolic of something, and it didn't really happen as such, those kind of things to me, as a perspective that I'm not that comfortable with. But that doesn't mean when they start to talk about Jesus in control of demonic forces, I mean, there is an expectation that the supernatural still happens.

DW: I think not all, there are some who have a negative opinion towards those, but there's been some who's believed, it's like for example those who wrote about the demonic powers being in the waves and the storms and such. He had more of a positive aspect towards miracles, but those who rationalize and intellectualize the whole thing seem to be negative towards miracles.

JW: It ranges go from some on the one side, who totally set about taking miracles apart and breaking them down to logical explanations for why this could have happened or whatever. Across onto the other hand where there is an acceptance of miracles and looking at the teaching that can be borne out of miracles.

SA: There are so many of them and they all have their own views. Some of them are sceptical, they don't believe in a supernatural happening, they always think it's a sign if something happens. If somebody has cancer and is cured, then it's either the tests were wrong or something like that, it's not God, God's intervention. And on the other hand there's also some who believe that God does intervene through people, or through some source, some resource.

Even these marginally affirmatory observations by the students are signalling that there is a major discrepancy between their own faith in miracles and the perspective of intellectual biblical scholars. This disparity is very keenly felt by many of the students and accounts for some of the dismayed reactions to academic Biblical Studies that have been recorded in this chapter.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have touched on the powerful clash of discourses that arises when students enter the School of Theology. They bring the intellectual, ideological and social baggage of twenty years or more of primary and secondary discourse. They confront a discourse in critical academic theology which has a sense of vocation rooted in the enlightenment, which is to free people from the wrongheaded and obscurantist views of the Bible they have inherited and provide them with the critical skills to go out and demolish this view in all the world (Patte 1995:72). The ideological underpinning of such a view is that critical exegesis is right and the only way to go while anything else is wrong. In the following chapter I will re-present the students as observers and critics as they approach a text as ordinary readers and try to make sense of it through a dramatisation of the story and then by giving their own reading of the meanings and truths contained in the story. After this they will confront five examples of typical critical exegesis and will pass their judgement on these readings, in the same way that

critical exegetes pass judgement on ordinary readers. The difference is that many of the students approach these texts with an open mind and are willing to consider these five readings and develop the kind of multidimensional approach that Patte suggests (1995:27,59,103). In this they are more generous than scholars who go in for intellectual point scoring and do not develop much beyond the tradition in which they have been trained and have to seek comfort in huddles of like-minded intellectuals, like the Jesus Seminar and the Q industry but have nothing to say to the church (Akenson 2000:313, 321).

The other central concern that has begun to emerge in the pages of this chapter is the question whether we, the staff in the School of Theology, are going about the introduction of the students to the tertiary discourse of academic, critical Biblical Studies in the right way? In the previous chapter I have already raised the point that many students enter the School labouring under the disadvantage of primary and secondary discourses which do not prepare them adequately to meet the challenge of the reading and assignments in their theological courses including Biblical Studies. In this case it is reasonable to ask whether the staff who teach these students have clearly considered the language demands made in the readings they set for the students, the scaffolding of the written assignments they demand and whether the criteria for these assignments and the examinations are clear enough. The answer to these questions from the students' data is a clear negative and the responses of even those students from privileged backgrounds show a need for more support in this area.

The second group of questions relates to the spiritual needs of the students as they encounter this new discourse. The data in this chapter has shown a profound rupture between the students' need for emotional, psychological and spiritual support as they confront the tertiary discourse of Biblical Studies. Therefore it follows logically to ask if the teachers in the School of Theology have deliberated with themselves whether they have approached the ensuing issues with requisite sensitivity. Could the issues of race and especially gender be raised within Biblical Studies in such a way that it does not lead to conflict and the alienation of conservative male students? Could issues of sources, authorship and inspiration of the biblical texts be raised by a method that does less to estrange students from their faith and their primary and secondary discourse communities? Could the staff do more to orient the students into the

discourse with more explicit explanation of the assumptions that lie behind their teaching?  
How could the staff make their own faith commitment plain in order to reassure the students?  
And how could lecturers reveal their personal stance on issues of controversy with greater sensitivity, while, at the same time, assuring students that it is their right to believe differently?  
Do we really recognise that the problems faced by the students are as often as not the result of our discourses and our teaching practices rather than inherent weaknesses in the students?

These are not easy questions for staff to face and they have been faced by the staff in the School of Theology before. But I believe that it is necessary to re-consider them carefully if we are to ensure that students manage their transition into the tertiary discourse successfully.



## 6. *Students Reading the Text*

### 6.1 Introduction

I now come to the last section of my original data, which presents various readings of the text of the Stilling of the Storm, Mark 4:35-41. By using student data, collected at various stages in the tutorials and from their interviews, alongside the critical exegesis of the text which they read, I will present a multifaceted reading of this text. The selection of critical readings of the text included in the tutorials reflects the major trends of interpretation in biblical studies in the past century including *Formgeschichte*, *Redaktionsgeschichte* and social scientific modes of reading which developed from them. The data in this chapter re-presents a number of moments in the students' reader responses to this the pericope of the Stilling of the Storm, Mark 4:35-41. The first moment is a collective response to the text in the form of a dramatisation of the text undertaken by two groups of first year students (See Appendix Two:308). The data that I will present is their evaluation of that process of collective reading and what they have learned from it. The second moment is a personal response to the text given in the answers to a series of questions (Appendix Two:309). In these questions the students were asked whether they believed the story was true and what, in their opinion, were the main messages of the text. These interpretations of this passage re-present readings of the text that result from the students' primary and secondary discourses.

The third part of the chapter will present a series of moments in the students' response to readings of the text from four methods of biblical interpretation. Firstly, a translation of the text, by the fellows of the Jesus Seminar. Secondly, a commentary on the text from by a group of authors writing from a social scientific perspective. The third moment presents two examples of the classic critical method of *Formgeschichte*. Finally, there is an example of the later development of the historical critical methods, *Redaktionsgeschichte*. The data in this section of the chapter re-presents work done mostly with first year students, in the Biblical Studies tutorial sessions, during the first semester of 1999. However, some of the data was also collected from interviews conducted with these first years and senior students in the second semester of the same year. The data from the first year students is also different from data in previous chapters because it is in the form of written responses to questions (See

Appendix Two:310-17) asked within the context of Biblical Studies tutorials and treated as assignments, rather than oral responses in an interview situation.

The methods of critical exegesis to which the students are responding in the third section of the chapter have been the vogue in Biblical Studies since the latter part of the nineteenth century and represent a powerful, ideological discourse within Biblical Studies presenting itself as the guardian of truth and positioning other readings of the Bible as foolishness or falsehood (Foucault 1981:53). In other terms, by claiming that they represent reasoned and critical exegesis of the Bible, they position all other ways of reading as sectional, confessional and therefore ideological (cf. McLellan 1995, Thompson 1984, Eagleton 1991). In Daniel Patte's terms these ways of reading represent the powerful, one dimensional, ideology of white male exegetes, who cluster together for company in the ivory towers of the university and think they are saving the church and the world from fundamentalist obscurantism (1995:75). In this chapter I turn the tables on this hierarchy of power in Biblical Studies by letting the students pass judgement on the work of White male exegetes. In this atmosphere where the normal order of the universe (and university) is overturned a world of misrule and carnival can take place where the servants and the slaves get to be masters and speak their minds. In this chapter the student will shake off the appellations of student, neophyte and lay person and take on the role of the master, the expert, the exegete and in this process they judge the white male exegetes. They are in a new position of power and like the student in Janks and Ivanic's paper (1992: 310) they read differently. Now the failure to understand is not a fault on the part of the student rather it represents the obscurantism of White, male exegesis. The ways that biblical scholars use language, their use of Greek and transliterated Greek, the lack of faith evident in their arguments, their claims concerning the demonic nature of the storm all become objects of scrutiny and critique.

However, before we can do this we must return to the beginning of the process and the students' response to the dramatisation of the text.

## 6.2 Dramatisation

At the beginning of the tutorials I did an exercise with the first year class in which we attempted to improvise a dramatisation of this passage with the help of some students from Drama Studies. My aim with this exercise was to take the students away from a religious and even an academic interpretive mode and free them to explore their interpretation of the text before writing it down. For most of the students this was clearly a positive experience. In her evaluation of the exercise the first student wrote fulsomely on the impact of the experience on her view of the text, followed by her colleagues who were equally positive if less lengthy.

LM: The dramatisations we worked, and those we saw performed by colleagues, helped me to understand the story better. By being creative, we were able to understand how Jesus and the disciples felt. We played different roles and showed different reactions to the situation. By doing so, we were able to learn from each other. I experienced, for myself the emotions that are present behind the story. I experienced the panic and fright that gripped the disciples in a sinking boat. I understood why they asked "What manner of man is this?" Even if they had seen Jesus work miracles before. The dramatisation stimulated my imagination, as we added some words, gestures, sound effects and movements which are not actually recorded word by word in the gospel. We tried to relive the past and make it more immediate, more real and tangible. This in turn, influenced my own interpretation of the text.

NQ: We had all positioned ourselves in the position and situation of Jesus and the disciples at that time. That is we had stepped into their shoes to feel the anxiety, the panic, the parties ie. Jesus and his disciples.

ZN: The dramatization of this story is better for my side because it help me to understand better, help me to get a picture of the story and I think it will stay for long time in my mind.

MR: Yes, because to me the reaction of the disciples was not an important thing, I took the story just like any story (like when I am reading a tale story). So in this whole dramatization I started to think about the important details of the story.

EC: After the drama of Jesus and disciples in a boat, I was able to look at the narration objectively and not from a biased perspective of a particular doctrine of faith.

For some other students the influence of working with drama went beyond the interpretation of the text, to the extent of building relationships between members of the class.

MP: I like the day when we had a dramatization. It was nice as I have never did it before and also it breaks shyness and we know more about the characterization of the disciples, Jesus and also of our friends. Definitely the dramatizations which we worked on helps me a lot as I can now understand perfectly how the servants of the lord were, they were frighten and also how Jesus was ashamed and sad about them as they didn't trust his words.

However not everyone agreed that the drama was a valuable experience. The first set of negative reactions focussed on stultifying effects of the Drama Studies students on the creativity of the group. To some extent this negative reaction can be explained by the fact that these students are white and middle class and clearly have experience of drama in church and education, which was not the case for the majority of the students.

AS: I do not think the dramatization of the story helped me understand it. This is because I have heard the story very often and know what it is about without a drama of it. It was not our interpretation as the girls who were helping told us what we should do. I think it was not right getting them in when there were people in the class majoring in drama and a person who has a degree in drama. My own part of being a wave did not help me understand the story, mainly as I have nothing to understand, this story is very familiar.

BH: I don't think the dramatizations of this story helped me to understand it better as it is not a difficult story to understand or visualize. I think that although the drama students were meaning to be useful, I think they negated, to a certain extent, our own interpretation of the story as they were more concerned with the story as performance rather than the story as experience. I'm afraid that because so many in the class had, or perceived to have, a bad experience of the exercise they will not realize the importance and usefulness of drama as an effective and necessary ministry tool. I, luckily, have experience of what drama can do for God as am involved in the drama ministry at my Church.

In other cases the detractors included older students, one of whom felt that his dignity had been compromised by having to participate in childish games.

DAW: I think that dramatization of the story could help me understand the story better, but our efforts certainly did not. I think the presence of the drama students in the initial stages inhibited the process rather than enhancing it. If the group had been allowed to explore the process more and come up with their own ideas, I think it would have worked better, not enough time was given to allow shy members of the group to overcome their inhibitions. The whole thing became us acting out what the drama students wanted, rather than them assisting us in fine tuning our interpretation.

RN: To me what was dramatized did not make any sense at all as there are no Sunday school children to play with in this University! In fact I view it as an act of exploiting students minds and undermining us as people created in the image of God.

For many students the process of improvising the drama invoked a more mixed response, initially hostile or indifferent they found their attitude changing in the course of the preparation and presentation of the dramatizations.

- JM: When we were working on the drama to me it was a mere drama and something that I was compelled to do and I just took dramatization as another way of making people understand from seeing rather than reading. Even when the group I was part of performed I did not feel anything. But when I was watching the other group perform, I was really taken into the story. It suddenly seems so real that I could feel the shirr of fear with the disciples. When Jesus shouted 'be still' you feel the power and when he turned to the disciples I felt the anger then suddenly that feeling of being let down. This made me understand the story better because I went through all the emotions which took place then in those few minutes I witnessed the drama.
- MB: Initially my attitude towards the dramatization was very negative. Only once the purpose of it had been explained, did I discover some meaning in it. I'm now curious to see how my opinions and attitude and understanding of the text will change over the next few years. There is also the possibility they will not change much, but somehow I think it will. Dramatizing the text also attempts to give a little insight into some of the possible feelings and emotions of the characters. Hearing different person's opinions on the boat size, type of storm, nature of characters etc. also helped me to visualize the text and 'get into it' in more detail. I have learned how Jesus was very angry with the disciples and how if I was in the disciple's place I would have reacted the same way, maybe I would pray before, but I would still be like them. That the most interesting thing I have learned is I always say why had the disciples didn't have faith in Jesus, but now when we have done the dramatization, I feel the same way as them.
- OS: Firstly the dramatizing was boring. But then with time it reinforces some new insight of the understanding of the story. Of cause for me the drama makes the story more alive and understandable, just because an approach was different unlike the approaches which people are used to, like us reading the story for them. From my experience I have learned that people learn more better with the pictures or visual stuff, than what they hear and get out of their mind easily. But with that

dramatization even now I'm still in the position to tell more about the story. Even the things of never think of before.

Despite the mixed response to this exercise and some of the hurt feelings that resulted, I have judged the dramatisation a success in that it gave most of the students an opportunity to approach the text in a non-literate way and to experience the human relationships and drama of the story without the reverence reserved for biblical interpretation. No startling or original interpretations of the story were forthcoming, but this was not the intention of the exercise. The conventional interpretations which did emerge were lively and included the participation of all members of the class despite the complainers and detractors. Having broken the ice with this exercise I then moved on to the next exercise where the students wrote down their personal individual response to the text.

### **6.3 Personal Response to the Text**

In this section of the chapter I will present the first year students' personal responses to the text of Mark 4:35-41. At the beginning of the tutorials with these first year students I was concerned to elicit an interpretation of this passage that as far as possible reflected their pre-critical interpretation of the story. To this end, they were asked to comment, firstly, on what they believed was the main message of the story and, secondly, to state whether they believed this text was a true story based on an actual event (See Appendix Two:309). The responses captured in this section are therefore designed to act as a further illustration of the accumulated interpretations of the students' primary and secondary discourses as they begin their dialogue with the tertiary discourse of university study.

In their responses, to the question whether of the story of the Stilling of the Storm represented an actual event in the life of Jesus, the first year students were mostly more complex and nuanced than I would have expected so early in their academic career. There was only one student who believed this story was not true, he is an older student with some previous theological training. Even then, his response was theological rather than sceptical.

RN: I believe this is not a true story but it is a figurative narrative aiming at teaching people about the power of Jesus.

There was also only one response which displayed the kind of inarticulate, unreflective, naive faith that I had primed myself to expect.

ZN: I think this story is true because as I am a Christian, I believe in the Bible, what is written in the Bible as the guard of my life which was God breath in it.

The other responses all displayed some level of deductive reasoning or attempted a justification for their belief in the truth of the story. For some it was important to point out that, although the whole Bible was literally true, there were some important exceptions in the form of the symbolic narratives given in Jesus' parables and the visions in Revelation. These students are clearly not naive, but seem rather to be choosing to cling tenaciously to their naive faith in spite of their questions and provisos.

AS: I think this is a true story. This is because the Bible is all true. In the Old Testament there was symbolic writing like the creation story, but in the New Testament nearly everything is literally true apart from Revelation and the parables.

BH: Yes, it is a true story. I say this because, as a believer, I trust that the Bible was inspired by God. Everything in the Bible, then, besides parables which are stories representing a deeper ideal, are true.

Others approached the idea of truth in concrete terms, pointing out that the lake still existed and storms could be observed on its waters to this day, therefore the events of the story were believable and true.

DAW: I do believe the event actually took place. Storms on the lake were common and the gospel records a number of instances where Jesus and the disciples crossed over the lake or were on water. There were prominent fishermen amongst the



disciples and so knowledge of the lake was good and I can presume they had easy access to boats.

JM: I think this is a true story given the fact that it happened on the Lake/Sea of Galilee which is existent. Strong winds and waves occur on the sea and boats sink or are threatened to sink. Jesus' ministry is a historical truth, he lived, he taught, had followers so one can't deny the truth of this story.

MB: I think this incident took place. The lake upon which many persons sailed, was prone to storms, therefore Jesus being caught up in such a storm was likely.

MR: Yes it is true. Since it is said that Jesus used to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, then one will have to understand the fact that storms are happening everywhere in the sea, so there is nothing surprising about the storms in the sea.

Another strategy employed by certain students emphasised the logical connection and consistency of this story with other stories in the Gospels. By this method of logical deduction each incident reported in the Gospel account, reinforced the truth of other similar stories.

LM: This is a true story which actually happened and was witnessed by people. Jesus calmed the storm on the lake. This is logical and consistent with the nature of Jesus, who is truly God and omniscient. The story is true because it is consistent with the gospel miracles. Jesus demonstrated power over various situations; disease, demons, death and over forces of nature. Jesus even overrides the principles of nature as in walking on top of water. The gospels show Jesus can perform many miracles, and this is one of them. The story was handed down through oral tradition then later on it was written down. Stories about Jesus handed down orally were usually true, and were told in various places. It is unlikely that the same untrue story could circulate among various communities and be handed down several years. There is no indication that the story is a parable. All evidence,

including narratives in the other gospels, point to the fact that it is an event which actually happened.

OS: Yes I think this is the true story. Because over the previous chapter we read of Jesus teaching to the multitude while he was together with his disciples. And the previous chapter also spoke of healing, appointment of the 12 apostles and the parables to illustrate how is the Kingdom of God.

NQ: I think it's true because there is no indication of this being a parable, moreover connecting the story with the initial paragraphs Jesus and his disciples had been ministering when they decided to get into the boat only to be risen against by the storm, a big one I should say. Other than that Jesus was a supernatural person capable of anything, while his colleagues were normal persons with weaknesses and moreover they were dealing with nature which is fairly unpredictable.

In the opinion of the following group of students the truth of the story was as symbolic as it was literal. The fact that Jesus could calm a storm reassures us that he is still able to deal with any problems we face.

MP: In the natural life everyone will say it not a real story as we can't just stop a storm like this and also as in this time of the year there weren't storms. But in the spiritual way, we all believe in God and all believed that the Bible is his word and his words is true so that is why I believe that what is said in the Bible is true and also that Jesus could stop the storm.

JM: This story also has a symbolic meaning to the reader. It will be pointless to read or know that Jesus calmed the storm years and years ago when it does not mean anything to me the present reader. I would say to a person who is not a Christian, history has something to do with our presence now so this historical truth also means something and to the Christian it means you have to learn something from the story.

For all these first year students truth was an important aspect of this story. This truth could be historical or literal, symbolic or theological, but every one of the students emphasised that this story consisted of true events. This finding is particularly significant in relation to a miracle story, a gospel genre or pericope type which is generally dismissed as mythological, read untrue or impossible, by the majority of critical exegetes. The question of the truth of the story is also linked to the message contained within it, which leads neatly on to the next question in the exercise.

In the second part of the reaction paper the students' answers were broadly divided between those that identified the nature of Jesus as the source of the main message of the passage and those who pinpointed the behaviour of the disciples and the lessons they had for Christians. Those who referred to Jesus, focussed on the power that he displayed in the story. The first responses concentrated on Jesus power over the storm in its natural and demonic manifestations.

BH: The main message for me is one of the power and authority of Jesus over all. This is shown through the way that Jesus is able to quiet the storm with a few words. He can cause great change through his supremacy over all.

PM: Jesus had great powers and these were seen in the way he healed people who had faith, the way he rebuked demons and they fled. Suddenly, I realised that Jesus had actually more power than I realised. Even the wind and the waves could listen to him.

For other students it was important to stress that the divine power manifest in Jesus' works was hidden in human form and therefore came as a great surprise to the other participants.

BMK: I am told that according to the Jewish people it was only God had power over natural forces, so any human being who could quell who could still the storms like that was known to be God alone, so if a human being like Jesus could do that, so it was raising questions as to who this man really was.

MP: What I like most about is how Jesus have the power, the authority to stop the storm and how his disciples who works with him was so shocked and couldn't believe their eyes. That what I like when they say: "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea, obey him?"

DW: I think the mere fact that they use a man, making reference to natural man, but also that He's speaking to elements, it's talking about how can he have power. He's a man, yet he's got powers in the spiritual realm.

EC: I like how Jesus is interpreted in this text, that he behaves wholly like a man. He must have been tired and so his sleeping in the boat. It is also shown, in this text, that although he was man, he had the power of God upon him.

JM: That Jesus cannot be judged from outward appearance is also another difference but I would say this was difficult for he acted human and only when he performed a miracles would one notice his supreme powers.

Those other students, who associated the main lesson in this passage with the disciples, were of the feeling that we should learn from the disciples' lack of faith and hold onto our faith and trust in Jesus, who would help us in similar situations despite any lack of faith or fear.

AB: The text gives us that hope of trusting Jesus as a saviour, healer and as having power, superior and as having an authority to everything he created. The disciples had little faith as Jesus said during or after he commanded the sea and storm, so then our faith must not be lost in every situation. We must only trust on Jesus

JM: The main message/lesson in this story is Jesus' power versus the faith of the disciples. From the story one learns that it is not always easy to build faith in humans. Even to Christians of today, in problems we try to do all we can first and when it fails we remember that we can ask God through prayer to help us.

- LM: The main message of the story is that God is in control of situations, and we should trust and have faith in Him. Certain “storms” in the form of trials or troubles may be allowed in our lives. We need not to panic and feel helpless. Jesus has authority over all situations confronting and threatening our lives. We only need to acknowledge His omnipresence and trust His omniscience in whatever circumstances.
- MP: Personally I think the main message was faith that the disciples was so coward that they lost their faith and also the lesson is whether we are in a bad atmosphere or we don't know what to do, we are going to die, we mustn't loose faith, indeed our faith must rise like God. We must always have faith in God as he will never let us down it us who leave him down all the time by never trusting him.
- NQ: Faith overcomes all, even if all evidence justifies one not to go on believing it is imperative that one looks beyond the given or present situation because it is only through faith that one conquers. On the other hand, as long as one is not willing to share his/her burdens and troubles' one cannot get over them.
- ZN: The main message here is that God warn or try to show us His love to His people as He protected them when they were in trouble of stilling the storm. I think if he did not love them maybe, he could let them die. But he did not mind about their fear, even one of them did not think to pray, because of this mercy of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died for our sins without forced by anyone, but only his mercy and love. He kept them alive.

The focus of these interpretations is pretty much what I expected from students beginning their career in Biblical Studies. Their insistence on the truth of the story is entirely consistent with their primary and secondary discourses which have been shaped by the tradition that the Bible is literally true. Added to their faith in the truth of the story is their conviction that the story contains a message that is focussed either on Jesus as the dominant personality in the story and as a significant figure in their faith or else on the disciples who represent the weak

and doubting aspect of their relationship with God. Also significant is the level to which these interpretations engage with the individual and corporate faith of the readers and avoid the detachment that is characteristic of much academic writing on the biblical text. The rupture between engagement and detachment is at the heart of the encounter between the discourse of faith and the discourse of the academy. In the following section of this chapter I will allow the encounter between the students' discourse of faith and the discourse of the critical exegesis to become more literal as the students give their responses to and judgements of the commentaries of selected critical exegetes.

## **6.4 Reception of Commentaries**

With this section on the reception of the commentaries on the text of Mark 4:35-41, I have arrived at the core of the data in this chapter. In this section the students will turn the tables on the "dead" white male traditions of exegesis and sit in judgement on them. The data was collected in two ways. Firstly from written exercises handed in by first year students after reading and discussing each text, evaluating the commentators' ideas by saying what they liked or disliked about the interpretation and how it was similar or different from their own reading of the text (See Appendix Two:310-17). Secondly from the follow-up interviews I did with these same first years and senior students in which I asked for their comments on some issues raised by the first years in their written work (See Appendix One:302).

I shall begin each subsection with a justification for why each commentary was included in the study. This task will also involve some investigation of each scholar's own reasons for their stance and some critique of each scholar's work where available. By this I hope to put each extract from a commentary into a context in terms of its stance on the pericope. In the critique I will try also to show the ideological underpinnings of the different modes of reading the text, after which I will present the students' critique of each author.

### 6.4.1 *The Jesus Seminar*

The first commentary is contained in a book called *The Five Gospels* by the Jesus Seminar, a group of primarily North American, biblical scholars engaged in research to find evidence of the historical Jesus. In the introduction to their volume the editors claim to be in the vanguard of serious biblical Scholarship in North America, labouring in the face of the attacks of political Christian fundamentalism which seeks to shut down all debate about who Jesus was. Their aim is to bring the results of biblical scholarship into the public eye and to educate the public in a critical view of the Bible to counteract the effects of TV evangelists and popular right wing religious writing (Funk et al 1997:34). In addition they see themselves as the heirs of the scientific tradition started by Galileo, continued by the Enlightenment and encapsulated, in theological terms, by the work of the quest for the historical Jesus by Strauss, Schweizer and others, who challenged the established view of the world and set out to find historical proof for their belief in Jesus (Funk et al 1997:1-5). The intention of their work is clearly shown in this introduction, which presents a short yet comprehensive history of the past 300 years of biblical Scholarship in order for the general reader to understand the basis for their quest without the need for theological education (cf. Funk et al 1997:5-33). In this book they are concerned with the gospel texts that we have inherited, not only the four canonical gospels but also the deuterocanonical sources of the Jesus tradition, notably the Gospel of Thomas which takes its place here, as the fifth gospel. Through their method, a complex system of voting and averages that I will not elaborate here, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar have determined, what they believe to be, the authentic words of Jesus. These sayings and aphorisms are then embedded in a new translation of the five texts in colloquial style, once again aimed at the general reader (cf. Funk et al 1997:xiii, 35-37).

The Jesus Seminar and their methodology have been seriously questioned, some would say debunked, in recent publications. Donald Akenson has shown clearly that their voting system is seriously flawed, both because of the variability of the panel of voters and because the system of averages they used can only ever produce inconclusive results (Akenson 2000:313ff). In addition their reliance on sayings and aphorisms, rather than stories, to get a true picture of the historical Jesus has been criticised by other scholars including Richard Horsley (Funk et al 1997:5, Horsley 1999:1-2). These criticisms aside, *The Five Gospels* is a

significant moment in contemporary scholarship of the gospels and represents an interesting viewpoint to present to the students.

The way the Jesus Seminar approaches this text is to dismiss it with three lines of comment. In their opinion the words ascribed to Jesus in this story would have had no independent circulation during the period of oral transmission of the Jesus Tradition and therefore are more likely to represent the gospel teller's imagination than any authentic sayings of Jesus (Funk et al 1997:60). There is no specific judgement about the voracity of the miracle story itself, however given the tradition they are working in it would not be surprising if the Jesus Seminar rejected any suggestion of the miraculous out of hand.

### **The Five Gospels**

And with the help of many such parables he would speak his message to them according to their ability to comprehend. Yet he would not say anything to them except by way of parable, but would spell everything out in private to his own disciples.

Later in the day, when evening had come, he says to them, "Let's go across to the other side." After sending the crowd away, they took him along since he was in the boat, and other boats accompanied him. Then a great squall comes up and the waves begin to pound against the boat, so that the boat suddenly began to fill up. He was in the stern sleeping on a cushion. And they wake him up and say to him, 'Teacher, don't you care that we are going to drown?'. Then he got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be quiet, shut up!" The wind then died down and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so cowardly? You still don't trust, do you?" And they were completely terrified and would say to one another, "Who can this fellow be, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"(Funk 1997:60)

Without the benefit of the context to this translation that I have provided above, the students' reception of this text focussed entirely on the use of language. The use of modern colloquial idiom found some favour among the students. However, there were limits to what they could tolerate and a number were particularly disturbed by the suggestion that Jesus could have used anything approaching foul or coarse language and suggested a return to the more refined tones of traditional versions instead.



AS: I like the translation of the first text into modern language but the difference between this and my own interpretation is that Jesus says 'shut up'. Since I have always been taught that this is the rudest thing you can say to anyone, I do not believe he said shut up, but 'Be still' or 'quiet' or something along those lines.

BH: The difference of interpretation from mine is that I disagree that Jesus would have shouted 'shut up' to the wind and the waves, as I don't believe it was in His nature to do such a thing.

Another group of students were less impressed with the modern language and believed that it detracted from the holiness of the text to be so close to everyday language. Others were somewhat mystified by the somewhat stilted style of the translation which reflects perhaps the struggle to give the translation in the contemporary idiom while still attempting to retain something of the flavour of the original Greek.

NQ: Reading one has taken out the meaningfulness, richness, powerfulness and if I may say so holiness of the text, this is particularly owed to the "worldly" "heathen" jargon that has been used (with particular reference to Jesus utterances).

LM: The interpretation is different to mine in that the writer is not so careful about tenses. There is a mixing of tenses which can be confusing. One needs to know if one is reading a narrative or a dialogue. There should be distinction between narrative and dialogue parts of writing.

Without more knowledge of the context it is difficult to imagine what else could be said about this interpretation. Perhaps in the planning of the tutorials it was remiss of me not to provide at the very least the snippet of commentary that accompanied this text. While the students did not have the context, it is built on the foundation of earlier scholarly tradition and their reaction to other scholars of a Form Critical and a Redaction Critical ilk can be assumed or read back into this section as the chapter progresses. However it should be explained that in the course of this particular tutorial the Jesus Seminar translation was

coupled with the following commentary from Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh's *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*.

#### *6.4.2 Social Scientific Approach: Malina and Rohrbaugh*

The second commentary extract comes from the *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* by Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh. Like the previous commentary this book arises out of the work of a particular group of scholars, in this case known as The Context Group, who place the accent of biblical interpretation on the cultural background of the text rather than the text itself (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:vii). The authors aim to show that the gap between the world view of modern western readers of the biblical text and the original hearers and readers is not just 2000 years but also a cultural gulf between Western industrial culture and Mediterranean agrarian culture (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:1-3). They show how the circum-Mediterranean area can be seen as a cultural continent, an anthropological term used to describe a cluster of societies which have common social structures and similar cultural adaptations to geographical region, and that this means that modern Mediterranean societies can provide important clues for the cultural context of biblical times. While they recognise that much has changed in Mediterranean cultures in 2000 years, they also believe that careful and critical application of the model of culture can offer a way to understand the biblical world in a way that western and particularly United States culture cannot (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:4). In addition they acknowledge the historical particularities of each society within the region and the changes that can take place within any society over even a short period of time, nevertheless they adopt a social scientific perspective in which analysis of societies takes place at the generic rather than the particular level (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:5). Critiques of this method have pointed out that the level of abstraction at which the authors are working seems to preclude any discussion of how the Jesus movement was any different from other contemporary groups and whether they deviated from Mediterranean cultural norms in any way. Furthermore, the strong distinction between honour/shame and guilt culture which pervades their study has been questioned in recent anthropological work (Burnett 1994:603). Nonetheless, this is a very interesting approach to biblical interpretation and as such I included it for comment by the students.

The authors' response to the text of Mark 4:35-41 is very brief and concentrates on the disciples reaction, their fear, their obtuse incomprehension of Jesus' power and his place in the hierarchy of spiritual forces. There is also a reference back to an earlier note on demons, demon possession and the cosmic hierarchy, which suggests that the storm was caused by demonic forces and that Jesus would need to be further up in that hierarchy in order to control and calm the storm. However, the students only had access to the very short extract below in order to make a judgement of this social science method of interpretation.

### **Social-Science Commentary**

Showing fear openly as the disciples do here results in a serious loss of honour for a Mediterranean male, should such fear become known to some out group. It can be added to Mark's frequent characterization of the disciples as obtuse and uncomprehending. The disciples' question in verse 41 is not one of "identity" as a modern reader would assume. It is one of status or honour. It asks about Jesus' location in the hierarchy of powers and is the question raised because "even the wind and sea obey him" (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992).

Dealing with the issues as they arise in the text above, most of the students were somewhat mystified by the stress which the authors of this commentary place on honour and loss of honour in Mediterranean Culture. Mostly they did not seem to understand the relevance of this cultural background to the interpretation of this text and in one case even accused the authors of bias towards a particular cultural world view, which is precisely their stance.

DW: I cannot see the connection of status and honour in this scripture.

LM: What I like about the interpretation is that it gives more information on certain aspects than an ordinary reader would know from merely reading the text eg. that Mediterranean males were not to show fear openly. But I would not have equated the fear shown by the disciples in this instance to fear on other occasions. Besides, the fear was never shown to an outsider; the disciples were on their own, and could not have taken Jesus to be an outsider.

OS: What I like least is that Malina and Rohrbaugh showed their world view biases that fear of the disciples resulted in serious loss of honour of a Mediterranean male which became known to some out group. They also stated that Mark quite often characterizes the disciples as being stupid and uncomprehending. But for me at this point the real core of disciples' problem was the embarrassment of the thing that Jesus did. And for me I think Christ's disciples had been shocked but not to be stupid of what Jesus did. Due to the deeds which always surpass their understanding.

In many cases the students' incomprehension of the author's point was expressed in terms of an understanding of the disciples' fear as a natural and even healthy reaction to an intolerable and frightening situation.

EC: This story of Jesus with his disciples is interpreted in a very different way from what I have always held. I always thought the expression of fear by the disciples was a natural thing that anyone would understand and accept. The question of honour for me does not apply because they were faced with a death situation.

JM: What I like least is the taking of fear of the disciples as un-man-like. I think this is rather oppressive because one has to oppress the real feelings and pretend to be brave not for your sake but for the sake of society. I think we have to live a life for ourselves, not for society. Their fear of death and forgetting that Jesus was in their midst is also a similarity to my own interpretation. I think to human beings the thought of death breaks our faith and reasoning, therefore the urging of having faith in Jesus as the elementary/basic force in our lives.

MB: The fact that Mark sees the disciples as slow learners, was not new to me, as I had interpreted it so before. Jesus uses parables to separate those who really want to learn, from those who do not want to put much effort in. I see the humanness and fearfulness of the disciples, and the fact that even those closest to Jesus, did not recognize or even understand who he really was. They must have had tremendous

faith in him, to call upon him to save them from the storm. The faith of the disciples, both individually, and the faith in each other was lacking

But in at least one case a student found that the information about Mediterranean culture validated her own culture and assured her that the Bible did not need to be interpreted through only one particular lense.

NQ: The second reading is informing of a behaviour pattern of a particular culture which is closely related to African culture. Thus this knowledge leaves me with pride and joy in knowing that African culture is not obtuse and remote as it has always been perceived by non-Africans.

Another aspect of Malina and Rohrbaugh's commentary on this passage was the way they reinterpreted the disciples' question "who is this man?" in verse 41. In the questionnaire I brought students' attention back to the disciples' question and asked them whether they assumed that the disciples were concerned with Jesus' identity on earth or his place in the heavenly hierarchy. I was interested to see how much they would have in common with the 'modern reader' assumed by the authors. Some of the students did seem to feel that the disciples' question was one of identity, but few focussed on identity in the existential sense that was intended by the authors, rather they emphasised the humanness of Jesus in contrast to his spiritual power. To some extent this is probably because the way I asked the question didn't specify how they should interpret the term identity, on the other hand there could also be that the kind of 'modern' interpretation envisaged by the authors is not an issue for these students. In fact most of them seemed to regard it as focussing on Jesus spiritual powers in a religious rather than a sociological sense.

JM: I think they're looking for His identity on earth, because I think by this time, they did really believe that Jesus was a spiritual being. I think they just took him as one of them, but who was superior like he had some special powers they couldn't understand. So I think they were just asking his hierarchy among men. And I believe, maybe in their context there were people who were powerful, who could

perform like maybe say a miracle, so I think Jesus they studied as one of them but who was powerful, who had some special powers.

JW: I would have said that to a large extent they may be speaking about his place here on earth. For me it's just a case of "Who is this man"- you know he's able to do this and still the storm and everything else, who is he? Not "is he some spiritual being" and everything else but is he you know, who is he? We thought we knew him but now we really just don't know.

MAN: I think they were asking about His identity on earth, because in the first place when Jesus come, they look at Him as a person who's going to free them from the oppression of the Romans. So I think they were still questioning him on those grounds that, 'who is this person? why is He so powerful', yes, so the identity of Him on earth.

As it turned out, most of the students seemed to assume that the disciples' question was related to the spiritual hierarchy. The following students concentrated on how Jesus' supernatural act impacted on the disciples view of his identity. Once again however the sense they had was spiritual rather than sociological.

BMK: I think they are asking about his identity, his ability, because I am told that according to the Jewish people it was only God had power over natural forces, so any human being who could quell who could still the storms like that was known to be God alone, so if a human being like Jesus could do that, so it was raising questions as to who this man really was.

RS: I think they were clearly asking about his identity because this was a supernatural act that he did, and I mean it couldn't really have been his position on earth because that would have made him another human being. I think, I think they were looking to supernatural positioning, you know. If he does supernatural things then it must be something from a transcendent source, from somewhere in heaven.

LC: I think more in a spiritual sense, if I were to get that. I think they have obviously seen that there is non ordinary man, this is a spiritually empowered man.

DAW: Ja, but I see it with a, definitely in terms of identity in a spiritual power structure, but almost the question I ask with amazement just in terms of suddenly seeing, I mean they had exposure to stuff that He was doing in terms of healing and so on. But this now suddenly, even the wind and the waves obey him, this is like wow, they are certainly not 'who is this guy?'

AB: I think that they are asking about his place in spiritual hierarchy, because of his power, because of his miracles, and they were just, they don't believe, they were asking themselves how kind of a man that can stop even the waves, and the wind can listen to him, can obey him.

PM: Jesus had great powers and these were seen in the way he healed people who had faith, the way he rebuked demons and they fled. Suddenly, I realise that Jesus had actually more power than I realised. Even the wind and the waves could listen to him. I like the way Jesus is elevated in the hierarchy of power. Before quietening of the storm, it was realised that Jesus was powerful, but after the storm, the disciples saw that he was really, greater than they thought.

A number of students thought that the question was searching for answers about Jesus' place both in the earthly and the heavenly sphere.

SA: I think it could be both ways I mean more so the spiritual wise, but I also think, you know if somebody does something that's totally out of this world, you want to know who the person is, therefore they ask: "Who is this man?"

SD: I would say both because there's a psalm in the Old Testament, it is saying that everything on this earth belongs to God, so ya, they were shocked, and they

wondered that who is this man that is having power over nature, ya, so I would say both. They were questioning Jesus' identity on spiritual grounds and on earthly grounds.

DW: I think it's both because the mere fact that they use a man, making reference to natural man, but also that He's speaking to elements, it's talking about how can he have He's a man, yet He's got powers in the spiritual.

MR: Firstly his place in heaven, first of all the world belongs to God and then they didn't know that he is God. Therefore even water or the sea is one of the things that is showing the powerfulness of God as a creator, therefore who is he who can actually control God's nature? When coming to his position, about his identity, yes we have people like for instance Caesar and then Herod and others who is so powerful, where can we put him? Can we put him on top of Caesar or just between Caesar and others.

A first year student found herself prevaricating between the two possibilities, but her critique was aimed at the commentators not the disciples.

MB: They shouldn't have questioned His identity. I think they should have known who he was, and maybe then they were questioning the spiritual hierarchy, but not his physical identity. At first, I thought was a question of identity, not so much of power. But since it has been explained in more detail, I do see the issues of status and hierarchy being important. But, I am not convinced I like the interpretation showing the importance of status. It just seems so cold and impersonal. I would prefer it if the issue of identity (of Jesus) was explored in more detail.

Other students agreed that the commentators' questions had little relevance for them, emphasizing instead that the amazement which the disciples felt at this display of power was the source of the question.



EC: I don't think it's speaking of either these two. I don't think their question of 'who is this man?' is a question per se, I think it's a rhetorical question, it's not something that needs a response. I don't think it's a quest for knowledge, I think it's an expression of alarm, you know, like wow, my god, who is this man. That's how I would interpret it.

TT: The fact that they use man- that word- it doesn't carry the idea that they were thinking of the position in heaven or something like that but I think they were just amazed- you know, who is this? What kind of a person is this? What kind of a man is this?

In retrospect I should perhaps have been more careful about presenting the work of groups of scholars with particular agendas to students, without more contextual explanation of their aims and agendas. Had I done so, it would probably have meant that I would have got more carefully reasoned critiques from the students. On the other hand, my aim was to present students with examples of tertiary theological discourse that was as far from their primary discourse as it was possible to go. In that case, these two methods of interpreting the text fit the bill admirably for the kind of discourse that mystifies students. This is an interesting finding in the light that the stated aim of both works is to make the interpretation of the Gospels easier for the general reader. Therefore it could be suggested that these commentaries are not ones that can be casually dipped into by the curious without some degree of alienation of the reader arising from the discourse. The students were put off by the coarse language or confused by the stress on honour because they had not read the introductions to these books which provide the frames of reference and context to explain why the text is being read in a particular way. Therefore these findings support my conclusion that critical theological discourse, no matter how friendly it tries to be, cannot be presented to ordinary readers without mediation which gives them a frame of reference to understand it. At some level the students anticipate Akenson's critique of such work as pretentious nonsense produced with dubious methods to dubious effect.

### 6.4.3 *Demonic Readings: Branscomb and Schnackenburg*

I selected these two readings to represent scholarly commentaries on the English text which are firmly rooted in the Historical Critical tradition. This was the prevailing orthodoxy in Biblical Studies in the middle decades of the twentieth century and still exerts some influence as the heritage which the scholars who wrote the previous two texts received in their theological education. Once I began to take note of the students' reaction to these commentaries I realised that they share a common emphasis on the demonic nature of the storm, which provides another link between them. Therefore, I will deal with them as a unit in this section of the chapter. I will introduce and present the Branscomb text first, followed by Schnackenburg, and then I will deal with the students' reaction to both texts.

The older of the two is Branscomb, which dates from 1937 and is part of a series of commentaries based on the now classic Moffat translation of the New Testament. At the time this was clearly the cutting edge of biblical scholarship in the Anglo-American world and includes titles from celebrated biblical scholars of the time. James Moffat's Editor's Preface underscores the purpose of the commentary to provide an explanation of the text using historical critical methods to elucidate what the text would have meant in its original context, but that any historical considerations needed to be subordinated to the fact that this is a document of faith and as such it is the religious meaning that is most important (Branscomb 1941:vii). Branscomb's own introduction is standard fare, including sections on the original "readers", location, purpose, sources, date and author of Mark's gospel, providing no surprises to the reader who has been educated in this tradition (Branscomb 1941:xiii ff) His list of sources includes some classic works of German *Formgeschichte* and emphasises once more that this commentary is firmly bound to the prevailing orthodoxy in biblical studies at the time. Interestingly enough this commentary, like the previous two, claims to be written for the general reader or the apprentice theologian without the esoteric jargon and elaborate footnote, so fashionable in scholarly circles (Branscomb 1941: xxxviii).

True to his roots in *Formgeschichte*, Branscomb locates this text within a series of oral units including the following two stories. Also he is careful to distinguish those aspects of the story which reflect the faith of the Church from those which have the air of historical facts related

to the Galilean ministry of Jesus. With a somewhat condescending manner he suggests that any modern reader who ascribes miraculous powers to Jesus is a primitive rustic like the disciples. He is prepared to see some truth in the story but only as far as it is a truth which Jesus' followers believed rather than an event that really happened (Branscomb 1941:87-8). But as Patte (1995:75) would have pointed out, this claim suffers from the same ideological burden as the previous two which is the vocation of theology post-Enlightenment to combat rather than embrace and transform the interpretations of ordinary readers. The careful separating of faith from theological discourse is what alienated students from this reading.

**Branscomb:**

Storms such as the one described are not rare on the Sea of Galilee. On the east shore the land rises precipitously to the plateau some two thousand feet above the level of the sea. Further north and east it is higher still. The wind-storms which break on the sea from the heights and through the ravines are both sudden and severe. The boat conveying Jesus and His disciples was caught in one of these squalls, and the latter feared for their lives. The remainder of the story is told in vivid and popular language. Jesus, asleep in the stem, is awakened. He rebukes the wind, and commands the sea to be quiet, just as He did the demon in v. 25 ff. It appears that the storm is thought of as the work of a demon. This was quite natural, for demons not only entered human bodies, but could locate themselves in the wind, or in stars, or other natural objects (cf. Eph. ii. 2). A great calm followed Jesus' words. The statement of the disciples to each other points the moral of the story, a moral couched in terms of the developed faith of the Church rather than of the days of the Galilean ministry. Whatever can He be, when the very wind and sea obey Him? In attempting to understand this story one must remember that it was written down a number of years after the event which is described, and in the light of the beliefs which Christians had come to hold about Jesus. That a severe storm fell upon the small boat which once conveyed the disciples and their master from the western to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and that they were convinced either then or later, that they had been saved by Jesus' powers, remain the salient facts. One might guess that the words of Jesus, when aroused from His sleep, were words of encouragement and faith rather than addresses to the wind and sea. In any case, modern readers are likely to seek elsewhere for the causes for the quieting of the storm than did the disciples. But the story contributes a brief but vivid picture of the journeys in and around Galilee, and of the impression which Jesus made upon His followers (Branscomb 1941: 88-9).

There are not many clues about the intentions of Schnackenburg in his commentary, apart from the fact that it belongs to a series called the *New Testament for Spiritual Reading*. This is what attracted me to this commentary in the first place with its suggestion of a more devotional stance which would bring the discourse a little closer to the student's own discourse. The only other lead to Schnackenburg's intentions is a short preface from one John L. McKenzie who is presumably the editor of the series. McKenzie makes a number of interesting critical points about the stance of this commentary towards the Gospel of Mark. Firstly, that it presents the ministry of Jesus as the salvation event expected by messianic Judaism rather than as a teacher of wisdom. Secondly, that this event is presented in the light of the faith of the church that through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God had become incarnate in the world. Thirdly that although the presentation of this event in Mark is mythological, this does not matter because the original readers also thought mythologically (Schnackenburg 1977:vi-viii). All of which amounts to saying that the truths contained in the gospel are spiritual, but we cannot make any claims for their historicity.

Schnackenburg approaches this text as a reworking of an ancient sea rescue myth where Jesus, acting in the place of God, uses the power of a word to exorcise demons and the demonic powers contained in the storm. Several special features of the storm are underlined, the unusual and unnatural ferocity of the storm which reduced even experienced fishermen to panic, the rapidity with which the storm is calmed and the fact that Jesus' outward appearance belies his spiritual power. The presentation of Jesus' power underscores the complete lack of faith by the disciples and the lesson of the story that the reader's faith should survive the hostile assaults of enemy powers and hold on to belief in Jesus the son of God (Schnackenburg 1977:84-5). This commentary is a curious blend of scepticism, evidenced in hints about natural explanations, and almost fundamentalist faith which demands no questions. Perhaps it is this very schizophrenia, which reflects their own experience of coping with theological discourse, which appeals to the students, because this is the one commentary that received an overall favourable response from the students.

**Schnackenburg:**

The power of Jesus, experienced here, is only comprehensible in the sense intended by the evangelist if, with him, one understands the adjuration of the storm and the word of command to the sea as a casting out of demons. The Greek word which is used for "rebuke," or forceful reprimand of the wind, is also to be found in the adjuration of the demons (1:25 and 9:25). A distinction is evidently made in Mark between the demons of storms and sea (not so in Matthew or Luke). Every word of command corresponds to a definite result." The wind ceased and the sea became calm, "two marvellous happenings since the waves normally do not become calm so quickly. The "natural" explanation that such violent storms suddenly arise on the sea of Galilee and just as quickly die down breaks down, however, in face of the experienced fishermen among Jesus' disciples who must have known about this. The portrayal echoes a special experience first, fear of death (v. 38), then after the sudden calm another type of "fear," awe before him who accomplished this with a short word of command. Even the description of the disciples' reaction is similar to that of the people after the first exorcism. Jesus' power over the wind and the sea proves him to be master over demonic powers.

That the powers of God are present in Jesus cannot be deduced from his outward appearance. He behaves wholly like a man after the tiring day of preaching at the sea before great crowds of people, he sleeps on the hard cushion where normally the helmsman sits, and not even the noise of the storm and the waves beating against the boat wake him. The disciples wake him, but then he acts immediately and in a manner which is without parallel. The motif of rescue from peril at sea is old (the Jonah story, also Jewish and pagan stories); but in other incidents God is the rescuer or it is the prayer of the pious which brings down help. Here someone acts in God's name and utters only a word of command. The whole incident is at the same time an experience of the disciples and a lesson for them. In Matthew the last words of astonishment are spoken by the "men." In Mark it is always the disciples. Danger of death made them forget who they had in their midst; the powers to which they saw themselves exposed overpowered their faith. This is openly expressed in Jesus' words of reproach, they are fearful and cowardly. Again it is Mark who with his double question brings this out more forcefully than any other evangelist. For him, the disciples completely lost faith, where Matthew speaks of "men of little faith." Faith is here not yet a reflective faith in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God. It is the elementary force of believing confidence. It must survive all the assaults of powers hostile to God. It is the prerequisite for the understanding of Jesus' message about God's kingdom. The last question, however, gives the reader also to understand that it must be a faith in Jesus the Son of God.

The issue which exercised the students' minds to the greatest extent in these texts was the suggestion that the storm had elements of a demonic nature. This was not something many of the students had contemplated in their previous reading of the text, as a result some of the students found it rather hard to swallow. However, in presenting the data in this section I will begin with the thoughts of those students who were willing to take the idea into consideration. For some of the students reading the arguments put forward by the commentators were a crucial factor in convincing them that the demonic interpretation was a valid reading of this pericope.

EC: The question of the sea being influenced by demonic powers to raise a storm is what makes the whole story new to me. Here the interpreter seems to highlight that demonic storms were quite a common thing in those days. The geographic information given in the first lines and the history to that geography has made me to believe the concept of demonic storms in Galilee.

MB: Well, I had never thought of it that way, I had never thought about it that way, but when I read, but then reading those readings that you gave us did make me think it could be, but I had never, ever entertained that thought prior to reading that material. But I could begin to believe it.

JM: At first when I read this story before all those articles we dealt about, I never thought or regarded the storm as demonic. But when we went through those papers, I was thinking of exorcising, and it meant that there was something demonic.

For senior students schooled in the symbolic interpretation of such stories the symbolic connection of the storm with chaos, and Jesus' equally symbolic calming of that chaos provided the explanation for the demonic forces.

BMK: I don't know, but according to what I'm told is that the storm symbolize chaos and I read the book of Genesis Chapter 1 that there was chaos and the ordering of that chaos is God who is against these chaotic forces, so I should say that it is, it might be demonic.

In the case of some other students their willingness to contemplate the demonic nature of the storm arose from their general acceptance of the idea that demonic forces are constantly at work rather than Branscomb's scholarly focus on the fact that the Greek word used to rebuke the storm is the same as that used to cast out demons.

TT: In that I do believe there are things like demonic things and that Jesus was actually able to quiet it and that it sort of obeyed him, then maybe it was some kind of a demonic storm.

DAW: The idea that the forces of darkness may have been responsible for the storm, in order to disrupt or destroy Jesus ministry, is a point that enhances my interpretation and gives reinforcement to the importance I place on the authority of Jesus.

OS: What I like most about this interpretation is that Jesus calm the storm in the same manner when He was rebuking demon . And as the result the storm was thought as the work of demons that don't only enter human body but also locates themselves in wind, storms and natural objects. The reason is that this interpretation fits in with what Paul speaks about in Eph. 6:10 stating that our battling is not just against blood and flesh but also the authorities, the powers of darkness and against the spiritual force of evil in the heavenly realms.

At a literary level this student was willing to see a demonic trap in the storm, because Jesus' teaching in the preceding parables had been focussed on faith.

MP: I can now see the demons wanted to trap the disciples, and also I can just say how it is connected with the verses before as Jesus say if you have faith like the mustard

seed you can move a mountain and that why Satan wanted to put them on test. That was nice as I could connect these two things together.

But most of the students, twenty-three in all, rejected the idea immediately and even found it quite disturbing. When they considered the evidence put forward by Branscomb, which is that Mark used the word 'rebuke' to describe the way Jesus deals with both storms and demons, they were not convinced. In my analysis I believe that this shows that this kind of evidence, which scholars deem sufficient when dealing with the Bible in purely literary terms, has no weight in the discourse of faith, which is still many student's default mode when dealing with the biblical text.

CM: No, I never thought of it in that way. I don't even know why symbolism needs to be given to the storm as such. Because I could look at it, well you could look at it in a number of ways. I mean, on the one hand, you could perhaps have a demonic meaning attached to it, especially because there are parables before it, but you can also just look at it as just a local storm there was a storm. But I really don't think that there was anything demonic about it.

BH: I disagree with Branscomb attributing the storm to demons. Why would God wish to use demons? Let alone use them to create a storm which is created naturally by the topography of the Sea of Galilee anyway. I believe that the squall just happened to be a bad one. Just because the word rebuke was used, doesn't mean that it refers to demons it could just have been the word used to calm chaos of any kind. I think Branscomb is totally misled by thinking that the storm was the result of demons he is merely assuming things and is reading too much into the word 'rebuke'.

LM: What is different from my own interpretation is that he puts together things that do not really belong together. He makes a far-fetched match of the storm and demonic power by picking on single words by the gospel narrator. I dislike the



assumption that people took a storm to be the work of a demon. There is no indication of that in the narrative.

In contrast to this hostile reception of Branscomb, Schnackenburg was well received by the students and regarded as comfortable, safe and consistent with their own views.

LM: Schnackenburg's interpretation of the calming of the storm is the same as my own in that he acknowledges supernatural power where it is appropriate, and does not simply explain away things. For example, he says the explanation that storms were frequent on the lake breaks down the as experienced fisherman react in an unexpected way. He also states Jesus acts in a manner which is without parallel, showing Jesus was doing supernatural things here.

This positive reaction was most aptly demonstrated by the extent to which they were able to countenance the concept of a demonic storm when he raised it, even by those students who had most vociferously rejected Branscomb's very similar suggestion.

BH: The way that Schnackenburg attributes the storm to demons I have never thought of doing this. At first, in the previous text, which also referred to the squall as one caused by demons I was very sceptical, but after reading this extract I'm a bit more convinced. A natural squall could have been as chaotic, but because the experienced disciples became 'dumbstruck' with fear makes me wonder if the squall was maybe demonic. At the same time I remain cautious to attribute things to demonic power where they are not due. I still have to come to my own conclusion about this.

Apart from raising the uncomfortable idea of the demonic, Branscomb made students uncomfortable with some of his other pronouncements. In her written assignment, after reading his commentary one of the students was disturbed by Branscomb's hint that the words "Be still" could have been addressed to the disciples, rather than the sea.

LM: The fact that the words of Jesus were words of encouragement rather than addresses to the storm does not go down well with me. This seems to undermine the impact of the miracle.

When I interviewed the students later in the year I picked up this question, asking students if they agreed with Branscomb's reading of the text: "One might guess that the words of Jesus, when aroused from his sleep, were words of encouragement and faith rather than addresses to the wind and sea" (Branscomb 1941:88). In their answers one student was prepared to accept this reading as a likely scenario because Jesus could have been disoriented as he woke up from his sleep.

DS: I think there He was speaking with the disciples', that maybe to ensure that they must not be frightened about the storm, and then maybe they frightening Him with noise and all these things, and He was like you know when you sleep you get frightened if somebody came and wake you in a harsh way, you know He was like calming them down so that they must be quiet, so they must explain what is going on, why are they waking Him up because He don't know what's going on.

But, most other students interviewed were clear that the words of calming were clearly addressed to the sea and the wind in the storm. Some also felt the need to point out that any other suggestion was tantamount to saying that the miracle had not happened.

NQ: The idea that Jesus' words were not directed to the sea and the wind deprives the story of the "universal" acknowledgement of Jesus' supernatural powers.

MAN: For me, I think He was addressing the storm, to show that even the nature listens to Him, so He's having that divinity within Him.

MB: Well, once again I always thought that, that was addressed to the storm, and had never thought that, that was addressed to the disciples' who were obviously floundering around, so I thought it was the sea.

MP: To the sea. And also like it can be to the sea, cause if it was meant for the disciples', the sea would continue, but he said it to the sea, so the sea is still, the people also still.

MR: I would say that to the sea, in a sense that he, like I said, he knew what was happening therefore showing them seeing them be that way he wouldn't just say to them "be quiet!" he'd rather show them what to do, "you don't have to be afraid of anything, I'm in control, of everything myself that is to say even the sea."

A few of the more adventurous students were willing to concede, after a struggle, that both the sea and the disciples, could easily have been addressed by the same words.

DAW: I don't actually know. I've always considered it to be addressed to the sea, and would in the main, retain that. But I wrestled with the way the writer, tended to be quite heavy about the disciples. But maybe it was addressed to them as well, but I think that there was definitely a word spoken, in my mind, to the storm.

AS: Well I think that He could have been, but then the sea wouldn't have be calmed because He didn't tell the sea to be calmed. Unless that was just in his own head. I think it's more likely that he was actually telling the wind and the waves to be calm, but I think He might have been insinuating that the disciples' should also be quiet too.

Some students thought that given the state of panic that the disciples were in, they would probably have needed simultaneous tranquillising, along with the storm.

EC: I think to all of them. I think Jesus was addressing the fear within the disciples. The stillness is also for the storm to calm down, and the wind to stop, and also the disciples' fears to come to rest. I think when He said "Be still" he had taken a stand of authority over nature and even men.

PM: Probably a mixture of the both because he was probably annoyed that they were whimpering and nattering behind him a bit, and especially if they'd woken him up. The simple humanity of him probably told them to be quiet as well as the sea. But it was probably aimed at the sea as well.

SA: Again you could look at it both ways. He could have said, you know, because the disciples' they were in such chaos, such a panic he could have told them you know, to keep quiet. I'm here now and I'm going to work it out, work your problem out. And he also could have said to the storm be quiet, because he has the power.

Another issue that I thought had to be addressed in the interview was the fact that as far as I could see Branscomb's reading seemed to have no basis in any textual variation or any other evidence from either the English or the Greek text, unless he was hearing echoes in his mind of Matt 8:26, which could have suggested that the disciples were the addressees of these calming words. In the context of this research I felt that the issue of legitimate and illegitimate commentary was of decisive significance so I asked the students what they thought about a scholar who would make such a proposition without any evidence. The students were largely forthright in their condemnation of Branscomb, if it could be proved that he deliberately misread the text.

RN: I would challenge His reading of the text, cause as I've said, you read the text, you consult the commentaries, you look for evidence. You don't just take the thing at random, you say, as the Pentecostals do, this is what the Bible says, you've got to do some kind of searching to see what other scholars have said about it, where do they agree, where do they disagree, and then take your stand.

BH: Where's his proof, for one, you can't just say something without having proof . Because it would have said in the Bible if Jesus said to the disciples, "Be quiet!"

but he didn't as I see it he sort of ignored the disciples and spoke to the wind and the waves.

MB: The scholar hasn't done his homework, and shouldn't be writing the text, shouldn't be publishing. Somebody should be checking the scholar, the scholar is just writing his own opinion, maybe he wants to make a point, you know.

RS: Well I mean the Greek text is the text from which the English text has been translated, so I don't, I couldn't agree. I would actually try and convince this scholar from the Greek text that what He is saying is incorrect, literally.

SD: I would say we should go back to the proper interpretation, and go back to the early document of the text, in order to be accurate. In order to be accurate I must go back and make detailed research as to whether this scholars was actually saying the right thing, or he was saying something contrary.

DW: I would firstly ask on what grounds can he validate it to say that Jesus was talking to the disciples', and then I would look at his evidence to say what does he use to justify what he's saying. And then if doesn't weigh up with the facts that are before us, the Greek and the text itself, then he will be discarded, in that, for that text.

Apart from these allegations, that this interpretation indicated bad scholarship on Branscomb's side, there were other students prepared to, cautiously, consider his point of view.

DAW: I would say one would need to check it out but not dismiss it because maybe there's more in the text than just the direct translation. Maybe there is room for other views. It would make me cautious though.

This willingness to consider Branscomb' reading was still partly based on the idea that it was conceivable that Jesus would need to clam the disciples as readily as the storm.

EC: I think I agree with him, even if the Greek text and The English Bible says that He was directly speaking to the storm. He might have been speaking directly to the storm as it says, but I think as he quieted the storm, it was, I mean indirectly too, He spoke to the disciples'. I don't think Jesus' concern was just the storm. He was quieting the storm, but at the same time He had a concern for the rising fears within the disciples'.

JW: I think its, my response would be, texturally its to the sea, but also you've got to look at the tone and the spirit of the tone and the passage. And say that you know there's a possibility that Jesus could have been distinctly annoyed with his disciples, and at the same time said "Be quiet! Be still!" You know, enough's enough in their direction!

In the case of the following student, the stretching of a point in interpretation could be legitimate if there were good pastoral or moral reasons for doing so.

LC: You know, I actually would sympathise with them because in terms of preaching, Very often I've noticed, I have sort of interpreted it because I've looked at the spiritual need of the congregation, I have said listen who is to stop me to see this in this way because I can encourage them and address their needs.

It is only in the course of reviewing this data in order to write this section of the chapter and in focussing on the role of *Formgeschichte* in Branscomb's work, that I have suddenly come to the realisation that Branscomb never intended his idea that the words of calm were addressed to the disciples to be a textual comment, rather it is meant as a contextual comment of the *Sitz im Leben* of the words "Be still". Branscomb is trying to show that the storm came and went naturally, but that in hindsight the disciples remembered the words that Jesus had used to calm them down and re-constructed them as commands to the wind and the waves. Therefore my reading of Branscomb, on which my question to the students was based, proves to be inaccurate. This does not however, invalidate the data I have collected because the students' comments illustrate their approach to scholars whose discourse is alien to their own. The ideological underpinning of critical exegesis is to find natural explanations in the oral

context or *Sitz im Leben* of gospel pericopes, that dismiss the uncomfortable notions of miracles and spiritual powers. In the same way that the ideology of sociological study in Malina and Rohrbaugh's work dismisses miracles as a figment of the cultural context. It is notable that the reason why most students were willing to even consider Branscomb's proposal was that they believed that both the sea and the disciples were in need of Jesus' calming influence. Not one of the students openly dismissed the idea that Jesus really calmed a storm in the way that Branscomb does and their suspicion of his *Formgeschichte* inspired emphasis on the faith of the early Jesus Movement is embodied in this comment from the student who first raised questions about Branscomb's methods.

LM: I do not go along with the idea that the narrative was influenced by beliefs that people had. Mentioning this fact seems to suggest that it did not actually happen, but was created to suit into contemporary beliefs about Jesus.

Furthermore, the fact that I was so easily able to misconstrue Branscomb's intentions only goes to prove my point that theological discourse needs plenty of mediation to be intelligible. This is not discourse for the ordinary reader seeking understanding as Professor Moffat says in his introduction to the series, rather it is discourse of the ivory towers of the Oxbridge and Harvard/Yale theological hegemony, attempting to impose its view of right interpretation onto the church. However as the reaction of the students has shown this has not materialised and has been rejected with suspicion by the ordinary readers of most denominations.

#### 6.4.4 A Symbolic Reading: Kelber

For the final commentary in the series, I chose one that is perhaps the most difficult of all, because of its consideration of the symbolic meaning of the crossing and the storm. Werner Kelber's *The Kingdom in Mark* represents the next step in the history of critical biblical Scholarship, *Redaktionsgeschichte*, which is concerned with how the gospel text has been edited to suit the theological purpose of the evangelist, in this case Mark. For Kelber the overriding concern for Mark as the author of the first gospel is the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. Departing from the earlier scholarly consensus that Mark was written before 70 AD, he contends that it was the loss of the city and the temple as the focus for their

symbolic hope that prompted Mark to provide a new reason for hope. He does this by showing that the Kingdom present in Galilee rather than the temple in Jerusalem should be seen as the Jesus Movement's reference in space and time (cf. Kelber 1974:1-11).

In Kelber's overall plan of the gospel, the text of Mark 4:35-41 falls into the third part, which is entitled "Expansion and Unity of the Kingdom." In this section of the gospel, beginning with 4:35 and ending at 8:21, Mark is showing Jesus initiating a journey sequence which expands the kingdom beyond the confines of Capernaum and the western shore of the lake, across the lake to the gentile shore and into surrounding territory (Kelber 1974:46f.). In the course of this journey the disciples continually fail to understand Jesus' purpose and mission and the storm is therefore symbolic of their fear of crossing and their selfish concerns in the face of difficulties (Kelber 1974:49f.). Therefore we see that Kelber in this work is concerned with the role of symbolic themes of space and place and discipleship rather than the historicity or truth of the gospel narrative (Kelber 1974:xi). Here again the ideological burden of the enlightenment or in this case the German *Aufklärung* can be seen. Kelber labours under the burden of the philosophy of Kant, the liberal theology of Strauss and those who followed, the legacy of Schweitzer's apocalyptic Jesus and Bultmannian existentialism each of which has stripped away another layer of mystique and spirituality from the text. All that Kelber is left with to talk about is the symbolic literary truth which resides in Mark's editorial purpose rather than in events that could actually have happened.

### **Kelber**

What surfaces as the traditional core of the story is a sea miracle which manifests Jesus' superiority over a demonic nature. Into this miracle story Mark has introduced the motifs of crossing and discipleship. The redactional *dielthomen eis to peran*, [cross over to the other side] defines the purpose of Jesus' embarkation in terms of a crossing. This produces a slight shift from the original sea story toward a voyage story. Following the calming of the elements, and before the disciples are given a chance to express their admiration, Jesus rebukes them, charging them with lack of faith and, interestingly enough, cowardice. *Pistis* [faith] in conjunction with *deiloi* [danger] alters the traditional notion of belief in, or acknowledgement of, the miracle worker to an attitude of courage under stress. The rebuke singles out the disciples' weakness during the crossing, and not their lack of reverence in view of the miracle. They are admonished because, cowed by



the perils of the crossing, they showed concern only for their well-being (4:38). This gives an indication of the pervasiveness of the theme of Discipleship, or rather that of the failure of discipleship, throughout 4:35- 8:21. The whole section is bracketed by the "not yet" of the disciples' courage and understanding. The motif of the disciples' fear (4:41a), "a theological, and not a psychological datum " is a functional element of Mark's discipleship theology. That he associates fear with their lack of understanding is shown by the redactional verses 9:6, 3:2 and also 10:32. Fear is an expression of the disciples' condition of non-perception. The understanding of the fear in 4:41a is therefore not that the disciples are filled with reverential fear in view of Jesus' demonstration of power, but rather that they are shocked by Jesus' rebuke of cowardice because they cannot grasp the implications of the crossing. Their final question, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?" must be viewed as a statement made in lack of faith. It is out of fear and lack of understanding that they confess the lordship of Jesus over nature." Therefore the redacted story of the Stilling of the Storm will have to be considered not as a sea miracle which manifests the power of Jesus, but as a mysterious crossing which is misunderstood by the disciples as a sea miracle. Jesus himself takes the initiative for this first passage across the Lake of Galilee. It turns out to be a stormy passage, and in mid-water the disciples falter, which incurs the rebuke of Jesus. Among themselves the disciples marvel at the identity of the one who saved them by mastering the elements, but the real significance of the move across the lake escapes them. As the master pioneers the breakthrough toward new shores, they appear to be out of step with the purpose of his mission (Kelber 1974:50).

As with Branscomb, the difficulty and complexity of Kelber's ideas leads this student to react negatively to anything he says, even when she had been prepared to consider similar suggestions from a less difficult author like Schnackenburg.

BH: I feel he attributes too much to demonic forces; he states that the disciples were afraid as they didn't understand the implications of the crossing, feel that they were more afraid of their lives rather than not understanding; I also disagree that the passage is primarily about the crossing and that, that is its theme I still see it as being the disciples lack of faith and Jesus' demonstration of power.

In the interviews with the students I asked them whether they had considered interpreting the passage in this symbolic fashion. In reply, most of the students stated that they did not think

there was anything symbolic about the crossing of the lake or that the disciples are in anyway resisting that crossing.

DS: No, it wasn't, it doesn't have anything. It was just maybe the time of the storm to come up, I mean it's not like they were tested or they were like maybe tried to be prevented to go across the lake, you know.

JW: I'm not entirely sure because there would have been, there would have been an interaction with the gentiles quite regularly in Galilee. I don't think there would have been that much of an issue with regards to the gentiles. As opposed to their resistance to go across the lake to the gentiles, I think it was more of a consolidation before getting to the gentiles, trying to understand where they stood, what they perceived Jesus to be, their faith in Jesus before they got to the gentiles so I think its more of a consolidation.

PM: What's different is the interpretation that the disciples did not want to cross and their hardened hearts manifested in a form of a storm. If they felt that way, they could have told Jesus about their reluctance to go and he could have read what was on their mind. His rebuke could have been different.

RS: No, I don't think it's got anything to do with that, I mean they wanted to go over. They were trying their best to get over there, and there was resistance from nature for other purposes for purposes of developing their faith in the story.

A number students however, were prepared to consider that there was a symbolic element to the story, some for different reasons from those put forward by Kelber in his interpretation.

BH: It could very well be, cause symbolic is sort of deeper meaning and the Bible is full of deeper meanings so it could have easily been.

LM: Kelber's interpretation of the calming of the seas is the same as my own in that he attaches theological meaning to simple happenings. He says the crossing over is a mysterious crossing and not just a sea miracle. I usually try to derive some lessons from everyday, common happenings.

Meanwhile others found that Kelber's interpretation was illuminating for their view of the disciples and discipleship. However, in my opinion, the following responses are most interesting, not because they signal a whole-hearted acceptance of Kelber's symbolic interpretation of the passage, but because certain aspects of what Kelber is saying fitted into a previous schema in the students' frame of reference. The responses also show something of the resourcefulness of the students' faith discourse, which is its ability to take and adapt insights from critical biblical exegesis for its own ends.

DAW: I really like the idea of the symbolism in this interpretation and am intrigued by Jesus staging of events to get His message through. I am more comfortable with Jesus rebuke of their cowardice, when it points towards their fear of the cost of discipleship rather than 'merely' the physical storm.

EC: I have never looked at this story as symbolising something else. In this interpretation it is said to have meant Jesus teaching on discipleship. Now I can relate to the scripture not only in a literal way but also bearing in mind that some of the things written had a symbolic meaning.

MB: Well, once again I had never seen it that way, but I like that interpretation that it could be a thing of crossing boundaries, and being symbolic of that. It really adds depth and new meaning to the story for me. The fear of the disciples is better understood, because it is not so much a fear of the physical storm, but their own inner turmoil and fear to cross boundaries. I like this interpretation of the text.

KK: I can't say, they were resisting in that they were afraid of what's going to happen- they were afraid of the unknown of what's going to happen to them when they get

to the other side not only crossing over the sea, but crossing over to a new spiritual life. So crossing over from where they were comfortable, their comfortable area, to that unknown place but which had those threats, it was not an easy thing for them.

Other students found that this interpretation gave them scope to bring issues that they were concerned about into their reading of the text.

JM: Yes I think it can be symbolic because I was thinking in reality it's not really easy to cross cultures, though as Christians we are demanded to cross all cultures in the land. But in reality it's difficult. So I think the disciples' could just have resisted.

TT: I think it is symbolic, I don't think it's a literal storm, so it is symbolic of something. But it could be that they were struggling with understanding who he is, because there it says, like in the last verses of the chapter, they are still struggling, they don't understand who is this man, you know. So it could be that struggle as far as I see the text.

NN: Because I think it's very difficult if you grow up being taught one thing about people certain people who are different from you to then suddenly be able to go to those people and give them something that would get you on an equal level, if you know what I mean. So, the storm could be symbolizing the greatness of the struggle they had to overcome what they've been taught for a long time.

While, for this student who was prepared to consider Kelber's ideas, there was still a struggle as she grappled with her own feelings towards symbolism and the symbolic within the Bible and in biblical interpretation.

CM: This is really hard, because like you could see it in those terms especially because I think they were moving from Jewish to gentile land, but again I hesitate to put any symbolism onto the sea. Like even though I've grown up in an interpretative world where the sea is symbolic of the storms of life, you know, but I'm still struggling

with this question of symbolism. We're doing John at the moment which is fraught with symbolism, but I'm seriously just questioning symbolism at the moment.

The interesting pattern here is that while this interpretation has received the most emphatic condemnations of all the commentaries, by its very open nature it has also allowed students the most freedom to run with their own concerns or to pick up themes that they have in common with Kelber and perhaps ignore his essentially sceptical stance towards the historicity of the story. Perhaps because this story already has a fully fledged symbolic interpretation, where the storm symbolises life's difficulties, it has been much easier for many students to get in touch with his ideas than with the previous commentators who have picked over the text and questioned its authenticity and historicity more baldly. It could also be that the difficult language of the commentary means that many students latch onto a familiar idea without fully considering the implications of what the author has said. And equally Kelber's suggestion of a racial angle to the reluctance of the Jewish disciples to cross over to Gentile land probably has echoes for many South Africans who are used to the idea of race conflict and the fear of mixing with other races.

The general pattern that has emerged from the data in this section is that the students tend to concentrate their responses on those aspects of each commentary that is most controversial or unusual. This is probably as a result of the way that this data was collected, asking the students to identify points of agreement or disagreement with the commentary or else highlighting the contentious issue by means of the question in the interview. Nevertheless, the data does serve to exemplify the gulf that exists between the discourse used by these scholars, four of whom claim to be writing for the general reader or student, and the students. I have already acknowledged that perhaps one weakness in my data collection was that I failed to call to the students' attention the substantial Introductions that accompany three of the volumes and which carefully lay out the context within which the authors are writing. On the other hand perhaps the authenticity of the task depends on not making students do what they would not do themselves, which, my personal experience tells me, does not usually include reading Introductions unless they are prescribed. Furthermore, I am by no means assured that

had many of these students read the Introductions, that they would have understood them, given the level of knowledge assumed by the authors of even the most general texts.

## **6.5 Student Evaluation of the Process**

The data relating to the tutorials and interviews has now been presented and therefore all that now remains is to give an account of the first year students' evaluation of the tutorial process. The assessment of the impact of reading these commentaries, on the students, was conducted at several stages in the process. In each of the weekly papers they were asked to reflect on whether coming in contact with the scholar's views had changed their interpretation of this pericope. Later, in a written evaluation and in their interviews, I asked the same sort of question in more general terms. Sixteen of the seventeen first year students registered some change in their interpretation, at least at the time of writing, as a result of reading the commentary of the week. In the interview process, which now also included the seniors, thirteen of the thirty-four students registered some kind of change in the way they interpreted this passage as a result of studying Biblical Studies at university.

I will start with the response of a student to the question in his interview, where he acknowledged that it had not occurred to him to give much thought to the interpretation of this pericope before he attended the tutorials.

MR: I will say that not so much, but to say that it didn't change, in a sense that I actually came across it for the first time here, the interpretation of the story itself. That is to say that I read the story a long time ago I'm sure, but I never bothered to interpret it, you know, but with these questions it gave me new light, they challenged me to actually be engaged with the text and I would say that is when my whole understanding of the text here, I would say it changed in that sense.

Also in response to the interview question, another student found that his interpretation had been enriched by the tutorials but not fundamentally changed.

DAW: I don't think it's fundamentally changed, but I think it's, as with some of the questions I answered earlier, it's certainly opened it up, it's enriched the story for me. Just in terms of other ideas, other questions asked is it really this? Or could it be that? And just the bringing in of the fact, the symbolic nature of it, and also I had never thought of it in terms of a demonic nature of the storm before, ya. It was just always one of those straightforward Bible stories from Sunday, it was kind of fixed, and so it has, it's opened up a lot of possibilities, but it hasn't changed my fundamental that Jesus was there, the storm came up, He used His authority to still the storm, as the Son of God.

By contrast the following student, writing in her evaluation paper at the end of the tutorials, found she had something to say on the impact of virtually everything she had read in the whole six weeks.

LM: The different interpretations of this text have changed the way I understood and especially interpret the text. By analysing and noticing flaws, I will be more careful when giving my own interpretation. I will not assume readers can read what remains in my head. I have been provided with more information that is not found as part of the biblical text. I have learnt about the topography of the Lake. The information about the behaviour of demons is useful in understanding other passages of scripture where demons occur. I've also seen the need to give occurrences their real value, like if an aspect is "natural" it remains that way; But if it is supernatural there is no need to hide and behave as if supernatural forces do not exist. The interpretation also shows disciples as not understanding Jesus' purpose and mission. I now understand that things that happen in life can be taken symbolically and help us to check our own actions, convictions, perceptions and faith. I got to understand the aspect of Jesus' true humanity, that he was tired, actually fall asleep, and also the response of the disciples' was not something out of the ordinary. Anyone can be expected to respond like that in a life threatening situation. The theological motif of the fear and misunderstanding also helps us to perceive the true humanity of the disciples versus the true divinity of Jesus.

In the following responses, taken from both the written evaluations and the interviews, the students are less fulsome in their assessment of the impact of these commentaries.

Nevertheless, they did register some changes in the way they interpreted the text. However, these changes of view remained mostly superficial and it was clear that many of the students have retained a view of this pericope that remains true to the heritage of their primary and secondary discourses.

PM: Reading the scholars has changed the way I understood the text. It has made me realise the significance of Jesus calming the storm and how much effect it had in the disciples realising the authority of Jesus. I also look beyond the text when reading eg. it never crossed my mind to look at the storm as demonic. And it has taught me something about being faithful. Even in times of trouble in real life we should look up to God. Finally reading the text has made me aware that this text is actually about the mysterious crossing of Jesus and not really about calming the storm.

DW: Yes, I began to see in many different ways, through looking at and hearing from the different scholars how they interpret it, some would interpret it from a natural, some would see it from a spiritual, and some would see it from geographical and historical and such. And what happens is that when you put all these together you could actually have, you could formulate your own opinion from what they were saying, based on historical, geographical data,

BH: Yes. I have become less judgmental and sceptical and have become more open and willing to accept that maybe the storm is to be attributed to demons I'm not saying it isn't, but I'm also not saying that it is. I'm only saying it could be. It has also reminded me that the text of Mark could have been written a few years later than the event itself so could, therefore contain elements of simplification as well as overemphasis.



NN: In the way that before I would have thought of Jesus as testing the faith of the disciples', and I would have thought of the storm as being demonic. But now I just see it was as a storm that happened, and it was an opportunity for Jesus to show his disciples' that he can calm the seas.

MB: I think the two things that were the most interesting to look at and that would change my thinking were the demonic, that the storm could have been demonic in nature, and that this whole issue of it symbolising crossing culture, or however you want to take it crossing boundaries or borders or going to another place. I think those two issues were definitely the most interesting, changing my interpretation.

VM: Well like the question of whether it was demonic or not, before I used to have this view of reality this dichotomous view that there's evil spirit and there's the Holy Spirit, influencing all reality. But looking here at what we read in this story that such storms were frequent in that area, so I think it was just a natural phenomenon.

Responding to the question in the interview about how studying theology had changed their interpretation of this text, senior students also showed that they had retained some vestiges of the interpretation from their primary and secondary discourses, including the classic symbolic interpretation that the storm represents crises in the Christian life. In these reactions the two students show the contradictory workings of change as a result of studying the Bible at University. The first student has decided to adopt the symbolic reading of the storm as a crisis in the Christian life and to reject the idea that the storm is demonic. The second student has decided that he can move beyond this symbolic interpretation from his primary and secondary discourses and can accept that there is a deeper symbolic meaning in the text.

LZ: I would say first, when I heard the story here, the way they interpret it here at University, for me it was strange. Before I took it as the storm was like demonic in nature, as your one question has said. But as the time goes on I think the stilling of the storm can be just like, can be any practical event in our lives, any crisis that we

are faced in our everyday lives, yes, but before I was taking it really as demonic, not taking it as crisis that we can face.

LC: Okay, initially if I interpreted this, I would have just seen a story of disciples and the storm and the furthest I would probably have taken it was, this is really Jesus' storms of life. But Biblical Studies has allowed me to be open to your suggestions like we could see this as a theology of nature where there is a reaction in nature, there is a spiritual effect, and now it has opened me to the possibility that this could be related to the gentiles. So after Bibs Studs, now I'm quite open to that and I don't really have a problem with that.

In the process of the tutorials, first year students had also developed new interpretations of the text that represent opposing views, in this case on the debate whether Jesus was using the storm to test his disciples.

AB: I was just interpreting this as simple, as easy. I didn't understand how the meaning of it, and now I've found that information, that knowledge from the Biblical Studies. That even the thing that Jesus was trying to test the disciples', you know, I wasn't familiar with that, I wasn't thinking the same way. But after doing Biblical Studies I found differently, I got it different, you know. I found OK, Jesus was trying to test his disciples' by doing that, by acting like sleeping you know.

DS: I can say, before I was reading the Bible literally like and listening to what the other pastors were saying, I was like Jesus wanted to show, he persuaded the sea to get angry so that He can show them His power that He has power over all the things and they have to believe Him because He has power, you know, in a way that He wanted to control them, you know. But now I can understand that Jesus was not a person who wanted to control, He caused people so that they must follow Him according to their own willingness.

But not all aspects of the story elicited such contrary reactions. Students seemed to agree that the story gave them startling new dimensions of the humanity of Jesus.

NQ: The idea that Jesus could be an authoritarian in a negative way further emphasizes that Jesus was human with strengths and weaknesses.

JW: Now, I feel that my interpretation's far richer, for me, personally, there's an opportunity identify with a human Jesus, a Jesus who can share my own irritation at times, who can share my joy, who can share my frustrations. And Biblical Studies has given me the opportunity to actually identify with a human Jesus and not be afraid to do that, to not be afraid to deal with a human being as well as there is a divine nature and there is a spiritual nature fine, and that is important. Its made meaning to identify with a human being.

SD: At University I actually expanded my world view, so I better understand that and I also understand that Jesus was human just like any other human being though He had the power of God with Him you see, so that has changed.

EC: Yes I think it has changed a great deal because I can see that it was a story I can look at it now as a story that happened, and I can also look at Jesus as someone who could sleep. I mean, before doing Biblical Studies, I never went into the nitty gritty of the story, asked questions like why could he say this? I have learned that the Bible can be read as an informative narration with a particular context in mind. I have appreciated having to consider the historical background of the text.

Another idea that produced some positive reactions, from both first years and seniors, was Kelber's suggestion that the disciples' resistance, to the mission of Jesus to the Gentiles, was symbolically enacted in the violence of the storm. One student had even had the opportunity to use this symbolic interpretation in her approach to a sermon on cross cultural relationships.

JM: I think it has changed. Like this resistance of disciples' was a new thing to me. All the interpretations I had not, I had never touched this area, and I found it helpful for things like planning a sermon on this passage from all the angles that I have interpreted this passage so that it will be dynamic and interesting. Like during the vacation I had a sermon in a multi racial church, and I just used this sermon to talk about how people resist to cross cultures.

TT: Now I don't really see that, that is what this text is saying. I think like you mentioned, that the storm is symbolic, the storm may be suggesting that the disciples were resisting, who Jesus is and what his role was, in that context, you know of their time, so maybe it is actually calling for people to be open, to understand Jesus, who is he, look into that.

**But perhaps the area of the greatest consensus was among those first year students who could see no change, or even any need to make changes, in their interpretation.**

BH: No, I still think the same as I did before the tutorials on the stilling of the storm story. People must stop trying to delve too deeply into trying to find an in-depth answer and not overlook what seems to be simple and yet extremely important messages in the text, the disciples' lack of faith and Jesus' absolute authority over everything. I learned that my interpretation is sound as although I had so many different scholarly ideas on the extract of Mark they didn't change my ideas. I also learned that people attribute many things to demons which I would not, before now, have even thought of attributing.

AS: These readings have made my own interpretation seem more realistic and right.

**In two other cases the students felt that to change their interpretation of the pericope in the light of what they had been reading in the tutorials would be to give in to blasphemy and heresy.**

SM: No, it cannot change my understanding at any stage. These views are too heretic.

RN: This is the misinterpretation of the Bible. In fact that is nothing but Blasphemy. I would like to change all these misleading heretical statements committed by these different scholars in your tutorial. In fact most of the statements made are too Blasphemous to hold and proclaim in the church.

To round off this survey of student reactions to the readings I now give a selection of their observations on the most important thing they learned in the course of the tutorials.

DAW: The most interesting thing I learned, was that people can see such different things from the reading of just a few verses. Each of the authors had a particular point of view based on their careful consideration of scripture. I'm not sure how I would have handled an interpretation that was contrary to my core beliefs, but these we read contributed positively to my understanding.

MR: The new way of interpreting, seeing from different angles. Also my ignorance has actually made me not to see any significance in some of the text, so I learned to dig deep and try to find the significance of what is happening in the Bible.

NQ: I've learnt to be flexible as pointed out above that I needed to change or check my interpretation frequently.

At first glance these three final evaluations of the course, the stubborn refusal to change, the accusation of heresy and blasphemy and the accommodation to the variety of approaches taken to the text by interpreters, may seem to be in conflict with each other. However, I would like to contend that they are in fact two facets of a response to the shock students' feel when confronted with tertiary theological discourse. The first two acknowledge the variety of interpretations to the text, but in doing so reject them and return to the familiar readings they have inherited. The third response is not so much wholehearted acceptance of the variety, but

a resignation to the fact that the comfortable and the familiar have been replaced by the uncertainty of diversity.

This section of the chapter has documented the changes that have occurred in the interpretation of this text in the hearts and minds of the students. Altering their view of this well-known story was a painful struggle, pitting their reading from their primary and secondary discourses into the ring of pitched negotiation with the new tertiary discourses that confront them. The relative equanimity with which most students seem to have embraced the change should not blind us to the struggle they have undergone.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter the first year students have had the opportunity to comment on, and make their own judgements about, the major trends in biblical scholarship over the past century. As ordinary readers they have had an occasion to turn the tables on trained readers and the major players in white, male biblical exegesis. As ordinary readers they are operating within the discourse of faith, and trust in the Bible which they have inherited from their primary and secondary discourses. In addition they have approached the text with a sense of personal engagement with and investment in the Bible as a significant and sacred text. They have shown confidence in the historical truth of biblical narratives and in the personal messages about faith and discipleship that it contains. Pitted against them are the readings of the text taken from commentaries in order to illustrate the hegemonic tertiary discourse of critical Biblical Studies which casts a detached and discriminating gaze over the Bible, subjecting it to fragmentary analysis which appears to preclude any suggestion of historical truth or sanctity from the text. These two positions represent the extremes of a continuum of discourses on the Bible. At the same time, in this and the previous chapters, there have been examples of students who have a more critical view of the Bible and its role as a sacred text. The senior students have shown that as semi-trained readers they occupy a kind of borderland between the trust and confidence of the first years and the uncertainty and scepticism of trained readers. Equally there are staff who teach in Biblical Studies, perhaps best represented by scholars like Patte and West, who are concerned about the unity and sanctity of the Bible, as well as the readings by ordinary readers. However, in the arena where discourses clash

perceptions reign supreme. As I have shown in this, and the previous chapter, the majority of students feel that academic theology is too intellectual and that lecturers and scholars neglect important aspects of the biblical narrative, such as miracles.

With the completion of this chapter I have come to the end of the presentation of original data which I collected for the purposes of this thesis. In the process of the presentation and analysis of this data the discourse communities, which I outlined in the previous paragraph, have emerged. The picture may initially seem simply to involve a clash of discourse between a community of students and their lecturers. However, I believe this data has demonstrated a range of overlapping discourse communities among the students: From white privileged students, who do not struggle with the academic discourse but may be traumatised by the theological discourse, to under-prepared Black South African students, who labour beneath the double burden of academic and theological alienation. From foreign Black students, who seem to cope both academically and theologically but arrive at the end of their studies with a sense of hopelessness and frustration with Biblical Studies, to mature students who seem to thrive and grow in the critical environment of the University.

In the next, and final, chapter of this thesis I will re-visit some of the issues raised in the previous chapters through exploring some questions that arose from my teaching a course on Romans in 2001. The class included three students from a Lutheran Seminary who were new to the university discourse and six students who had been part of the original study. In the first part of the next chapter I will look at my reaction to the seminary students and the problems that these students posed for me as a lecturer and vice versa. In the second part of the chapter I will present the results of follow up interviews that I conducted with three of the students and the questions that their responses posed to the School of Theology.

## *7. Profiles From the Frontline*

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter I have taken the opportunity, presented to me by teaching in the School of Theology, to follow up on some of the issues, and the students, that I have dealt with, in the previous chapters of this thesis. The opportunity arose in a course I have been teaching for the School of Theology for a number of years on the exegesis of Paul's letter to the Romans, and it has allowed me to develop what I will call "profiles from the frontline of the clash of discourses". What I mean by this is that, in this chapter, rather than dealing with the clash of discourses in the somewhat diffuse and rather general fashion that I have in previous chapters, I will now deal with some specific cases or profiles of specific incidents or specific students. I have used the term "frontline" to deliberately echo the terminology of warfare and thereby to emphasise that the incidents and struggles profiled in this chapter are not mere stories but episodes in a real war raging in the hearts and minds of all participants in the School of Theology, the ongoing and often bloody clash between our primary and secondary faith discourses and the tertiary discourse of critical theology.

The first profile concerns my reaction to three of the students in the Romans class who had come from the Lutheran Seminary at Mphumulo on a scheme through which they were able to convert their seminary diploma into a University degree. Their presence in the class created a very interesting situation where two contrasting groups of students or communities of discourse were trying to come to grips with the same context. In the first part of the chapter I will assess my reaction to these seminary students as a discourse community in my class and the problems that were created by my own experience of studying theology coupled with the complexities of the vocation of critical exegetes described by Daniel Patte (1995). For a wider perspective, I will then pair this experience with the results of a study done by my wife, Fiona Jackson, within the School of Theology which was aimed at creating a course to remedy the grammatical and language problems of post-graduate students coming into the School. Her preliminary findings are that the problems are not primarily linguistic but arise from a clash of discourses and the students' problems in creating their own theological discourse from texts that are not essentially theological (Jackson 2001).



Six of the students in the Romans class were among those who had participated in this study in 1999 and were now in their final semester of Biblical Studies. At the end of the course I interviewed NQ, MB and JM, three of the female students from the 1999 study, to add a longitudinal aspect to this thesis and assess the impact of three years of study on them. As a result of these interviews, I will present two longitudinal profiles. The first is the story of NQ, who clashed with, and was then expelled from, her small Pentecostal African Initiated Church (AIC) congregation because she could not tolerate their attitude to young women, and her struggle to form new spiritual and communal bonds and make a career for herself in the aftermath of her theological education. The second will tell the story of MB and JM, two highly articulate and successful theological students who are about to become Presbyterian ministers, who are finding that after three years of theological training the struggle of integrating their training with their ministry in a congregation has only just begun.

## **7.2 Frontline Issues in the Classroom**

The course on Romans which I have been teaching in the School of Theology since 1996 is run on the lines of a seminar. Over the course of eight weeks the students and I explore the Epistle to the Romans through four topics which deal with seminal issues in the epistle, the make up of the community that Paul is addressing, the issue of homosexuality in 1:18-32, the issue of government in 13:1-7 and the purpose of the letter in 14:1-16:27, and four major subsections of the letter, Chapters 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, 12-16. Each topic includes a number of prescribed and voluntary readings which explore the different issues raised by these topics which are of concern to the tertiary discourse of theology. In the readings I have tried to include articles and chapters from books which illustrate different viewpoints within the scholarly debate and I encourage the students to read and engage with as many perspectives as possible and to broaden their interpretation of the epistle. When the class is made up of articulate, self-motivated students who have become adept at the tertiary discourse of critical biblical exegesis then these seminars can be exciting and invigorating for both students and lecturers. However, as is more often the case, students who are still struggling with the intellectual and the spiritual demands of the tertiary discourse find the multiplicity of perspectives hard to handle and I am often forced to resort to lecturing them on what I think

are the important issues in each debate. The 2001 class was a special case because it was a mixture of highly motivated students who had come through the School of Theology's BTh programme and Lutheran Seminarians who came from a seminary environment steeped in, and deeply wedded to interpretations of the bible prescribed within the secondary discourse of official Lutheran dogma. In order to assess my reaction to this situation I will firstly describe how the Lutheran Seminarians acted as a distinct discourse community and then give my own reading of the Epistle to the Romans. Thereafter I will describe how issues from my past combined with my sense of vocation as a critical exegete to create a clash of discourses that could easily have become unpleasant.

The Lutheran Seminarians formed a very distinct community of discourse in the class (cf. Hymes 1972, Saville-Troike 1989) for a number of reasons. Most obviously they travelled as a unit to and from the Seminary at Mphumulo, which is some 150km distant from Pietermaritzburg, and only came onto campus on certain days. Secondly they were all male in a class that was otherwise predominantly female. Thirdly they had a common and distinct sense of their Lutheran identity and doctrine in an environment where denominational differences are de-emphasised, and finally they were distinctly uncomfortable in the tertiary discourse of critical exegesis among students who mostly developed a growing facility with its methods in the course of their university studies. This distinct identity in the class helped them to resist the usual tactic of students who are struggling with university discourse which is to force the lecturer to give you her views and then give it back to her, repackaged, in assignments. Instead they took a line in assignments of supporting the side in any debate which fitted most neatly with their Lutheran tradition. This strategy produced a particular reaction in me which I will describe in the following paragraphs after I have given my own reading of the Epistle to the Romans.

My own reading of Romans has been building up through teaching this course and through the reading I did for my Master's thesis (Meyer 1995). Essentially it is as follows. Sometime in the mid to late 50's of the first century, Paul, a wandering activist for a new religious movement called by some 'the Christians', is on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth to participate in a Jewish ritual in fulfilment of a vow and to deliver a symbolic sum of money

collected by Christians in Achaia, to the titular head of his movement, for distribution to the poor among their fellow believers in Judea (Romans 15:25-27, Acts 21:17-24). The next step in his itinerary (1:8-15, 15:23-24) is Rome, on his way to begin a new mission in Spain. On his way out he finds out that his patroness Phoebe (16:1), a leader from the community in the port of Cenchreae, is on her way to Rome and he dictates a letter to a secretary called Tertius (16: 22), in which he introduces himself to the Romans. In this letter he shows that he knows a number of people whom he greets as friends and fellow workers: Priscilla and Aquila (16:3), Epenetus (16:5), Andronicus and Junia (16:7), Persis(16:12), Rufus and his mother (16:13), etc. At the same time there is in his list of greetings in Chapter 16 a number of people he clearly does not know like, Mary (16:6), Apelles (16:10), Tryphena and Tryphosa (16:12) among others. The rest of the letter then emerges as addressing the people he knows and those he does not who fall into groups with a Jewish character, who follow the Torah and are at the same time Christian, and other groups who are culturally Greek or Gentile and who disregard the torah (See Watson 1991, Walters 1993). The conventional Protestant interpretation of this letter is that Paul supports the second group, often nicknamed 'the strong' by scholars (14:1-8), and is against the pious Jews in the second group and is trying to persuade them to give up the Torah or the Law and embrace the Gospel. Over the years of reading the scholarship of E.P. Sanders (1983) and Krister Stendahl(1977), among others, I have developed a strong conviction that this is a wrong interpretation. My view is that Paul is, first of all, encouraging all Christians to embrace the moral code of the Torah as a base for a new community in which Jews and Gentiles can feel equally at home and in which they all partake through their baptism as Christians. But, secondly, that his sympathies, in this letter, lie with the Jewish groups mentioned in Chapter 16 who are outnumbered and marginalised within the Roman Christian community.

When, therefore, the Lutheran students insisted doggedly throughout the course that the pious Jews were the objects of Pauls' attack in Romans and that we should consequently be attacking the pious pharisee in all of us, I was incensed and argued vigorously against them to the extent that my pronouncements in class took on a distinctly anti-Lutheran flavour. Fortunately, their protests and my own sense of balance brought us back from the brink and we were able to come to a point where we were able to agree to disagree on this issue. In the

aftermath of the events of the second semester of 2001, I have tried to analyse and understand my behaviour in this class. In the process of looking back over the years of teaching this course I have discovered that, although the stated outcome for the course is to present a multidimensional reading of the Epistle to the Romans, I have been operating with a hidden agenda, almost a vocation, to undermine what I believe is the wrongful, Lutheran interpretation of the evidence. This agenda arises from my own experience as a first year theological student being confronted with Lutheran and Protestant Orthodox Theology for the first time. In these doctrinal systems Romans plays a pivotal role and the themes of Law and Gospel derived from Romans are elevated to the status of dogma. I tended to resist this tradition in my assignments by writing essays on Mariology and other aspects of Catholic Theology. In following years and through my relationship with the university Catholic Student Society I discovered that I was not a Catholic, that my formation in the church was strongly Evangelical and that much Catholic doctrine was as strange to me as was Protestant Orthodoxy. I, therefore, came to the conclusion that I belong in my own tradition which is Anglican, that strange hybrid of Catholic and Protestant doctrines that tries to embrace a whole spectrum of beliefs without committing fully to any of them. But my strong reaction to Lutheran doctrine arising from Romans has marked my interpretation of the letter ever since.

This experience, happening at the same time as I was writing up the earlier chapters of this thesis and developing my ideas on the difficulties that students face in entering the discourse community of the School of Theology, has led me to raise more questions about my role and that of other lecturers within the School of Theology. Primarily, to what extent are we, rather than the students, the real problem in the clashes of discourse that happen in the School? Is it the students' inability to meet our expectations that holds them back, or is it our unrealistic expectations of the students that are the true obstacles in their path? These questions are to some extent answered in a paper written by my wife, Fiona Jackson, reflecting on research she has conducted with post-graduate students in the School of Theology.

The genesis of her research project was a brief from the School of Theology to intervene to diagnose and develop ways to improve the reading and writing skills of post-graduate students coming into the School from other institutions and struggling with the demands

made on them by the lecturers. The School staff felt that these post-graduate students were inadequately skilled in the written discourses of English and many were also unfamiliar with the critical, contextual paradigm of theology assumed within the School. Consequently such students were limping through their courses, and when it came writing their research projects or dissertations their weaknesses became so apparent that they were failing their entire post-graduate programme (Jackson 2001:1).

Jackson agreed to take on a project to develop a course which would ameliorate this situation with specific academic interventions which aimed to:

- a) facilitate an increased understanding among the staff of Theology of how to explicate the discourse demands of their discipline, for their students, within their teaching of post-graduate courses, and
- b) integrate specific instruction on the written genres central to post-graduate studies with instruction on the epistemic demands of analytic, interpretive methods of constructing academic knowledge of theological issues (Jackson 2001:1).

In the course of the planning of this intervention several difficulties arose which changed the nature of post-graduate courses in the School of Theology and therefore forced changes in Jackson's research project. However, after consultation with the School of Theology post-graduate lecturers, they agreed that Jackson should explore ways of integrating some attention to issues of effective post-graduate academic writing within the first semester courses of the year long post-graduate programme.

The rationale would be to eventually extend this process so that most students would complete at least one course in their first semester, where they gained some explicit sense of what kind of academic writing was expected of them in formal essays (Jackson 2001:3).

In order to facilitate her planning of the writing courses for the School of Theology, Jackson proceeded with an action research project to collect qualitative data which would help her to identify the specific writing and discourse needs of the post-graduate students in the School of Theology. Her first data collection exercise was a questionnaire administered to most of the students in the School of Theology post-graduate programme in the first semester of 1999. Her report of the findings of this process states:

The significance of these findings is that they suggest strongly that after six weeks of post-graduate study these students clearly find greatest difficulty in the areas of conceptual and discourse development. Students also seem to display a strong awareness of the dominance of a “critical” paradigm of study within the School, along with a sense that they do not yet understand how to be sufficiently critical themselves in their academic reading and writing (Jackson 2001:6).

What Jackson therefore discovered was that most students were less worried about their ability to write good English than the more overwhelming problem of coming to terms with the tertiary discourse of critical university theology which confronted them.

In the next phase of her data collection Jackson did some in-depth interviews with a number of students, mostly from the post-graduate courses in the Theology and Development programme, to get some idea of their observations on the problems they faced in the School of Theology. The first major difficulty that many students expressed was a fear of the openness of the paradigm of theology which they were expected to embrace in the School of Theology, which included not only the traditional disciplines of theology but also the study of economic and sociological models which they were expected to integrate.

This is too economical, it's too general, it's wide in the way they are looking at things and it's a bit liberal here, you are open to do whatever you like to do. You have all the stage to open up for your thinking, even though it's not easy maybe to go beyond what your professor might not appreciate as a good approach. But looking back where I'm from it's put in a cocoon sort of, where you need to work

in that particular frame. You are not allowed to go beyond the holiness Wesleyanism...

Whatever you read or whatever you are asked to study you don't need to take personally onto your personal belief system. You can say that's fine but I will learn it for academic reasons only. And I think that has been the biggest struggle for me. And certainly the fact that has made it different to say, ok, if I'm going to disagree with this lecturer, I am going to have to come up with some sound, critical argument why I disagree with him.

I've been thinking salvation is an individual thing, and here comes a theology saying that salvation can be a community thing, a social thing ... I had a problem with that (Jackson 2001:7).

The second major problem that the students expressed was the failure of their lecturers to give specific feedback on their assignments which would give them a clear picture of their areas of weakness and help them to improve their academic writing.

Cause where we come from we've never actually been taught...Here they expect something of an academic essay. So we just go on the same... so there are things that must be set out in detail...Not just on being given some literature. Sit down and actually... hold a seminar for a day...This is very important.

And the professor just tell you that you didn't get the crux of the issues, you are not in a dialogue with the author of the book, you don't demonstrate arguing with the book and things like that.

But for the other one he just put a general comment and I would feel that if those comments had been put on my paper, that ok, I could not see critical engagement in this area and you did not understand the writer in these sections, this is how he

is interpreting, this is how you are interpreting, in my paper. That would be more helpful for me (Jackson 2001:8).

This problem was compounded by the structure of the courses which did not provide specific practice for the students in the extended essays and the research project they were expected to submit as the final assessment in most courses.

I've done 5 courses in which all of them has a reading reactions, you know, on a weekly basis, which is short stuff...on that you get feedback. That is fine, you know, but your reading reactions do not equip you or help you write your thesis...The only real practice you get at a real essay writing are those which are anything between 15 to 20 pages long. I wrote 3 or 4 this year and I haven't got any feedback on them (Jackson 2001:9).

At the end of the interviews Jackson had developed the following impression of the needs of postgraduate students within the School of Theology.

The interviews thus revealed that after a year of full-time study all these students were acutely aware that a critical, contextual approach to theological issues prevailed within the School of Theology, and that they were expected to operate within this paradigm in order to succeed (Jackson 2001:9).

What was most immediately significant was that all students felt strongly that more explicit mediation of the discourse demands of their formal essay assignments, in a variety of forms, was necessary to improve their ability to write their dissertations effectively. Students conveyed very strongly to me their sense of frustration that the chief form of written preparation for their dissertation was the major research essay for each course. However, given that this task had the status of an exam equivalent, it was submitted in the final week of lectures, marked and sent straight off to the external examiners. The mark for this essay was subsumed within the total mark for the course. The students thus had no knowledge of the specific mark they had



received for their major essays, or the comments of either examiner on them. (One student was most disconcerted to discover from my photocopy of his essay that he had failed it) (Jackson 2001:10).

In the final part of Jackson's data collection she analysed two essays of the students she had interviewed. One of the students was clearly coping with the language and discourse demands of critical theology and this was reflected in his consistently high marks. The other student was struggling to maintain a passing grade in any of his courses. Having analysed the discourse and structure of his essay Jackson came to the following conclusion about the reasons for his problems.

Thus, overall, this student's problems in this essay stemmed clearly from difficulties in managing the complexity of the conceptual issues invoked by his topic and the processes of synthesising both personal and scholarly theological and social science discourses into an academically acceptable form of formal academic discourse. He clearly displayed a lack of mastery of numerous macro-structures of academic writing, while having minimal problems with a basic fluency in the micro-structures of English (Jackson 2001:12).

Jackson's analysis of the work of a failing student thus corroborates the findings of her questionnaires and interviews that the major problems in the post-graduate students' work arose, not from a lack of linguistic facility in English, but from the struggle to perform within the critical discourse of university theology. Jackson identified the causes of these struggles as the unfamiliarity of the critical paradigm, the interdisciplinary nature of courses and the failure of lecturers to adequately scaffold and apprentice students into the required discourse. As a result of these findings Jackson came to the following conclusion about the discourse needs of postgraduate-students in the School of Theology.

The development research essays require students to internalise the discourses of the secular social science of development (itself drawing on numerous other social sciences), and of scholarly theology. The students have to find a way to integrate

these with their own personal faith theology, in order to develop their individual sense of an academic theology of development. This is no small feat, given the newness of most of these students to both the discourses of development studies and critical, contextual theology. The task at hand, once more, is clearly more than simply “what grammatical features of advanced academic English do these students lack?” It is a question of what total range of concepts do such students have to work with; what forms of sense are they required to make of these concepts, and what communicative forms do they have to appropriate in order to be admitted to the discourse communities of apprentice scholars (Jackson 2001:13).

Jackson’s findings about the discourse needs of post-graduate students in the School of Theology tally remarkably well with my findings on the discourse struggles of first level undergraduates in the School. This should be no surprise however given that the common feature in the experience of new post-graduate and new undergraduate students in the School of Theology is that they are generally steeped in the secondary discourse of their denominational Seminary education and are encountering the tertiary discourse of critical, university theology for the first time. Therefore Jackson’s research provides further proof of my findings in the previous chapters that new students in the School of Theology, at whatever level of study, need to be carefully apprenticed into the discipline of theology, especially in terms of receiving explicit instruction on how to develop the type of discourse they are required to produce as trainee researchers in theology.

My experience, coupled with the findings of Jackson’s research have strengthened my conviction that problems students face in the School of Theology arise from the lecturers as much as from the inadequacies, from the perspective of the tertiary discourse, of the students’ primary and secondary discourse. In this light the need for research leading to strategies which will help lecturers is urgently needed. This research should aim to help lecturers to: Uncover any hidden agendas which may impact negatively on the students. Develop an attitude that students need to be carefully apprenticed in the tertiary discourse. Be more explicit in their demands on, and their feedback to, the students when developing and marking written assignments.

This first part of the chapter has dealt primarily with the academic needs of students entering the School of Theology. However, our responsibility as staff does not stop there, it extends to some extent into the spiritual life of the students and into their future careers after their training in the School of Theology. To explore this issue further I will, in the second part of this chapter, present two longitudinal profiles of students taken from interviews given in 1999 and 2001.

### **7.3 The Frontline in the Community**

This second part of the chapter consists of two longitudinal profiles of students that participated in my original study in 1999 and who attended my course on Romans in 2001. They represent two stories that at some level present the contrasting fortunes of BTh students from different contexts and denominations. Nevertheless, there are also certain similarities, especially in their experience as women theologians and their struggles to come to terms with denominational hierarchies and the Bible, as a sacred text, which are in many ways inimical to their interests.

#### *7.3.1 The Story of NQ*

The story of NQ is a classic case of the way theological training alienates students from their communities. NQ was a first year student in my tutorials in 1999 and a member of my 2001 class on Romans. She comes from a conservative Pentecostal AIC in Durban. In this profile I will interweave sections from the two interviews I did with her in September 1999 and November 2001 to present a profile of her career in the School of Theology. In the first extract I asked her about her schooling experience.

NQ: My home language is Xhosa, my language of schooling was firstly just Xhosa, and then English as I moved into Natal in 1990, and I went to an Indian school.

BM: So the teachers in primary school, did they provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers, things like that?

NQ: Not really because everything was sort of prescribed for us, the way to go, what to do, that kind of thing. Even like reading certain books, the teacher used to put words in your mouth as to what the stories about and that kind of thing.

BM: Right, and you weren't really encouraged to ask questions? OK then, moving on to high school did the teachers there provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?

NQ: Only the history teacher was like that, where you could ask questions freely, I think it's maybe because he had a political, he was politically minded, and so he was concerned, especially with us, wanting to know how we grew up, our background our experiences. So he would allow us to ask questions and come up with answers that you think are suitable.

This mixed schooling experience, ranging from impoverished rural schools to relatively privileged Indian Schools, would not be unusual for many of our students whose parents had enough money to give them some level of English First Language education after schools in South Africa began to be desegregated in the 1990's. However, despite what may seem like a good grounding in academic discourse, NQ found the transition from school to University quite traumatic.

NQ: At first I really couldn't cope and at some time I actually thought of quitting the whole thing of studying but I just managed somehow, I cannot tell how.

BM: Was the work load more or less than you expected it to be?

NQ: It was more, much more than I expected. In high school for example within specific days we would do, for example on Monday you'd be required to do some math's homework, and maybe your English homework. When you came to this place, it was like for every course we do, you have to do work irrespective of the day or anything like that. So it was much more.

BM: Right, so following on from that, were you able to cope with the amount of reading you needed to do at University?

NQ: Again I couldn't cope, but you just had to do it, it was for your own good after all. So even though you can't cope, you just have to do it.

BM: Did you find you couldn't get through the reading you needed to do?

NQ: Yes, but I did finish it because I actually learnt to manage my time, as it were.

BM: And what about assignments, were you able to cope with them?

NQ: Yes I was able to cope with my assignments, the materials that is provided for you so there's nothing to complain about, and also it's the assignments are from the lecturers, the lecturer sort of explains what's to be done and that kind of thing. So you don't really have that much of a problem, you can just write assignments.

BM: So did you find your marks were OK for assignments?

NQ: No, that was problematic I always wondered why didn't I get what I expected, so I guess, I don't know.

BM: So, then looking at the end of that semester, what problems do you think you faced in approaching the exams?

NQ: It was again a shortage of time, given that we are only given one week to go and read a whole semesters work. That was very pressurizing in the sense you didn't know which one to begin with and that kind of thing. So time was really just problematic.

BM: So did you find the time management you learnt earlier was beginning to help you?

NQ: Yes, I mean on a certain day I knew I had to do maybe two courses of that particular section each, and then the following day, and so on and so on. So that was helpful.

BM: What kind of help do you feel you needed to do better in your exams?

NQ: I cannot be sure because lecturers did their best to assist us, like in giving us questions that could possibly come up and to work on them, that was quite helpful. I wouldn't ask for anything more.

Once again these responses are fairly typical of many other students encountering the demands of tertiary academic discourse for the first time. However, as I have shown in the previous chapters of this thesis, the academic demands of University study are only the first part of the problem, many students find the challenges to their faith that arise from studying theology are equally exacting. As we will see from this extract from her 1999 interview, NQ was one of the rare students who revelled in the challenge.

BM: How do you feel about the approach to the Bible taken in the School of Theology?

NQ: It's very liberal [liberating?] and quite honestly I enjoy it, it's sort of opens eyes as to what the Bible really is, and I think it serves the purpose of making the Word of God alive as it were. It allows you to see two sides of the coin to it, rather than give one part of it and say this is it, and nothing more.

BM: Do you find the ideas which you hear about in the School of Theology are a challenge to your faith?

NQ: Yes, yes. Like for example the issue of Moses having not written any books that was quite challenging. I mean it was almost as though there's only the human dimension to the writing of the Pentateuch whereas all along I have the idea that it was the spirit of God, like taking control over the whole thing. I mean Moses going

up to the mountain and coming back with the tablets of stones, now when I come here and I've been told that the Jahwist or someone like the Elohist wrote the thing, it's quite challenging. You really begin to wonder, where is the hand of God in all of this, you know.

BM: Right, so is that quite frightening for you?

NQ: At first it was but then you have to think, what have I, why must I be afraid, if this is really the Word, there's no reason to be afraid, because God works in lots of good ways.

BM: Do you find this challenge useful or would you prefer a different approach?

NQ: It's quite useful. I enjoy it rather because again it opens my eyes.

BM: There's nothing you think they could do differently?

NQ: No, I'm really not sure, but the way we've been brought up and the way the Bible has been translated to us is sort of stifling as it were, and when you come here, although it's challenging, faith-wise, but it's useful. Because again the Word of God become much more alive than you thought it was.

BM: Can you try to describe the method you used to read the Bible before coming to University?

NQ: It was like I accepted what was written there without asking any questions, even if questions did come to my mind I would sort of let go of them as soon as possible, because I thought I was being unfaithful or backsliding.

BM: So has your attitude to the Bible or your method of reading changed after studying Biblical Studies at University?

NQ: Yes, I allow myself, questions that come up in my head I allow them to come through, I don't suppress them anymore, and when I do that sometimes I do not always get answers from the text that I'm doing, but sometimes I do.

This is an interesting point in NQ's 1999 interview in which reveals that she was already questioning the assumptions of her primary and secondary discourses and that coming to the school of Theology has allowed her to raise and air these questions in a way that she never could before.

BM: Do you think Biblical Studies provides you with resources to be a better pastor or person?

NQ: A better person rather since I'm not going to the ministry. In a sense that when I, I normally relate my faith and Christianity to a separate sphere of my life as I used to do, I understand it as now being a whole thing put together. Take for instance the issue of the Israelites coming out of Egypt, I mean that was a political issue, but in the church it's always spiritualised in a way, in that the coming out of Egypt was release from sin and that kind of stuff. So now I know that as a person I'm a whole human being, I'm not only a spiritual person but I'm also a physical person. I have emotions, a mind.

When I interviewed her in November 2001 many of the issues she raised in 1999 had remained important to her and she emphasised them again when I asked her about the positive aspects of three years of Biblical Studies.

NQ: The one I can think of right now is the whole thing of the Bible being relevant to my life as a whole, not something that can only be used in church and then discarded afterwards. That has come across very strongly during my years of study. And that the Bible speaks of specific situations and specific peoples' lives, although there is an element of mythology. So, once we are able to gain the tools that have been given to us we can relate to the Bible in a much better way.



However, by 2001 her positive appraisal of the effects of Biblical Studies was beginning to be counterbalanced by a sense that the price she has had to pay for these gains is a diminishing sense of the Bible as sacred text. In this sentiment she echoes many of the third level and other senior students that I interviewed in 1999.

NQ: I think the sacredness of the biblical text has been taken away and I'm concerned because there was some text that I don't think I will ever go back to and read them again. Like the book of Revelations for instance. It has always been a very scary book for me and to learn that it was a theological interpretation of some one concerning the specific context of his time and it is not necessarily going to happen things like that, that has come as a shock.

Another aspect of the price she had to pay for her Biblical Studies education is the sense that she has become alienated from her roots in a community. In the context of her conservative denomination some kind of clash was perhaps inevitable from the moment she set foot in the University. In her 1999 interview she was already expressing some level of dissent with the hierarchy of her denomination.

BM: Do you agree with the leaders in your church when they make decisions which affect you and your congregation?

NQ: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. For example, there was a controversy in my church some time last year about the issue of praise and worship, you know as I said I come from a Pentecostal background. Some of the elders don't like the idea of shouting, singing and praising, they want a more traditional kind of thing, and so that was like a bit harsh on us as the youth because we are so accustomed to that kind of thing. So on other things we agree, on other things we don't.

BM: So it's a question sort of almost of traditional culture and youth culture within the church. Right, so probing that a bit more. Do you agree with the way that your church approaches the interpretation of the Bible?

NQ: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It's sort of like prescribes for us what the Bible says, it doesn't allow you to take out what you hear individually or independently. It says this is what has been said in the Bible, it's either you accept it or you don't. So there's no room for independence in some sense.

The conservative attitude of her denomination to the Bible was also reflected in limited opportunities they offered her in ministry. To her credit NQ had been well aware of this and had never intended to try and force her way into the ordained ministry. In her 2001 interview she expressed her aims in studying theology in this way.

BM: So were you ever intending to go into ministry?

NQ No not as a minister, but working in the church and utilising some of my skills.

BM: So you were going to be a youth Pastor or a women's Pastor, something like that? Does your denomination ordain women?

NQ: It does not. The only space a woman gets is at the most is being a Sunday School teacher.

BM: Okay so the problem is that you were in a conservative denomination?

NQ: Yes.

But even her limited ambitions in ministry seemed to lead to clashes with her denomination. As a theologically educated, outspoken woman, her need to express her independent views led to the inevitable parting of ways.

BM: Let's think about your relationship with current church, with perhaps the hierarchy in your church, how has that change since you been doing Biblical studies?

NQ: It has changed a lot. For one, I sit in the church and listen and it's like everything the Pastor is saying is wrong, wrong, wrong and you end up asking yourself, "What did I gain from the sermon today?" And the problem again is the whole thing of subjectiveness, because I have the tendency, and I'm struggling with that, to think of my opinions of the Bible, that I have gained in the School of Theology, are the right opinions and everyone else's are just more the traditional ones. In terms of the hierarchy again I'm struggling with how you break down a whole culture, a whole system, a whole tradition that has been existing for years on end and if you do have the audacity to speak out and say, "But wait a minute the Bible is for women and the Bible is a patriarchal text.", You are going to be kicked out. That's basically my story.

BM: So have you been kicked out

NQ: Yes.

BM: So you have found Biblical Studies almost literally alienating?

NQ: Yes, I have.

I should not have found this revelation surprising given her response to an assignment I had set for my Romans course a few weeks earlier. For this assignment, the students were asked to prepare a sermon which they would preach to their community to highlight an issue from the letter which could be applied as a lesson to their community. NQ chose the passage from Romans 3:21-31 which proclaims that righteousness through faith and not the Law should be the requirement for entering the people of God. She used this text to speak to an issue in her community where the male leadership was attempting to control of the dress of young women. In her sermon she expressed her belief that the way she and the other young women dress should not be an issue in their acceptance by the community but rather their baptism and their faith. There could be much debate about what Paul would have thought about this use of his words because in 1 Corinthians 11:2-10, he also attempts to control the way

women dress. In this light the male leadership of her denomination is perhaps more in step with Paul's views than NQ. However, what NQ's sermon illustrated vividly was the process by which students who have been empowered, both positively and negatively, by critical exegesis fall out of step with the values of their community. The result is that most are eventually forced to choose between their community and their new insight. In the light of her own experiences of alienation from, and rejection by, her community, as a result of her university education, NQ had the following advice to give to the School of Theology about how to handle cases like her own.

NQ: I think at the end of this whole thing there should be a way, if I can make a suggestion, to kind of stabilise this criticality that they have indoctrinated us with. Because really, okay fine as long as you are amongst your colleagues and your peers in this Institution, you are fine. But when you go back there to your community, these things don't mean a thing to people. And so you are all by yourself, you are alienated, you are just discarded as one of the heretics and that kind of thing. So that balance, I think, is very much needed between our academics and the real experiences of the people out there.

In the last part of the 2001 interview I spoke to her about how she was rebuilding her life and her career in the aftermath of her expulsion from her church community. I began first by asking if she had, had any success in finding a new denomination to join.

NQ: Exactly because on the other hand my heart is saying, "You have to stay in the church. You have to be part of God's people." And on the other hand my brain or whatever is saying that, "No you are not the same person you were three years before, so you can't sit and pretend as if nothing has happened to you." .

BM: Well what have you done about staying within a church or in a community?

NQ: Presently I have done nothing to be honest but I've been fellowshipping here and there.

BM: So you are kind of searching for a new home?

Secondly, in the light of her diminished chances to enter the ordained ministry I asked her about her future plans.

BM: Okay, do you have no prospects of any further of training or support, are thinking about doing Honours, anything like that?

NQ: Not in Theology.

BM: Not in Theology. What are you thinking of? Where are you going?

NQ: I was thinking around the areas of development or community development.

BM: Okay but in a sense you could use your Theology together with that.

NQ: Yes.

BM: You didn't consider doing the development course with the Theology Department?

NQ: No because I think there is a lot of redundancy in the Theology, in the School of Theology, I know of some one who is doing that and the things that we have done as undergrads, they are still doing.

BM: And yet do you think going into that Honours, do you think your Theology studies will feed into that?

NQ: Hopefully because from the bit that I've heard people talk about the Theology and Development programme is that the purpose of theology is to bring development to people in a more humanising way and affirming them that they are people of God. And they deserve the better life and that kind of thing. So in many ways

theology that I have learnt so far has said that to me. And so going into a different field I think it, I will be different from someone who has just come from a development course. Because I will have the idea of God being concerned about God's people and their well being. That kind of thing.

In the end, this is not an entirely tragic case. NQ has come through her theological training with her faith intact and her sense of vocation undiminished. In fact, given that she came from a very conservative denomination and was already seriously questioning their approach to the youth and the Bible before she came to University, this outcome is perhaps the best that could have been hoped for. However, what NQ's case illustrates, and the issue which she herself highlighted in her interview, is the serious lack of emotional and psychological support systems for students within the School of Theology. This is an area that demands research and action on the part of the staff of the School to find a truly effective and efficient mechanism to help students negotiate conflicts with their community and to help them pick up the pieces if things go wrong. We have implanted and encouraged the questions that lead to the conflicts, therefore I believe it is our responsibility to provide support, if not solutions, in the traumas that result.

### *7.3.2 The Story of JM and MB*

JM and MB were on the verge of completing their BTh programme and were about to embark on their ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa when I interviewed them in 2001. They are both fine students, insightful, thoughtful and creative and by far and away the most academically competent students in the Romans class. I have chosen to present them together here so that the similarity and differences in their profiles can emerge.

JM is from Zimbabwe and as such represents an interesting case of a black student who has grown up without the legacy of South African apartheid education. In this profile I am interested to see if anything emerges to show if a different educational environment produces

different results. In 1999 I asked her about her education environment before coming to the School of Theology.

BM: Looking at your education environment. Did your parents, grandparents or other members of your family provide a rich environment with stories, things like that when you were a young child?

JM: I think they did

BM: Who told you stories?

JM: My grandpa, my grandma, sometimes my mother and my father, and my elder sisters and brothers.

BM: And did you have reading books, did they read books to you anything like that?

JM: When I was about to start school they began reading books, but before that it was only story telling.

BM: OK. Did your parents or other members of your family provide any creative learning or games for you as a young child?

JM: I think the games we played, if you look at them now, you can really say they were they helped towards my learning, or they prepared me for going to school. Like my brother used to cut some sticks and colour them differently, and that would help me in counting I remember he used to play it like a game but when I look at it now it made me aware of counting 1, 2, 3.

What emerges from her responses is a picture of a supportive and attentive family which studies, such as Heath (1983), have shown are very important for success within the school system. With this in mind I followed up with some questions about her experience within the school system to see if this positive start in education was followed through.

BM: Right. Did your teachers in primary school provide you with many stories or books to read?

JM: Yes they did

BM: Did you have a library at school?

JM: At the primary school we didn't

BM: No, but there were books in class?

JM: We had enough books for each student in class.

BM: Right, OK. Did your teachers in primary school provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?

JM: I think in the early stages of primary education it's mostly being given what the teacher knows, rather than you contributing. But I think when you are doing like the last two years, at least you're now in a position to say something, contribute something towards any subject.

BM: OK. Right, and how was the discipline at primary school?

JM: I think it was relaxed. I think they still treat you as a young child who still needs all the protection and love.

BM: So there wasn't any hitting or anything like that?



JM: If you did something bad, you had to go for punishment or you had to be beaten. Like if you come late or you speak in class, I think you had to be punished for that, I think it was right.

BM: Alright, in high school did teachers provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?

JM: Yes, I think at high school it was the teacher fed you with all the information they had, they gave you the chance to participate, and feel part and parcel of whatever you were doing. I think it contributed, and if you were interested in a subject, it would be shown by your contribution.

Once again JM's experience seems to indicate a supportive learning environment which allowed for student participation and development. This environment provides an interesting comparison with the relatively privileged environment of MB, a White South African from Port Elizabeth.

BM: Right, OK. Did your parents, grandparents or other members of your family, did they provide a rich environment of stories for you when you were growing up as a young child?

MB: Not a lot of stories, but more stories relating to family and incidents within family history, kind of story. And then other stories would have been just your children's books.

BM: So did they read to you? Also, did your parents, grandparents or other members of your family provide any creative games, kind of things for school readiness when you were a young child?

MB: Well one of the things was I attended a pre-school at the age of four and then at home we played a lot of games, but fun things.

BM: Right, any examples you can think of?

MB: I wouldn't say educational, it was more just fun things you know. Building little things and creating little things out of Lego, building houses and building cars, and making, creating things.

The comparison between the home environments of JM and MB reveals that essentially similar results can be obtained when parents and families are able to provide a child with either a pre-school learning environment, along with books and toys, or with the personal attention in the absence of these resources. I was now interested to see how MB's progress in the school system reflects her home environment.

BM: Right, and did your teachers in primary school provide stories and books for you to read?

MB: You know I can't really remember because I wasn't a big reader myself, so I didn't go looking for the books other than if they were provided. What was prescribed at school was those Dick and Dora, you know those those things, but nothing over and above that, other than what was around.

BM: Did you use the library?

MB: Not a lot. Yes in the school holidays we did but it wasn't a great pastime.

BM: Did your teachers in primary school provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?

MB: No, I don't remember anything like that.

BM: How would you describe the way you were disciplined at primary school harsh, adequate, relaxed?

MB: It was strict, but not harsh, you were sent out of the classroom you would go to your principal, those kind of things and lines, writing lines, those kind of things.

BM: Did your teachers in high school provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?

MB: No, not really. It was very much prescribed. This is the work and you do it and you don't go and look for things.

So despite the relative difference in privilege and wealth it would seem that JM had a more positive experience of the school system than MB. In this light I was interested to compare how they felt about their first semester at University.

BM: Coming on then to University. How did you cope with the first semester of your University education?

JM: I think for the first two weeks I struggled, because it's like I had not been coming straight from school, I had been working for some years, so really coming to study again, I had to struggle for the first few weeks.

BM: Was the workload more or less than you expected?

JM: I think it was fair, because when I came here I thought there would be too much, beyond my coping, but it was actually less than I expected.

BM: Were you able to cope with the amount of reading you had to do at University?

JM: As I've said, at first I struggled because I think for you to really read these articles and whatever, you have to discipline yourself. So if you're used to sleeping early and having some time of relaxing during the day, you have to discipline yourself again to reading strictly.

BM: And were you able to cope with the kind of assignments you were asked to do at University?

JM: Yes I did.

BM: And were you satisfied with your exam results?

JM: I was, but deep down in me I feel I'll do better than what I did in the first semester.

BM: What problems do you think you faced in approaching those exams?

JM: I think my main problem was anxiety. I didn't know what to expect from these exams and I wasn't sure how you are examined at University level, so I was just anxious.

BM: What kind of help do you feel you needed to do better in exams?

JM: Then I think I only needed self-confidence. But also, when I wrote my first exams, I could not write as fast as I wanted to do because I think there was a fear or something in me. So I think if I build on my self-confidence.

Despite her protestations to the contrary, I feel these replies to my questions show a good deal of confidence and self awareness. While I cannot be sure about the source of these qualities, I cannot believe that the combination of a positive education environment and work experience played no part in the fact that her adjustments to the demands of tertiary academic discourse had to do with self-disciplinary rather than intellectual challenges.

BM: Right, getting on to workload at University. How did you cope with the first semester at University?

MB: It was fine. I didn't have a major problem.

BM: Was the workload more or less than you expected?

MB: Well I did Hebrew in the first semester and that consumed most of my time, so I focussed 80% on that and the rest on my other subjects, so I think it was fair, it was fair. But Hebrew was a lot of work.

BM: Right. Were you able to cope with the amount of reading you needed to do at University?

MB: Ya, I was. It was fine.

BM: Did you do some extra reading?

MB: I wanted to and I could have and I think there was time but my problem and frustration was the Hebrew, and at nights, Greek, and it just consumed all your time. Cause you have to do it every day and every day. So, that takes up so much time that there's not much time for extra reading which would be great to do. So I don't do it.

BM: OK, were you able to cope with the kind of assignments you were asked to do at University, apart from the language ones?

MB: Ya.

BM: OK, were you satisfied with your exam results? Were there any problems you think you faced in approaching exams?

MB: Not in the first semester. It was fine, I didn't have too many problems, but maybe people could have explained how much information should be given in the exam and how much you should give of your own interpretation, you know, what kind of

percentage, how free can you be in exams. Must you stick to facts that would be nice to know, where you draw the line, in exams.

It should surprise no one that a white South African would find little difficulty in adjusting to the academic demands of tertiary discourse. Even MB's complaints about the amount of time taken up by studying Hebrew are counterbalanced by the ease with which she dismisses the intellectual challenges of her other subjects.

So far this profile of JM and MB has revealed that despite some superficial variety in their pre-university experience they are alike in their mastery of the academic demands of the tertiary discourse. In expanding their profile therefore I was interested to see how they coped with the demands that tertiary discourse in Biblical Studies made on their faith. In her 1999 interview JM showed that the spiritual challenges were far more serious than the intellectual ones.

BM: How do you feel about the approach to the Bible taken in the School of Theology?

JM: I think it's very challenging, and critical and I can say it sometimes it injured my soul and it injured my faith.

BM: So you do find the ideas a challenge to your faith. Is there any example you can give?

JM: Like you know when we are doing Biblical Studies, you know like this semester when we are dealing with the Old Testament, and the effect of, you have that awareness that there is not much historical evidence to the Bible stories. It really made me worry because to me the Bible is the centre of my faith, it is the centre of my belief. And I was saying to myself, lets say if all these are stories never happened, does that mean all along I was mistaken in following an example that is not really meaningful.

- BM: But, do you find this challenge useful, or would you prefer a different approach?
- JM: I think this challenge is useful because so far it has really equipped me, it has like deepened my faith. There was a time I was shaken but I say to myself, isn't this an approach to understanding the Bible more? And it's just given me the courage, because I know that out of my church, out of my congregation I will find some challenging people who think like this, and this challenge has equipped me to face that fear of feeling inferior to other intellectuals.
- BM: Right, can you describe the method you used to read the Bible before coming to University?
- JM: Let's say like we are doing Bible Studies, we would just pick up a passage from the Bible, and read it, and discuss it. But the discussion was different from the way we do it here in the sense that we could discuss maybe let's say summarize what's happening in the passage and try to look for the meaning of that passage to us, or to me as an individual. We never like dig it deep, looking at the text critically and trying to find what really the text means as it is written, so usually you find you won't engage with the text. You always find you look for what the text means to you theologically.
- BM: Right, before you came to University would you describe your attitude to the Bible as firm and fixed, or open and flexible?
- JM: I don't really know how to put this because I can't say fixed, as far as I can remember we used to have some radical discussions about the Bible, but then you didn't, I didn't know how to address those things. I would say it was open.
- BM: OK, how has your attitude to the Bible, or your method of reading, changed after studying Biblical Studies at University?

JM: The changes have mainly taken place in my attitude to the text. Now when I look at the Bible I don't just take one verse from this book, and another from that book, and another from that book. If I do that I make sure that at least I read, like the whole chapter through, and really find the thing of the story, before I can use one verse from that.

BM: Right, OK. Has Biblical Studies met the expectations that you had when you came to study Theology?

JM: So far it has, but this is my first year I don't know what we will do in the second year, and third year but so far I'm really grateful that I did it.

Having come through her first year without too much trauma JM was able in 2001 to look back on her three years of Biblical Studies and assess their impact with a clear head.

BM: Have you anything positive you have to say about what you have learnt in biblical studies?

JM: Yes there are many positive things that I have learnt. I've learnt the way to study the Bible like critical reading, I think it is very important and it's very helpful. I think it would help me in my ministry. When you are doing Biblical Studies, you should really try to read the text as a whole unit instead of reading just small bits or taking specific verse which suits you.

BM: Let me just ask you is there any negative part of that positive?

JM: I think there is because some of my faith personally like my belief in the Bible as the inspired word, the Word of God. My faith has been a little bit shaken. But still I think that shaking is important to me.



BM: Do you think in a sense the getting away from the idea of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Do you think that in the end do you think it is a useful thing to have done.

JM: I think it has been useful thing to be done. But what I really feel is that something should be done in Biblical Studies to complement that disturbance. To try to stabilise that disturbance which is put within peoples hearts or minds or belief systems by this study, Biblical Studies that disturbs it.

So like NQ before her JM can see some positive effects from her experience of the tertiary discourse of Biblical Studies while yearning for the naive faith she has lost and wishing for more support within the School of Theology to help her stabilise her world .

In her interview in 1999, MB also showed that despite her facility with the intellectual demands of Biblical Studies, she also had some serious spiritual difficulties with the way the tertiary discourse dismantled the beliefs she had inherited from her primary and secondary discourses.

BM: Right. How do you feel about the approach to the Bible taken in the School of Theology?

MB: Well when we did the New Testament that was fine, Old Testament's been different because Old Testament has been, if I can just use this as an example, more historical or archaeological, and that's been difficult because it could be said that maybe there was no Jericho, or no Moses or whatever. And that makes it difficult to then think, or understand it the way you always did in the past, so that's been quite difficult. So the approach is not a Bible study, you don't go and look at it from a Bible study perspective, it's very much looking at it from a historical standpoint and that's different.

BM: Do you find the ideas which you hear about in the School of Theology are a challenge to your faith?

MB: Yes, it has been, just to pick up on this Old Testament issue, that's a good example. So if it said that maybe there was no Moses or the whale never swallowed Jonah, if you've come out of a Sunday School background, you've never questioned that, so now it's a matter of going to re-look and rethink that and say look what's going on here. So that has been a challenge.

BM: Do you find this challenge useful or would you prefer a different approach?

MB: I think it's useful, but it would also be nice to have another approach where it maybe is more like a Bible study. Like if you take this calming of the storm story and you really just look at it and look at it just theologically, or just as if it happened. And looked at it, maybe in tutorial groups, I think that would be useful. Especially when you're doing Old Testament because now all this stuff is thrown at you, and you could walk out of there and throw what you've heard out, or it could really turn your boat upside down. And then I think it would have been helpful to have a place where you could go to and discuss it, you know in a Bible study context.

BM: Right. Can you try to describe the method you used to read the Bible before coming to University?

MB: Just reading it as it is, not reading it in detail, and trying to find the odd commentary and to try and understand a few things, but reading it quite simply, you know, just taking it at face value.

BM: How has your attitude to the Bible or your method of reading changed after studying Biblical Studies at University?

MB: Now I would definitely read it much more thoroughly, read it the same passage ten times instead of just the once, read it in detail. It's definitely changed, ya.

BM: OK. Has Biblical Studies met the expectations that you had when you came to study Theology?

MB: I didn't, you know I didn't really know what to expect, but you know I probably did expect us to look at it from another perspective than what we are doing, and I think somewhere along the line I was hoping that we would also look at it like I said, maybe more as Bible Study, more relevant to your life and that kind of stuff. So in that way it probably hasn't met an expectation, but in terms of looking at it differently, and with other sources, ya that has been positive.

So, even in her first year MB was suggesting to the School that the spiritual needs of the students were crying out to be met and made some very practical suggestions about the use of Bible Studies or discussion groups in which students could come together to cope with the challenges to their faith raised in their Biblical Studies classes. In her interview in 2001 she expanded on these feelings and echoed the sentiments of the other two participants about the feelings of lost innocence.

BM: Okay, MB could you just start with anything positive?

MB: I think for me what has been positive is that I've learnt to read the Bible carefully and to look at very specific things like the characters, the history and the world behind the text, that for me has been positive. It has opened up another dimension to the Bible. And another thing that has been positive is that I've discovered that I'm allowed to have an opinion to interpret, that I might read differently to someone else, that's been very empowering I think, just to appreciate that you have an opinion. Those stand out as the two most positive things for me.

BM: And any negatives within those positives?

MB: Ja, negatives? Also, something like the mystery or the innocence of a Bible being just the inspired word of God, that is being taken away from me. Although I don't feel devastated by that, but it does concern me. That's been a negative. And another thing I think sometimes is just being to see that there can be so many interpretations or ideas, around a text or a story and they can be so different and you wonder what is really going on here.

One aspect of Biblical Studies that affected both women in this profile equally was the discovery of passages in the Bible that were inimical to the interests of women. Having heard NQ's experience in the previous profile I asked JM and MB about any passages in the Bible they had found disturbing.

MB: Maybe the Judges texts where those women are cut up and raped and abused. In second year, that was the first time that we were exposed to those texts and that was quite a shock. I found them quite hard to read to believe that they are there. Even Genesis, the two creations stories in Genesis 1 and 2, it was something I wasn't really aware of, not that I can't read them but my reading would be very, very different now.

BM: JM any texts for you that have changed for you in a profound way?

JM: I would think that most texts that are uncomfortable to me as a woman or those texts where I find God as the judge, killing, like in Kings, when there is this story of God commanding the Israelites to go and kill all the Canaanites and occupy the land. Those are some things which I am now struggling to reconcile those Old Testament texts and the loving God of Christ in the New Testament, I can't reconcile that. And when we are doing bible studies yesterday with PZ we were reading about, was it First Timothy? I think. The dress codes of women and the like. I found it so tough when you critically read that text to defend it or to really

explain it, it's difficult. So those are the texts that maybe I could just like accept them as they are you can't really change them.

BM: But just generally, the Bible and the way it affects women, is that something important that you have learnt?

MB: I think for me it's done two things, on the one hand, you read some of the text and you think what's going on here? How do I really interpret this as a woman? Can I change it? Is this relevant to today still or is it just a metaphor? Can I dismiss it? There is that tension and then there's the tension of wanting to defend the text. And say as a woman I can speak out and for me there's that, there's still that tension of about how do I really interpret the text saying, be silent and wear x, y and z. If it's really saying that how do I interpret that today. I still feel I have that tension within me, it's not resolved. I don't feel entirely free that the Bible supports women. I think I still sitting with a bit of tension.

BM: Tension about whether the Bible is positive about women? So you, do you struggle with the fact that you have to get around these texts as women?

MB: I'd rather not want to be on the defensive the whole time because I feel like as women we have to be able to defend our selves in the light of those texts. To interpret those texts positively to support our calling or our ministry. I find that hard.

In the light of these comments I thought that the time had come to look at their responses to the question of ministry and how well theological study in general and Biblical Studies in particular had prepared them to be Pastors in the Presbyterian Church. The first responses come from their 1999 interviews and are immediately followed by extracts from the interview in 2001.

BM: Does Biblical Studies provide you with the resources to be a better person or Pastor?

- JM: I think it does, because the way I'm studying my Bible, or reading my Bible now, is different from the way I used to read the Bible before I came to this place. I think there's more understanding, more consideration, and I really look critically at the text. I'm not so defensive I'm more open to any questions about what I read from the Bible.
- MB: It's difficult because when you're looking at things so differently, it really challenges you, you really have to go back and look inside and think and work through some issues, and that I would hope at the end of the day I'd be better for that.
- BM: Looking then to ministry are there any positive things that have come out of Biblical Studies for your ministry, do you think?
- JM: I think there are positive things the way I came here in first year. I didn't understand what the Bible was, but I just said the Bible is the word of God and it speaks to me. Any text will speak to any Christian. But now I think, I like, have a deeper understanding of the Bible and as a woman I also feel these studies have like empowered me from the traditional interpretation of the Bible. Which has been dominated by men in my Church. So, I think as a woman, these studies have empowered me to go and read the Bible, interpret it from my own perspective as a woman. But, I also have doubts or tensions about going to the Bible as a woman when you are reading a text, because there you were becoming subjective, you are always wanting the Bible to say something that is positive to you and positive to women. And I am always struggling with this idea, is this not going to affect my ministry, because it will have to touch both men and women.
- BM: I was wondering also about the problem about now going back to the congregation that doesn't know these things, how do you speak to them? Do you think that, that is going to be a problem?

JM: I don't see it as a problem, because I feel that I still have my faith in the Bible, even though I know the Bible was written for specific context or specific people. I still have faith that the Bible is still applicable to me today and to my congregation. What I feel is that I have to equip my congregation to teach them to read the Bible critically and just a careful reading, I think it will help them.

BM: MB what about you? Do you think you might have a problem with relating to your congregation?

MB: I think it does create problems. Maybe I can use the example of Genesis 1 and 2 and the stories of creation. I think if I went to the congregation and said there are two creation stories, I think that would create an uproar. So I think it would have to be very sensitive as to how I would go about doing what you want to do. This does create a bit of tension because for me I'd like to be honest and say "Maybe this wasn't like this..." or "This is the history behind this..." But I know it will upset people.

BM: Do you think it necessary to upset people?

MB: This is what I'm not sure, do we just go and pretend that, take the average readers opinion and just read it "like it is" and say that the Bible is a hundred percent inspired by God. It creates that tension. A way around I think might be to really work closely with people in small groups and Bible studies and there to impart the tools that you have learnt, the close reading of the text, looking at the characters. And there you can create an environment to teach and to do your background reading and then, I think, you can really help people and educate them. I think that would be a way around it. For me, I think I would take that approach. I think we must be honest.

**In general therefore, they were embarking on their ministry with a positive outlook about how to meet the challenge of integrating the tertiary discourse of their Biblical Studies training**

with their ministry in congregations still largely rooted in the secondary discourse of denominational tradition. At the same time however, they did have some problems with their training and while they felt well prepared in some areas they were woefully under-prepared in others.

JM: I feel Biblical Studies should like address certain of the major theological beliefs. Like the Trinity I've been here three years I don't know what to tell my people about the Trinity. Or there are the issues about resurrection and death and dying. We are doing Psalms at the moment and the lecturer is saying something about the Jewish view of the soul and the body and I'm really thrown out because if they believe you can't separate the soul from the body, then I am thinking to myself, if the soul and the body can't be separated what does resurrection mean. What will be resurrected?

MB: I think in the BTh degree there are big gaps. There is a part of me that feels that their curriculum maybe needs to be different. Because you could come out of a BTh degree and practically not have read the Bible. So I think Biblical Studies needs to, you need to read more of the Bible.

BM: You don't think you read crucial areas?

MB: We have, I think we have. But I think, I think we read bits and chunks and I think we need to read more. Like in the first year we read a little bit of Mark, but I really think we could have read much more. If I had to add up what we've read in three years it's not a lot of stuff.

BM: You don't think you can then go and take how you have read Mark and read some others?

MB: Sure. But what if you are sitting in a place where you have no access to a library to do background reading? I just think we could read more I really do, but that's a



personal opinion, I would have liked that. That would have been my personal choice. And also this language thing, Hebrew and Greek, part of me feels that should be compulsory. If you really want to come out of the Biblical Studies major, I just think you need to run a language parallel with that, we would be so much richer. We have done a bit, but we dropped it because it got heavy. No one forced us to, but part of me thinks they should force us to do that.

BM: Did you just do the first year, the first level?

MB: First year Greek and then half a year Hebrew which was in retrospect a total waste of my time because I can't read a word in Hebrew anymore.

BM: I did a whole year of Hebrew and Old Testament studies during Hebrew and I still can't read Hebrew.

MB: Then one must ask what is the point. Do it and do it properly or don't do it or it's a waste of time. I just think they have to look at that seriously. I would recommend that, even though it is tough but then it's tough.

To elaborate the profile a bit further, and also to provide a further contrast with the previous profile of NQ, I was interested to probe the relationships between these Presbyterian ordination candidates and their denomination. In their 1999 interviews both women were essentially positive in their relationship with their denomination despite a few problems arising from the almost inevitable conflict between tradition and new ideas.

BM: Do you agree with the leaders in your church when they make decisions which affect you or your congregation?

JM: Sometimes yes, sometimes not.

BM: Can you give me an example of when not?

JM: I found out that sometimes the leaders in the church, they don't want to be objective. Like because they did something in the past years, it's like most of them it's difficult for them to change especially the elderly ones. Usually it's tough for them to accept advice, or suggestions from the young.

BM: Do you agree with the way your church approaches the interpretation of the Bible?

JM: Yes I do.

BM: Right, then do you agree with the leaders in your church when they make decisions which affect you or your congregation?

MB: Well, I do. I do, sometimes when they make the decision though, you're not really sure, you think it's a crazy decision, and then in retrospect you can understand why they made that decision. But up until now it's been fine, it's been interesting, it's been fine. But sometimes I have questioned a decision.

BM: OK, do you agree with the way that your church approaches the interpretation of the Bible?

MB: I haven't had a problem with it although there are people within the church that do have different opinions, you know they do have different opinions and I don't necessarily always agree with that. But as a whole I'm comfortable.

In the light of the previous discussion, about their responses as women to certain texts of the Bible and NQ's experience of being expelled from her denomination for challenging the male hierarchy, I asked them, in the interview in 2001, whether they had come into such disastrous conflict with the hierarchy in their denomination.

BM: So that hasn't happened to either of you two, has it?

MB: No.

JM: No.

MB: But our church, I mean I can't speak for another church, but our church does ordain women. And we hope they allow us a voice. So I think we have a bit of space to have an opinion, we hope.

Having been satisfied that their relations with their denomination were on as sound a footing as could be expected at that stage, and in the light of their comments about the gaps in the BTh, I ended the interview with some questions about the kind of post-ordination support and formation they could expect from their denomination.

MB: We go do a work probation next year, we are both going to be a learning in a congregation and then we get ordained.

BM: And you have no post ordination training?

MB: We have P. A. T, which is Post Academic Training. We have that now, we go into that.

BM: Okay, do you know what you do there?

MB: Ja, so we go now to do year of probation then three times a year we will all meet together for two weeks in a city and there we will look at church polity and stuff like that.

BM: Okay so there will be some kind post ordination formation.

In this profile of JM and MB I have found some room for optimism about the future of students who can muster both the academic preparedness and the spiritual strength to come

through a three-year BTh programme in the School of Theology, with their faith and their vocation relatively intact. In addition I am confident that they have the ingenuity and creativity to utilise their biblical training in ways that will do credit to the three-years they have spent here. What I find disturbing however is the knowledge that these women probably form part of a very small minority of the students produced by the School of Theology. As Daniel Patte (1995) has pointed out, most of those students who make it to ordination will probably abandon their training and head back to the relative comfort and certainty of the secondary discourse of their denominational traditions. More tragically, some never make it to ordination and lose their communities, their faith and often drop out of University without a degree to show for their troubles.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I endeavoured to round off my study of discourses and discourse communities within the School of Theology by highlighting what I have called “profiles from the frontline of the clash of discourses.” Academically and spiritually our students are engaged in a constant battle for the survival of the academic aspirations and their faith. We, the staff of the School of Theology, are well aware of these battles, no matter how well we have patched up the wounds and hidden the scars, because we ourselves fought them as students and continue to fight them in the effort to fan the embers of our sometimes fading faith. It is my hope that this study will be a clarion call to return to the frontline, despite the daily pressures we face as academic staff of a financially challenged university, and to develop programmes, processes and attitudes which will support our students and help them to emerge, if not unscathed, at least somewhat battled hardened and better prepared for the challenges of ministry and the new clashes of discourse they will face out in the community of believers.

## 8. *Summary and Conclusions*

### 8.1 Summary

In this thesis I have provided a description and analysis of the discourses and discourse communities of a group of thirty-four students in the School of Theology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. In Chapter 2 I have provided an overview and definition of the theoretical underpinnings of my research, including an expansion of James Gee's theory of discourse which posits that university represents a tertiary discourse which challenges both the primary and secondary discourses which the students bring with them from their previous socialisation. In Chapter 3 I have provided a description and justification of my methodology. In the central chapters of this thesis I have proceeded to present and analyse the data I collected from the students. In Chapter 4 I explored their primary and secondary discourses through their responses to questions on their family, educational and denominational background. I tried to show in this chapter the complexity of the discourses from which these students come and the consequent inaccuracy of convenient labels such as White and Black, advantaged and disadvantaged, etc. as predictors of students who will do well and thrive in all aspects of their theological education. In Chapter 5, I developed this idea further through the description and analysis of the encounter between the students and the tertiary discourse of critical Biblical Studies. In this chapter I have shown that while some students may cope with the academic demands of theological courses, they may at the same time suffer trauma and breakdowns as a result of the spiritual challenges involved in assimilating the tertiary discourse. In Chapter 6, I have described one instance of the clash of discourses that is happening in the School of Theology by allowing the students to pass their judgement on a collection of commentaries produced by the tertiary discourse of Biblical Studies in its various guises over the twentieth century. In this chapter the students have shown their struggles to accept the apparent lack of faith and intellectual dryness exhibited by the writers of these commentaries, illustrating once again how alien such writings are to the primary and secondary discourses of most of the students. Finally in Chapter 7, I revisited the issue of the clash of discourse through a series of profiles from the frontline. In this chapter I firstly gave a description of my response to a group of students who formed a distinct discourse community in one of my courses and challenged me with their unwillingness to accede to my

demand that their denominational, secondary discourse readings of a biblical text should give way to my critical, tertiary discourse readings. Coupled with this I present the results of research done among postgraduate students in the School of Theology which points clearly once again to the struggles students face in integrating the tertiary discourse if they are not explicitly and carefully apprenticed into that discourse. In the second part of Chapter 7, I have presented the profiles of three students whom I interviewed in both 1999 and 2001 in order to provide a longitudinal perspective on the effects of three years of study in the School of Theology. In these profiles I have shown how the encounter with the tertiary discourse has changed their lives and beliefs, leading to dramatic consequences in one case and presenting those in the other case with the formidable challenge of integrating their training in the tertiary discourse with life and ministry in communities steeped in secondary discourses. Having done all this, I will in the next section of my conclusion give the School of Theology the right of reply, by briefly considering two of the more recent publications to emerge from the School on pedagogy and the intentions of theological education at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

## **8.2 The Response of the School of Theology**

What I have written in this thesis so far may give the impression that the staff in the School of Theology are unthinking advocates of the white male intellectual approach to theological education. In this section of my conclusion I will highlight two articles arising from the ongoing pedagogical debate in the School of Theology, with the aim to show that the approach to theological education in the School is, firstly, intentional and, secondly, in the process of constant change.

The first of the two articles was published by Gerald West (1996b) in an effort to describe the thinking behind the redevelopment of the curriculum in the School of Theology and, especially, Biblical Studies since 1991. In this article West identifies the three core concepts which the staff in the School of Theology had in mind when the Biblical Studies curriculum was rewritten. The first concept is a commitment to engagement, by which he means identifying and delineating the resources that students bring with them into the Biblical Studies classroom and using this as the starting point of learning and teaching (West1996b:

49). The second concept is the idea of criticality or critical distance. This is a commitment to de-emphasise the role of content in Biblical Studies in favour of the development of critical skills which examine the text from historical, literary and hermeneutical perspectives which arise from the questions that students ask while reading the text (West 1996b:52-53). The third concept is that of contextualisation, which takes into account that all biblical texts are produced, read and interpreted within particular contexts, all of which profoundly shape the text and its meanings which are, as a result, plural, ambiguous and complex (West 1996b:54-56). Coupled with these is a commitment to the particular contexts of poor and marginalised communities in South Africa, which is the context from which many of the students come to the School of Theology, assisted by the School's bursary fund. All of which is to say that the School of Theology has a well thought out programme for moving our students from their primary and secondary discourse to our goal which is a tertiary discourse of a critically engaged and contextual approach to the interpretation of the Bible.

At the same time West does recognise that many of the students are resistant to some, or all, aspects of the programme outlined above (West 1996b:56). This concern is picked up in Draper's (2002) article which raises some questions about the intellectual and individualist approach to pedagogy taken within western Biblical Studies as a whole and the School of Theology in particular. Draper recognises that the resistance that has been encountered from the students is not merely an unwillingness to engage with uncomfortable ideas but arises from a real cultural antipathy to the tertiary discourse from the students' primary and secondary discourses (Draper 2002:8). In an effort to deal with this situation, Draper has modified his teaching of the classical Historical Critical tools in Biblical Studies so that the course includes a history of biblical interpretation which makes clear the political and rhetorical agendas at work behind the mask of science. In addition, he has begun to teach the method of Form Criticism and the development of the oral tradition in early Christianity by showing the parallels between this process and the less historically and culturally remote process by which Isaiah Shembe, a Zulu prophet and founder of a new religious movement called the *amaNazaretha*, appropriated and reinterpreted the Bible in an oral form (Draper 2002:9).



Also, in keeping with the commitment to contextualisation in the School of Theology, the Biblical Studies teachers and students have been working to recover the lost voices of Black African exegesis through working with ordinary readers with the Institute for the Study of the Bible. As part of their course-work students are trained to facilitate, listen to and collect the oral tradition of biblical interpretation in poor and marginalised communities in order to develop their respect for these oral traditions and to feel that the process of biblical exegesis is not foreign to their culture (Draper 2002:10).

Given that these papers arising from the work of the School of Theology show a high level of engagement with the kind of problems that I have highlighted in this thesis and that the findings of this thesis post-date the writings of the staff on these matters by at least two to three years,<sup>1</sup> it seems there is still much to do to improve the pedagogy in the School of Theology. In view of this the following sections of my conclusions will highlight, firstly, some recommendations for action by the management and staff in the School of Theology and secondly, some possibilities for further research which could lead to further improvements in our pedagogy.

### **8.3 Some Tentative Recommendations**

In the light of the limited scope of the sample in this study, both in size and in the history of the School of Theology, it is only possible for me to make tentative recommendations arising from the data I have collected. It is even possible that certain of the problems that have been identified in this study have been identified by other means and are in the process of being addressed. Nevertheless I will be so bold as to offer the following recommendations.

- That the staff in the School of Theology, including myself, should bear in mind the need for greater sensitivity to and appreciation of the primary and secondary discourses of our students, heeding, to some extent, the call of Daniel Patte (1995) to

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<sup>1</sup> Draper 2002 was written for and presented to the conference of Association of Anglican Biblical Scholars in San Francisco in November 1997!

embrace the plurality of readings of the Bible, not only outside the School of Theology, but outside as well.

- That the staff in the School of Theology, including myself, need to develop systems and processes for apprenticing all students into the academic skills and demands of the tertiary discourse including critical reading and essay writing skills. In addition these systems and process should assist staff to present clearly and explicitly written rubrics and descriptions for assignments and to give feedback on assignments which focusses on improving the students facility in the tertiary discourse.
- That the management of the School of Theology should endeavour to set up systems and processes to guide and support the students through the inevitable traumas that will arise from the clash of discourses within the School. This should include support for students who are having difficulty with the content of the courses themselves and those who encounter resistance and rejection when they attempt to share their tertiary discourse with their communities.

### **8.3 Possibilities for Further Research.**

I can however be less tentative in pointing out areas which seem to me to demand further study and research within the School of Theology.

- Firstly, there is a need for more detailed research into the primary and secondary discourses of the students coming into the School of Theology, for the purpose of using such discourses as resources for the teaching and interpretation of the Bible.
- Secondly, there should be more research into factors from their primary and secondary discourses which help students to cope better with the tertiary discourse of university study. For example, to study whether those students who do well have a particular type of early education in the home or if their school environment was free and open with respect to asking questions from their teachers and engaging in independent research and thinking.

- Thirdly, further research should be conducted to collect solid data on which kinds of readings cause most trouble for students and how these readings can be better mediated by the staff. The question of writing support also deserves further, more focussed research into ways in which staff can make their writing tasks more explicit and support students in their endeavours through constructive feedback.
- Another area for investigation would be to study the nature and seriousness of conflict between students and their denominational authorities, before, during and after their studies in the School of Theology. The object of this research would be to discover how much of the conflict arises as a result of their studies and to find mechanisms to support students through the resulting traumas.
- Finally, the issues of gender and racial tensions within the School of Theology deserve more focussed attention. Given the ongoing manifestations of these tensions in the wider society in South Africa the object of this research would be to find the extent and seriousness of these tensions and to suggest ways of helping students to manage them so that they enhance their studies rather than detract from them.

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## *10.1 Appendix One*

### **Questionnaire**

1. Nationality
2. Denomination
3. Home Language
4. Language of Schooling
5. Year of Study
6. Year of Biblical Studies

### **Educational Environment**

7. Did your parents, grandparents or other members of your family provide a rich environment of stories for you when you were a young child?
8. Did your parents, grandparents or other members of your family provide any creative learning or games for you as a young child?
9. How would you describe the way you were disciplined at home?
10. Did your teachers in primary school provide many stories and books for you to read?
11. Did your teachers in primary school provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?
12. How would you describe the way you were disciplined at your primary school? Harsh? Adequate? Relaxed? Explain?
13. Did your teachers in High school provide an environment where you could ask questions and look for your own answers?
14. How would you describe the way you were disciplined at your High school? Harsh? Adequate? Relaxed? Explain?

## **Workload**

15. How did you cope with the first semester of your University education?
16. Was the work load more or less than you expected it to be?
17. Were you able to cope with the amount of reading you needed to do at University?
18. Were you able to cope with the kind of assignments you are asked to do at University?
19. Were you satisfied with your exam results?
20. What problems do you think you faced in approaching the exams?
21. What kind of help do you feel you needed to do better in your exams?

## **Relationships**

22. How is the relationship between students and staff in the SOT?
23. How is the relationship between Black and White members of the SOT?
24. How is the relationship between men and women in the SOT?

## **Church, the Bible and Theology**

25. Are you an ordination candidate in your Church?
26. Do you agree with Leaders in your Church when they make decisions which affect you or your congregation?
27. Do you agree with the way that your Church approaches the interpretation of the Bible?
28. How do you feel about the approach to the Bible taken in the School of Theology?
29. Do you find that the ideas which you hear about in the School of Theology are a challenge to your faith?
30. Do you find this challenge useful or would you prefer a different approach?

## **Biblical Interpretation**

31. Can you try to describe the method you used to read the Bible before coming to University?
32. Would you describe your attitude to Biblical interpretation as firm and fixed or open and flexible?
33. How has your attitude to the Bible or your method of reading changed after studying Biblical Studies at University?
34. Has Biblical Studies met the expectations that you had when you came to study theology?
35. Does Biblical Studies provided you with resources to be a better Pastor or Person?

## **Stilling of the Storm**

36. Do you agree that this is a story about how Jesus tests the disciples faith by not responding to the storm, to see how they would react?
37. Do you agree that the disciples question “ Who is this man?” is asking about Jesus place in the spiritual hierarchy (ie. What is his position in heaven) rather than about his identity
38. Do you agree that the storm was demonic in nature?
39. Do you agree that the words “be quiet , be still” were addressed to the disciples not the sea?
40. If I tell you that the scholar who made this suggestion had not read the Greek text properly, how would you respond then?
41. Do you agree that the storm is symbolic of the disciples resistance/ objections to taking the gospel to the gentiles across the lake?
42. Can you describe how your interpretation of the Stilling of the Storm has changed since you began Biblical Studies?

## **Miracles**

43. What is your definition of a miracle?
44. Miracles happened in the Bible but do they still happen today?
45. Does your Church give much teaching on miracles? The miracles of Jesus? Miracles today?
46. What do you feel is the attitude to miracles of staff in the School of Theology?
47. What do you feel is the attitude to miracles of the authors you read in Biblical Studies tutorials?

## *10.2 Appendix Two*

### **Tutorials on Mark 4:35-41**

INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THESE TUTORIALS:

1. *FOR YOU TO INTERACT INTENSELY WITH ONE PASSAGE FROM THE BIBLE.*
2. *FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE.*
3. *FOR YOU TO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT WAYS OF INTERPRETING THE BIBLE, BOTH YOUR OWN AND THAT OF THEOLOGIANS AND NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS.*
4. *FOR YOU TO HAVE FUN AND GET TO KNOW EA CH OTHER.*



## TUTORIALS ON MARK 4:35-41

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

WEEK ONE	Life Histories	Life history exercise in which you will write on your experiences of reading, writing and the Bible.
WEEK TWO	Dramatization	Preparing performances of the story of the stilling of the storm to be presented to the class.
WEEK THREE	Dramatization	Continued
WEEK FOUR	Reflection Paper	Write a page trying to put the message of the story into their own words. I will help you to ensure that this reading is as rich and detailed as possible
WEEK FIVE	Reading 1 and 2	You will read and discuss scholarly readings of the Stilling of the Storm in small groups, giving a written answer to questions.
WEEK SIX	Reading 3	As above
WEEK SEVEN	Reading 4	As above
WEEK EIGHT	Reading 5	As above
WEEK NINE	Interviews	Tape recorded interviews with selected students .
WEEK TEN	Evaluation	Your chance to tell me what you think of these tutorials .

## **EXERCISE ONE:**

### **Life Histories:**

In this exercise we would like you to write about your experiences of reading, writing and reading the Bible. It is important that you try and give as much detail as you can but only give information that you feel comfortable giving. There are a number of sections to this exercise, under each section there are a number of questions designed to help you write about your experiences. Try to answer as many questions as you can but you do not have to answer them all.

#### **Section 1.**

How old were you when you started writing? What kind of writing did you do? Do you have any memories of writing before you started to write yourself? How did you feel about learning to write, was it fun or hard work? Can your parents read and write? Can any other members of your family (uncles ,aunts, grandparents) read and write? If so, what kind of reading and writing did they do? What did they feel about writing? What did you feel about them writing? Did they help you with your writing? How did they help? Was their help useful? Did their help hinder you in any way?

#### **Section 2.**

How old were you when you started to read? What kind of reading did you do? Did somebody read to you before you started reading for yourself? How did you feel about having people read to you? Did you enjoy learning to read? What kind of books did you most enjoy reading as a child, give some examples? Did your family encourage you to read? What books did you enjoy reading in high-school? What books, magazines or comics do you enjoy reading in your spare time? Do you find it easy and enjoyable to read?

#### **Section 3.**

Write about your experiences of reading and writing at primary school, what was it like? What were your High School experiences? How many languages have you learned to read and write? Think about the most positive learning experience you had at school, what made the experience good? Think about the most negative learning experience you had at school,

what made it so bad? Do you find reading and writing enjoyable? Try and explain what makes reading and writing a pleasant experience for you? Also explain what makes reading and writing difficult and stressful for you? Which languages do you find easiest to read and write? Which languages are difficult for you?

#### **Section 4.**

Write about reading the Bible. When do you first remember hearing the Bible being read? Where did this happen? Can you remember what language was used on that occasion? Did your parents read the Bible to you? When did you first read the Bible for yourself? Did you use a simplified text with stories and pictures? Do you read the Bible regularly now? Do you enjoy reading the Bible? What language do you read the Bible in? Can you enjoy reading the Bible in more than one language? What versions of the Bible do you read? Have you learned to quote Bible passages from memory?

## **EXERCISE TWO**

### **Dramatization:**

In this exercise we will be looking at the story of the Stilling of the Storm from a different angle. You will be divided into groups and asked to create a 5- 10 minute dramatization of the story. The point of this exercise is to be as creative as possible, for you to try and understand how Jesus felt about the disciples and how the disciples felt about Jesus in the story. The thing to remember is that by changing the story you are not trying to change the Bible but trying to experience for yourself the emotions that are present behind the story. To help you to do this I suggest that you look at and use other versions of the story ie. Matt 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25, Mark 6:45-52. You have two tutorials to prepare these dramatizations with the help of some senior students from Drama Studies. They will be presented to the whole class at the end of the third week of lectures.

## **EXERCISE THREE**

### **Reflection paper**

This exercise is some what similar to exercise one. I am asking you to write a short paper in which you try and answer the following questions:

What do you think is the main message or lesson of this story?

Do you think this is a true story or not? Explain carefully why you think this.

Do you think that the dramatizations of the story, which you worked on, and the ones that you saw performed by your colleagues helped you to understand this story any better? Why, Why not?

## **EXERCISE FOUR**

Read the following passages. In your group you should discuss the questions at the bottom of the page and then write your answers and hand them in next week.

### **1. TRANSLATION BY THE JESUS SEMINAR (extract from Funk R.W. et al 1993 The Five Gospels: The search for the authentic words of Jesus. San Francisco: HarperCollins)**

And with the help of many such parables he would speak his message to them according to their ability to comprehend. Yet he would not say anything to them except by way of parable, but would spell everything out in private to his own disciples.

Later in the day, when evening had come, he says to them, "Let's go across to the other side." After sending the crowd away, they took him along since he was in the boat, and other boats accompanied him. Then a great squall comes up and the waves begin to pound against the boat, so that the boat suddenly began to fill up. He was in the stern sleeping on a cushion. And they wake him up and say to him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are going to drown?". Then he got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be quiet, shut up!" The wind then died down and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so cowardly? You still don't trust, do you?" And they were completely terrified and would say to one another, "Who can this fellow be, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

### **2. JESUS' POWER OVER NATURE 4:35-41 (extract from Malina B.J. and Rohrbaugh R.L. 1992 Social Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. Minneapolis: Fortress**

Textual Notes.. Mark 4:35-41

Showing fear openly as the disciples do here results in a serious loss of honour for a Mediterranean male, should such fear become known to some out group. It can be added to Mark's frequent

characterization of the disciples as obtuse and uncomprehending. The disciples' question in v. 41 is not one of "identity" as a modern reader would assume. It is one of status or honour. It asks about Jesus' location in the hierarchy of powers and is the question raised because "even the wind and sea obey him."

**Answer the following questions:**

- 1. Is there anything about this interpretation that is the same as your own?**
- 2. What is it about this interpretation which is different from your own?**
- 3. What do you like most about this interpretation of the text and why?**
- 4. What do you like least about this interpretation of the text and why?**
- 5. Has reading this interpretation changed anything about the way you understand and interpret this text?**

## EXERCISE FIVE

Read the following passage. In your group you should discuss the questions at the bottom of the page and then write your answers and hand them in next week.

### 1. JESUS QUIETS A STORM ON THE SEA OF GALILEE (extract from Branscombe B.H. 1941 The Moffat New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark. London: Hodder and Stoughton)

Storms such as the one described are not rare on the Sea of Galilee. On the east shore the land rises precipitously to the plateau some two thousand feet above the level of the sea. Further north and east it is higher still. The wind-storms which break on the sea from the heights and through the ravines are both sudden and severe. The boat conveying Jesus and His disciples was caught in one of these squalls, and the latter feared for their lives. The remainder of the story is told in vivid and popular language. Jesus, asleep in the stem, is awakened. He rebukes the wind, and commands the sea to be quiet, just as He did the demon in v. 25 ff. It appears that the storm is thought of as the work of a demon. This was quite natural, for demons not only entered human bodies, but could locate themselves in the wind, or in stars, or other natural objects (cf. Eph. ii. 2). A great calm followed Jesus' words. The statement of the disciples to each other points the moral of the story, a moral couched in terms of the developed faith of the Church rather than of the days of the Galilean ministry: Whatever can He be, when the very wind and sea obey Him? In attempting to understand this story one must remember that it was written down a number of years after the event which is described, and in the light of the beliefs which Christians had come to hold about Jesus. That as severe storm fell upon the small boat which once conveyed the disciples and their master from the western to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and that they were convinced either then or later, that they had been saved by Jesus' powers, remain the salient facts. One might guess that the words of Jesus, when aroused from His sleep, were words of encouragement and faith rather than addresses to the wind and sea. In any case, modern readers are likely to seek elsewhere for the causes for the quieting of the storm than did the disciples. But the story contributes a brief but vivid picture of the journeys in and around Galilee, and of the impression which Jesus made upon His



followers.

**Answer the following questions:**

1. **Is there anything about this interpretation that is the same as your own?**
2. **What is it about this interpretation which is different from your own?**
3. **What do you like most about this interpretation of the text and why?**
4. **What do you like least about this interpretation of the text and why?**
5. **Has reading this interpretation changed anything about the way you understand and interpret this text?**

## EXERCISE SIX

**Read the following passage. In your group you should discuss the questions at the bottom of the page and then write your answers and hand them in next week.**

### **1. THE CALMING OF THE STORM (extract from Schnackenburg R. 1971 The Gospel according to St Mark for Spiritual Reading. London: Sheed and Ward)**

The power of Jesus, experienced here is only comprehensible in the sense intended by the evangelist if, with him, one understands the adjuration of the storm and the word of command to the sea as a casting out of demons. The Greek word which is used for 'rebuke,' or forceful reprimand of the wind, is also to be found in the adjuration of the demons (1:25 and 9:25). A distinction is evidently made in Mark between the demons of storms and sea (not so in Matthew or Luke). Every word of command corresponds to a definite result: "The wind ceased and the sea became calm," two marvellous happenings since the waves normally do not become calm so quickly. The "natural" explanation that such violent storms suddenly arise on the sea of Galilee and just as quickly die down breaks down, however, in face of the experienced fishermen among Jesus' disciples who must have known about this. The portrayal echoes a special experience: first, fear of death (v. 38), then after the sudden calm another type of "fear," awe before him who accomplished this with a short word of command. Even the description of the disciples' reaction is similar to that of the people after the first exorcism: Jesus' power over the wind and the sea proves him to be master over demonic powers.

That the powers of God are present in Jesus cannot be deduced from his outward appearance. He behaves wholly like a man: after the tiring day of preaching at the sea before great crowds of people, he sleeps on the hard cushion where normally the helmsman sits, and not even the noise of the storm and the waves beating against the boat wake him. The disciples wake him, but then he acts immediately and in a manner which is without parallel. The motif of rescue from peril at sea is old (the Jonah story, also Jewish and pagan stories); but in other incidents God is the rescuer or it is the prayer of the pious which brings down help. Here someone acts in God's name and utters only a word of command.

The whole incident is at the same time an experience of the disciples and a lesson for them. In Matthew the last words of astonishment are spoken by the "men." In Mark it is always the disciples. Danger of death made them forget who they had in their midst; the powers to which they saw themselves exposed overpowered their faith. This is openly expressed in Jesus' words of reproach, they are fearful and cowardly. Again it is Mark who with his double question brings this out more forcefully than any other evangelist. For him, the disciples completely lost faith, where Matthew speaks of "men of little faith." Faith is here not yet a reflective faith in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God. It is the elementary force of believing confidence. It must survive all the assaults of powers hostile to God. It is the prerequisite for the understanding of Jesus' message about God's kingdom. The last question, however, gives the reader also to understand that it must be a faith in Jesus the Son of God.

**Answer the following questions:**

- 1. Is there anything about this interpretation that is the same as your own?**
- 2. What is it about this interpretation which is different from your own?**
- 3. What do you like most about this interpretation of the text and why?**
- 4. What do you like least about this interpretation of the text and why?**
- 5. Has reading this interpretation changed anything about the way you understand and interpret this text?**

## EXERCISE SEVEN

Read the following passage. In your group you should discuss the questions at the bottom of the page and then write your answers and hand them in next week.

### 1. STILLING THE STORM (extract from Kelber W.H. 1974 The Kingdom in Mark: A new place and a new time. Philadelphia: Fortress)

What surfaces as the traditional core of the story is a sea miracle which manifests Jesus' superiority over a demonic nature. Into this miracle story Mark has introduced the motifs of crossing and discipleship. The redactional *dielthomen eis to peran* [cross over to the other side] defines the purpose of Jesus' embarkation in terms of a crossing. This produces a slight shift from the original sea story toward a voyage story. Following the calming of the elements, and before the disciples are given a chance to express their admiration, Jesus rebukes them, charging them with lack of faith and, interestingly enough, cowardice. *Pistis* [faith] in conjunction with *deiloi* [danger] alters the traditional notion of belief in, or acknowledgement of, the miracle worker to an attitude of courage under stress. The rebuke singles out the disciples' weakness during the crossing, and not their lack of reverence in view of the miracle. They are admonished because, cowed by the perils of the crossing, they showed concern only for their wellbeing (4:38). This gives an indication of the pervasiveness of the theme of discipleship, or rather that of the failure of discipleship, throughout 4:35- 8:21. The whole section is bracketed by the "not yet" of the disciples' courage and understanding. The motif of the disciples' fear (4:41a), "a theological, and not a psychological datum" is a functional element of Mark's discipleship theology. That he associates fear with their lack of understanding is shown by the redactional verses 9:6, 32 and also 10:32. Fear is an expression of the disciples' condition of non-perception. The understanding of the fear in 4:41a is therefore not that the disciples are filled with reverential fear in view of Jesus' demonstration of power, but rather that they are shocked by Jesus' rebuke of cowardice because they cannot grasp the implications of the crossing. Their final question, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?" must be viewed as a statement made in lack of faith. It is out of fear and lack of understanding that they confess the lordship of Jesus over nature." Therefore the redacted story of

the Stilling of the Storm will have to be considered not as a sea miracle which manifests the power of Jesus, but as a mysterious crossing which is misunderstood by the disciples as a sea miracle. Jesus himself takes the initiative for this first passage across the Lake of Galilee. It turns out to be a stormy passage, and in mid-water the disciples falter, which incurs the rebuke of Jesus. Among themselves the disciples marvel at the identity of the one who saved them by mastering the elements, but the real significance of the move across the lake escapes them. As the master pioneers the breakthrough toward new shores, they appear to be out of step with the purpose of his mission.

**Answer the following questions:**

1. **Is there anything about this interpretation that is the same as your own?**
2. **What is it about this interpretation which is different from your own?**
3. **What do you like most about this interpretation of the text and why?**
4. **What do you like least about this interpretation of the text and why?**
5. **Has reading this interpretation changed anything about the way you understand and interpret this text?**



## Table of Attributes

Name	Age	Denomination	Gender	Home		Nationality	Year Of Study in
				Language	Language of schooling		1999
AB	20's	Methodist	male	Xhosa	Second Language	South African	First
AS	20's	Presbyterian	female	English	Home Language	British	First
BH	20's	Methodist	female	English	Home Language	South African	First
BMK	20's	Church of Christ	male	Zulu	Second Language	South African	Third
CM	20's	Lutheran	female	English	Home Language	South African	Third
DAW	40's	Anglican	male	English	Home Language	British	First
DS	20's	Lutheran	female	Venda	Bilingual	South African	First
DW	20's	Pentecostal	male	English	Home Language	South African	First
EC	20's	AFM	female	Shona	Second Language	Zimbabwean	First
JM	20's	Presbyterian	female	Shona	Bilingual	Zimbabwean	First
JW	20's	Anglican	male	English	Bilingual	South African	Postgraduate
KK	30's	Methodist	male	Sotho	Bilingual	Lesotho	Third
LC	30's	Full Gospel	male	English	Home Language	South African	Postgraduate
LM	20's	Lutheran	female	Shona	Bilingual	Zimbabwean	First
LZ	20's	Pentecostal	male	Zulu	Bilingual	South African	Second
MAN	20's	AFM	male	Tswana/Zulu	Bilingual	South African	Third
MB	20's	Presbyterian	female	Eng/Afrikaans	Home Language	South African	First
MP	20's	Full Gospel	female	Creole	Second Language	Mauntian	First
MR	20's	Catholic	male	Sotho	Bilingual	South African	First
		International					
NN	20's	Centre of God African	female	Zulu	Second Language	South African	First
NQ	20's	Evangelical	female	Xhosa	Second Language	South African	First
OS	30's	Bretheren	male	Sotho	Bilingual	South African	Second
PM	20's	Baptist	female	Bemba	Second Language	Zambian	First
		Uniting					
PZ	30's	Reformed	female	Zulu	Second Language	South African	Postgraduate
RN	50's	Anglican	male	Swati	Bilingual	Swazi	First
RS	30's	Lutheran	male	Eng/German	Second Language	South African	Third
SA	20's	Pentecostal	female	English	Home Language	South African	Third
SD	20's	Baptist	male	Pele	Second Language	Liberian	First
SM	20's	Methodist	male	Xhosa	Second Language	South African	First
TL	20's	Methodist	female	English	Home Language	South African	Third
TM	20's	Methodist	male	Zulu	Bilingual	South African	Third
TT	20's	Bretheren	female	Zulu	Bilingual	South African	Postgraduate
VM	20's	NA	male	Zulu	Second Language	South African	Second
ZN	20's	Lutheran	female	Zulu	Bilingual	South African	First