

*Reading  
Writing  
Right*

Essays presented in honour  
of Prof Elna Mouton

EDITORS

Jeremy Punt  
Marius J Nel



SUN PRESS



*Reading Writing Right: Essays presented in honour of Professor Elna Mouton*

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# Preface

## “What time is it?” *Nuni de* in the New Testament

*Prof Dr John E Alsup*

Congratulations Prof Dr Elna Mouton! ... from your friend and colleague, both in the settings of Stellenbosch, South Africa and Austin, Texas, USA, who has himself fairly recently become “emeritus” in the world of theological education. Joining me in this greeting of tribute are all your friends and colleagues here at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, especially President Theodore Wardlaw and Dean David Jensen. At retirement time we acknowledge with reluctance and yet with a degree of acceptance that it is “time” to do so. While we rejoice and celebrate, we also wrestle with the “timing” of it all. Hence, my contribution to your Festschrift is about “time.” At the personal level, the expression in German is – to be sure – apropos: *Mit einem lachenden und einem weinenden Auge!* (= “with a laughing and a crying eye!”)

To be sure, the question of time has fascinated the imagination of thoughtful people for generations. From astronomers to mathematicians to chroniclers of historical phenomena and cycles of change to the younger generation, always asked “What do you want to be when you grow up?” (whenever that may be!) to the average adult person coming to terms with (or trying to do so) with the aging process when looking into the mirror, to Mister or Miss Average scrambling about to accomplish all the “to do’s” while there is still time left before it is “too late” (complicated or helped by the construct of “daylight-saving time?”). We all – it would seem – are in a quandary over the question: “What time is it?” or more often “How late is it?” The optimists among us tend to reply: “It is never too late ...”, while pessimists and procrastinators say: “It is always too late, so why do today what you can put off until tomorrow!” This kind of futurist thinking demands a conversation about divine possibilities and opportunities to link up with God’s purposes in history. There is a

theological caution, it would seem, that arises whenever we speak about the future. We do well to be hesitant when speculating about what the future holds! (A Sunday school teacher by the name of Otto Stybor got me to wondering about such matters during my teenage years when he suggested that we might think of “history” as “His story”.)

I am instructed in this regard by what we find in the linguistic options in Greek texts, ancient and modern: there is a refinement here of word usage on this topic of time and the future. First, the common word *chronos* (from which comes the English term “chronology”) has as its contextual anchor the “movement” or “flow” of time as measured by the calendar ... days to nights to weeks to months and to years etc. – often expressed in connection with the seasons of the year. We often utter the familiar phrase “Time marches on!” Yet, as Prof Dr Mouton may remember from her visit to our horse ranch here in Texas, there is a type of time here called the “rhythm of the earth” that enables horses and humans to live together and interact respectfully and beautifully with one another as we live out a life of belonging to one another. It reminds me of the famous quotation from Winston Churchill: “There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a human being.” Prof Dr Punt and family also have such equine memories from their visit. What this special rhythm represents for humans who are open to learning from horses is that they live each day to the fullest without worries about tomorrow, confident, it would seem, that tomorrow will be just fine (not unlike Jesus’ counsel in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:34: “Do not worry yourself about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”).

When asked “How old are you?”, Native American Indians replied by indicating how many summers they have experienced! In most places today a birth certificate offers a more precise answer ... or at least, so it would seem. We often call this “ordinary time.” But is this all there is? When responding to affirmatives about all the good things coming from yesterday’s blessings, Paul often introduces the caveat of *pollo mallon* (“how much the more,” cf. e.g. Rom. 5:9, 10, 15, 17; 8:34, 11:12, 24; 14:13; 2 Cor. 5:9; Gal. 4:9; Phlm. 16, etc.), the (often) exceedingly more wonderful dimension of what breaks in unexpectedly into the chronological flow of things! What is that kind of time anyway when unmasked? Jacob Needleman offers an answer to this question in his provocative volume entitled *Time and the Soul* (New York, Currency/Doubleday, 1998). Quoting in part from Jeremy Rifkin, he asserts initially that we are:

overwhelmed by plans that cannot be carried out, appointments that cannot be honored, schedules that cannot be fulfilled, and deadlines that cannot be met. It is the new poverty ... our famine of a culture that has chosen things over time, the external world over the inner world. It has become the aching question of our era ... being busy, having many responsibilities, being involved in many projects or activities – is now being felt as an affliction. It is leading us nowhere. More and more it is being experienced as meaningless (vii-viii).

Needleman's book, basically a pithy biographical novel, then moves from this initial observation about time and a sense of meaninglessness to a captivating engagement with metaphysical, theological insight. Eliot Appleman, essentially Needleman's chronologically prior self, is visited (as a divine gift) by the author in order to relive that which had been a former experience level, now from a "new now" perspective. Eliot encounters his future self, as it were, and tries to make sense of and act upon this encounter with the strange-yet-familiar future self. The past is now present and the future is now present for one and the same person in a time-warp of sorts. Needleman asserts: "Young Eliot feels the terror of being visited by a force infinitely beyond his comprehension; the terror of being seen by his own eyes; and then he asks provocatively: "Why are we afraid of being seen – by ourselves?" He continues: "Freedom from time – the approximate term for which is 'immortality' – awaits you; you are made for that, but you must search and search to receive in your life the winds of this immortality, this endless presence, that are constantly being sent to man from the centre of the universe." And he wants to call it a "good fear" that is "sometimes known to us as the experience of the *uncanny* ... Experiences that break through our ordinary sense of time ... " Needleman goes on to ponder this issue of time and other dynamics surrounding the profound quest for discovering answers to the question of "who you are." (There are echoes here, of course, from the ancient Greek traditions associated with the *gnothi seauton* (know thyself!) counsel by the Pythian oracle at Delphi to inquiries about future risks and associative consequences).

The reflections of Needleman above lean, as it were, into the alternative discourse on time, which we have located in the *alternative* terminology and biblical thought world of *chronos* in Greek, which is "time" as *kairos*. In scripture it tracks a reality that has less to do with the "march of time" across the landscape of aging than it has to do with the encounter of "event draped in meaning" or some such thing. Let us call it event during and after which nothing can remain the same. A possible translation might be something like "destiny's hour" or "divine purpose manifest in history." These two types of time collide – if you will – and may go undetected and uninterpreted until the chronological time moves in its experiential stride to the "appointed hour" (of destiny) in which the encounter with the *kairos* of "divine purpose," if you will, produces the "new time" that is unimagined and "earth-shaking" (as we say) and that bursts on the scene. We know such moments, of course, as we sit in cancer wards, waiting incredulously and afraid, or in disbelief over the magnitude of natural disasters, or – in contrast – in maternity wards beholding the glory of new birth! For scripture this is – more often than not – understood and spoken of in terms of the genre of "apocalyptic" (= pulling back the curtain to reveal what is otherwise hidden and thus unseen). To quote the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9f (paraphrasing the prophet Isaiah (64:4ff)): "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of mortals, the things which God has prepared for those that love him. But (now) God has revealed them to us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things; yes, the deep things of God."

The literary genre in which the Apostle articulates this apocalyptic/theological understanding of time is the epistle, i.e. correspondence as surrogate for personal presence. This mode of “presence” takes very seriously the location of dialogue within the context of the church. It would seem that for Paul – and others – the church, as body of the risen Lord in a post-resurrection world, is seminal in many respects, not the least of which is certainly the issue of time! The eschatological “now” is *nuni de*, the new/now world of God’s intention for creation ... a sobering and exciting notion of promise. Distinguishing itself from the genre of “gospel” – which itself is to be distinguished from the genre of “biography”, of course, and yet building on it, this epistolary genre opens the door to wise counsel (following aspects in oral tradition of such counsel as in the Sermon on the Mount? (... a provocative history-of-tradition question worth pursuing would be that of the relationship between the “it was said of old, but I say unto you” of the Jesus tradition and the *nuni de* of Paul and the tradition of faith development of apostolic congregations)), i.e. subsequent “parenetic guidance” (= admonishments, advice, etc. regarding the Christian life). The diction of this genre moves regularly from syntactical statements in the indicative mood (statements of fact) to those in the imperative mood (commands), i.e. appropriate new-faith conduct based on the prior facts or givens of God’s revealed actions – particularly that of Jesus’ resurrection – in history. To quote Prof Leonhard Goppelt in his Commentary on 1 Peter: “To live in society on the basis of Jesus’ resurrection means to have an eschatological existence in history” and “as Christians they are ‘foreigners’ because they are to live this existence in history” (English trans. 67 and 156).

This brings into perspective another terminological refinement as pertains to the Greek term *eschaton* as the end or final “divine optic,” so to speak, which sees time from the end to the beginning rather than the reverse order, which is our accustomed way to think of time’s movement. Contrary to our view, we have here a view of chronological time turned upside down. It would be something like a kind of time that “marches backward toward and into *chronos* from the end toward the beginning; hence, “eschatology.

Another important aspect of the discussion of time in Pauline theological thought and diction is that which is raised by the title of this preface. It pertains to the content of the expression *nuni de*, noted above. While it is not a word for time per se, it draws attention to the contrasts within the relationships between three aspects of time, namely past, present and future, i.e. what was, is and shall be. The *nun*, of course, points to the “now of what is” and it sets itself apart, interestingly enough, from a certain aspect of the past-ness of what was, but weds – so to speak – the “is” with the “will be” of present and future. This “eschaton dimension” of time-reality is generally called in English the “eschatological now.” The *eschaton* of God’s future embraces the promises of God “from of old” – as the expression goes – pulling them forward into the present reality of time, while – at the same time – enabling future time to “reach back” into the present experience of the addressees of the genre in “parenetic

address,” thereby giving life and a compelling foundation to the behavioural guidance being urged. From the standpoint of “chronological time,” it is as though the time reference of past event and future deliverance bend forward and backward simultaneously ... now as vivifying reality upon the present from both directions when mapping time upon the “flow chart” of *chronos*. The “now” becomes critical as a realisable focus: the past is no longer “over” and the future is no longer “not yet” ... rather both live within the present of God’s new possibility.

At this juncture it is critical to specify what the particular (not general) past that “lives” in the present and the future has become. That is to say, we are drawn by virtue of lived life to raise the practical ethical issues of time that are so critical in a world like ours with all its nuclear dangers, natural disasters and the avarice, hatred and threats to “life and limb”, as we say, from the unexpected assaults, driven by evil, of those who would do us harm for no other reason other than our skin colour, the way we part our hair, the views we hold on a variety of topics, or our confession of faith and the way we worship God! In point of fact, however, in the New Testament world things weren’t much better with regard to the dangers that beset people like us. Creatures of God’s creation and the giftedness of a habitat/environment that God has provided, since the Garden of Eden, for them to enjoy has always been subject to corruption ... the experience of evil forces, lurking in every corner of our lives, has always been the bane of our existence.

Instead of assigning blame and ratcheting up the rhetoric of diatribe to which we have grown accustomed through the public news media and internet technology etc., Paul and the author of I Peter and other New Testament writers like them think and speak like apostles, like those sent by God with a message of hope, not unlike the prophets of old, but now (*nuni de*) with the declaration of “good news” for all creation after the resurrection of Jesus, i.e., the good news of *euaggelion* and its posture on time.

The post-resurrection perspective is important when comparing the apostolic confidence and diction of *nuni de* in the prophetic posture of Paul et al. vis-à-vis the oft-concomitant complaint of Old Testament prophetic longing: “How long, oh Lord, how long until your promises become our experience?” For the eschatological *nuni de* of Paul and elsewhere, the “new” that has come through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead comes even now as God’s new reality into the present from the future(!) of apocalyptic promises, e.g. in the Book of Revelation (cf. chs. 20–21), as well as into the present from the past, as much as from the *nuni de* of apocalyptic eschatology; the past was actually – as scripture would have it from the divine point of view – never anything other than present for God! The same can be said for the future in relationship to the present and past for God! And yet prophetic longing continues to ask: “and for us?” This business of promise and an empirical realisation is a thorny issue, to be sure. Accustomed as we are to the dominance of our thinking and speaking within the categories of existentialism and rationalism, it is quite foreign – as it were – for us to think and speak theologically, as the counsels of scripture and Needleman – in his style – prompt us to consider seriously.

So, from whence or how does Paul derive the expression *nuni de*? First, this could be understood as a history-of-tradition question, by which we might attempt to trace lines of literary source-indebtedness among written biblical sources, their oral traditions, and their respective *Sitze im Leben* and inter-relationships. Even a brief exploration of New Testament and LXX Greek lexica and concordances (the Hatch and Redpath LXX Concordance is especially instructive here) makes clear, however, that, while the use of the term *nun* is hardly unique to Paul, the chronological flow of time in texts like Second Isaiah (ch. 43:1) or Job 30:1 and 9 hardly qualify as a source of indebtedness for the focal theological nuancing that constitutes the critical pivot point for the development of his correspondence with communities where his preaching and – presumably – conversations and clarifications in on-site dialogue were foundational for their very existence. First of all, it is important to acknowledge that the addressees of the writings containing the technical terminology of *nuni de* were congregations of Christians, which by and large were founded by Paul in his ministry of preaching and shepherding (often in absentia). Paul is not simply passing on the wisdom of prior prophetic wisdom. A first-hand “Apostolic calling” and “being sent out” is *sui generis* – as it were – for him as he attests frequently in reflection upon his encounter with the resurrected Lord Jesus (also chronicled as the Damascus Road appearance in Acts 9, 22, and 26 (cf. also in his own words from 1 Cor. 9:1; cf. also, 2 Cor. 5:16f: “Thus we – from the now perspective – know no one according to a physical perspective – even if we (once) knew Christ according to a physical perspective – but now (“nun”) we no longer know (like this) ... thus if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new”). *Nuni de* was for Paul clearly not merely a theological construct, but rather a personal, transformative reality.

This resurrection-contextual focus on the “but now time” of his own experience (“did I not see the Lord?” 1 Cor. 9:1) is also expressed in Philippians 3:10 as he seeks “to know” this Lord, that is (an exegetical *kai* in Greek) the “power of his resurrection,” and that of the “but now” life of the congregation, that changed everything for both. Even when appreciating all other good and wonderful things in this life, Paul often proclaims the *pollo mallon* (= “how much the more”) of *nuni de*! Worth pondering, of course, would be the possibility that *pollo mallon* (as suggested earlier with the reference to the gospel tradition of the Sermon on the Mount) is an echo of Jesus’ “you have heard it said of old ... but I say unto you!” This would make sense, of course, for the continuation of apostolic discourse on the question – common to all the gospels – of the identity of the historical Jesus from the perspective of post-resurrection influences upon the development of gospel narratives, especially as regards Jesus’ question at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27ff and parallels): “Who am I?” Thus, he moves from the indicative mood of God’s act of raising Jesus from the dead to that of the imperative mood of parenetic consequences of *nuni de*.

It is consequential for Paul to then move, for example, to these powerful “so-what images” of inclusive table fellowship in Romans 12-15. This interpretive transition reminds me of an impassioned, prayerful appeal in Desmond Tutu’s “An African Prayer Book” (110-113) entitled: “Reflections on Wholeness.” It reads:

Busy, normal people: the world is here. Can you hear it wailing, crying, whispering? Listen: the world is here. Don’t you hear it, praying and sighing and groaning for wholeness? Sighing and whispering: wholeness, wholeness, wholeness? An arduous, tiresome, difficult journey towards wholeness. God, who gives us strength of body, make us whole. Wholeness of persons: wellbeing of individuals. The cry for bodily health and spiritual strength is echoed from person to person, from patient to doctor. It goes out from a soul to its pastor. We, busy, “normal” people: we are sick. We yearn to experience wholeness in our innermost being: In health and prosperity, we continue to feel un-well, unfulfilled. There is a hollowness in our pretended wellbeing: Our spirits cry out for wellbeing of the whole human family. We pride ourselves in our traditional communal ideology, our extended family. The beggars and the mad people in our streets: Where are their relatives? Who is their father? Where is their mother? We cry for the wholeness of humanity. But the litany of brokenness is without end. Black and white; Rich and poor; Hausa and Yomba; Presbyterian and Roman Catholic: We are all parts of each other, We yearn to be folded into the fullness of life – together. Life, together with the outcast, The prisoner, the mad woman, the abandoned child; Our wholeness is intertwined with their hurt. Wholeness means healing the hurt, Working with Christ to heal the hurt, Seeing and feeling the suffering of others, Standing alongside them. Their loss of dignity is not their loss: It is the loss of our human dignity, We busy, “normal” people. The person next to you: with a different language and culture, With a different skin or hair colour – It is God’s diversity, making an unbroken rainbow circle. Our covenant of peace with God, encircling the whole of humanity. Christians have to re-enact the miracle of Good Friday; The torn veil, the broken walls, the bridge over the chasm, The broken wall of hostility between the Jew and Gentile. The wall between sacred and secular? There is no wall. There is only God at work in the whole; Heal the sores on the feet; Salvage the disintegrated personality; Bind the person back into the whole. Even if there are ninety-nine: Without that one, we do not have a whole. God, who gives strength of body, make us whole. (“An African Call For Life”).

It would seem to be clear from this pastoral prayer’s passion for God’s gift of wholeness that faith’s conviction is – fundamentally – that God is the only One able to define wholeness and to enable “working together with Christ” to heal the hurt, to see and to feel the suffering of others, to stand alongside those who have lost human dignity ... in short, to “re-enact the miracle,” which is *nuni de*/Good Friday’s Easter morning!

Finally then, in the spirit of shared dignity and the “re-enactment of Good Friday/Easter morning,” it is appropriate to conclude this exploration of *nuni de* in the New Testament thought-world with the shortest, yet perhaps in many ways most profound extant example of Paul’s epistles: that which was written to Philemon. While certainly belonging to the Pauline corpus, it would appear that its authorship is actually a collective effort, or as we say today: “a group-send.” At the beginning, Timothy “the brothered one” is mentioned as co-author and at the end Epaphras,

Mark (the Gospel writer?), Aristarchos, Demas and Luke (the Gospel writer?) sign off with Paul at the end as well in pronouncing the grace of the (resurrected) Lord Jesus Christ upon the “spirit of you all.” This plural – you all – is significant because the Epistle itself, while being addressed to Philemon “the brothered one” (as the head of the household), is also addressed to Apphia, the “sistered one” (= the wife of Philemon?) and to “Archippos” (= in Greek “Big or Alpha Horse”), our fellow-soldier, and to the “of you (singular ... the antecedent is of course Philemon) *ekklesia* (“church”) of the household sort (in contrast to the “synagogue” sort?). A difficult lesson for Christian household dynamics (especially for those accustomed to ‘being in charge!’), then as now, is that there is but one Lord of this household and all members thereof are *douloi* (servants) to one another (cf. for example, the *hypotassomai* structures of the household code tradition in Col. 3:12-4:6 and parallels).

Subsequent to the opening list of addressees in vv. 1-2, there follows in v. 3 the apostolic blessing: “Grace to you all and peace from God our Father and (from) the Lord Jesus Christ.” After this focus of address, there come assurances in vv. 4-7, which constitute a contextualisation of familiarity between all the parties mentioned in part one. Sometimes these parties have epithets of function within this exemplary house-church. V. 4 contains the “thanksgiving to my God” ... stemming from the Pauline lead voice of apostolic address, that launches a prayerful reminder statement about the constant concomitant recall of Philemon as head of this house-church in Paul’s own prayer life. V. 5 focuses on that which has prompted this prayer of thanksgiving, namely, that Philemon’s love and faith have been brought to Paul’s attention. The singular pronoun (“*hen*”) suggests that Paul sees love and faith as inseparable when directed to “the Lord Jesus” and when shared among “all the saints.” V. 6 introduces a result clause: “that the common cause impetus that stirred your faith may accomplish the needed form of discernment about all the good at work among us for Christ.” V. 7 continues: “For I feel a great joy and comfort as a result, dear brother, of your love because the compassions of the saints have found their peace (resting place: *anapauo*) through you.”

A major shift in content follows then in v. 8, when the Apostle continues regarding the parenetic counsel prompted by the *nuni de* crisis hour that also exists for this house-church. The key word is *epitassein*, “to give orders, to arrange, shape, or structure something.” In context it reads:

On account of the foregoing, I am feeling considerable confidence about my laying out what is the necessary thing for you to do. Yet (v. 9), on account of love, on the other hand, I am exhorting you, being such as I am, Paul, even a seasoned veteran, but now (*nuni de*) also being a captive of Christ Jesus, (v. 10) I am exhorting you concerning my ‘offspring’ Onesimus, whom I ‘birthed’ in my service of bondage (to Christ) (v. 11). He it is who once was of no use to you (Greek *achreston*), but now (*nuni de*) is of use (*euchreston*) to you and to me. (v. 12) He it is whom I have sent back to you, that is: the one whom I care for dearly.

(v. 13) He it is whom I have wished to retain by my side for *diakonia* in order that, on your behalf, he might be useful in helping me in my duties as captive of the gospel." (v. 14) "But without your knowledge and willing consent, I was wishing to do nothing, in order that the good and helpful thing might not happen by constraint, but rather with your blessing.

An important moment for "time" and "transformation" has been reached here at vv. 15ff as the Epistle nears its conclusion. For one thing, like the formula "it is enough, payment has been made in full" in the gospel tradition (cf. Mark 14:41), *apeches* – drawing on the realities of various kinds of indebtedness between Paul, Philemon and Onesimus – opens the eyes of Philemon to the difference between "hour" time and "eternity" time, or (as earlier (v. 11)) *nuni de* time! New time, new perspectives on behaviour! V. 16 holds up for consideration a new definition for the "servitude of captives of the gospel" (cf. v. 13 above). Hence, v. 16 focuses on the emergence of a new creature shaped by the model of the resurrected servant-slave Lord Jesus, the One who is an "on behalf (of others) servant" – a "beloved Brother" (cf. also Rom. 8:29f). This is an invitation to Philemon to join up and to make common cause with the new day dawning: in receiving Onesimus, he/we are receiving one another in the Lord. Former errors and shortcomings will find new and helpful, redemptive solutions. These are blessed, apostolic pledges ... we all are invited to step forward ... echoes from the beatitudes! An interesting – though subtle – "seal on the deal," as it were, comes in v. 20 when Paul uses the "I would that and pray it will be so" form of the first person singular, 2<sup>nd</sup> aorist optative mood, middle voice of the verb *oninemi*, from which comes the very name of Onesimus, which means to be helpful, of service, or useful. This apostolic, prayerful expression of name-interpretation is now placed on Philemon himself as epithet in the confidence that harks back to the joyful expression of compassions of the saints resting in love and comfort "through you" back in v. 7. Here, Philemon and Onesimus, in the "new now" of *nuni de*, share a common heritage and a new-now-future. Significant also is the accent on extending the *oninemi* supportive help of hospitality to those in need and doing those things that go above and beyond bare minimums in offering such specialised supportive help.

Wow, would that we had "the rest of the story", as we say, and could read Philemon's letter in reply to Paul! Some would say that we do in a way, in the Epistle to the Colossians (4:9) in which the service of *diakonia* became the last word in this drama ... the rest of the story? ... (Col. 4:9 "all things will be made known to you all there!") Amen.

Well, for now Prof Dr Mouton, God speed to you and all the best in retirement. I should have written more, but I ran out of *chronos* ... I had to go and feed the horses!

As before, your friend and colleague, John.

# Introduction

*Proff J Punt & M Nel*

This collection of essays aims to honour the scholarly work, academic contributions and research activity of Prof Aletta Elizabeth Johanna (Elna) Mouton, who retired as professor of New Testament at Stellenbosch University at the end of 2017. As is evident from all eighteen contributions, Elna's contribution to biblical scholarship generally, and New Testament scholarship in particular, has been influential and far-reaching, and often touched the nerves of those with whom she interacted. The contributors to this volume are academic colleagues from various institutions as well as past and current students of hers. All immediately agreed not only to contribute, but to write essays that relate in one way or another to Elna's scholarly focus on what she often called the "transformative potential" of biblical texts. Elna's many scholarly contributions, in conference presentations, scholarly writings and otherwise, clearly demonstrate her concern for accountable and responsible exegesis, and for exploring the ethical dimensions both in texts and in hermeneutics: reading writings right, with all its accompanying challenges and ambiguities, amidst liminalities of various shapes and sizes.

In the preface **John Alsup** from Texas in the United States and a long-standing friend of Elna Mouton's, already signals the connections between the academic concerns, faith commitments and human friendship that characterised Elna's life in so many ways.

In the *first part* of the book seven scholars demonstrate, often in engagement with Elna Mouton's work, important facets of reading rightly. The first two chapters directly engage Elna's hermeneutical approach to biblical texts. In the first chapter, and engaging Elna's work directly, a long-standing friend and later colleague

of hers, **Dirkie Smit**, casts a light upon four aspects of her work that portray her concern with reading rightly. He shows also how her academic work is interrelated to her life's vocation, embedded in how she understands herself and her academic responsibilities across the spectrum of her involvement in intellectual, ecclesial and other intentional communities. In a related way, **Bernard Lategan** describes how Elna Mouton developed a very specific understanding of what an ethical reading entails. He explains how Mouton identified three interrelated levels of responsibility – and to even embodied these in her academic activities – including the need to account for the choices made during an interpretation of the text; discerning the pragmatic thrust of its content; and then applying these insights in the community and context in which and for which the interpretation is made.

**Maretha Jacobs**'s reflection on Elna Mouton's kind of biblical interpretation points to what she identifies as the prominent aspects of Mouton's work, which Jacobs reads in conversation with other New Testament scholars: the theological hermeneutics of Dale Martin, Loveday Alexander's reflection on the kind of interpretation "God's Frozen Word" requires and the work of a few feminist biblical scholars. These comparisons lead Jacobs to consider alternative ways of viewing the Bible, their implications for biblical scholarship and for "opening up" the canon to other early Christian sources, and "dialogical biblical interpretations" of various kinds as ways of doing justice to cultural differences between the New Testament world and our modern world. In this way Jacobs situates and evaluates different ways of reading ethically.

**Louis Jonker** challenges the ability of the popular, comparative paradigm of interpretation of African biblical scholarship to produce right readings. The bias towards socio-historical textual analysis of the Bible in tandem with contemporary African socio-economic and religio-cultural realities, as well as splitting interpretation into two separate procedures of exegesis and application, creates problems for African biblical scholarship to read the Bible rightly. Jonker critically explores this paradigm and its dominance in African biblical scholarship, particularly in relation to the Old Testament. He argues that an analogical hermeneutic will be a more responsible basis for the comparative paradigm when applied to narrative texts.

Ancient narratives and stories have often been limited to their textual forms and only been allowed to serve as literature and products of countless translations. **Cornelia van Deventer**, however, seeks out the performance and experience of these stories focusing on the author of the first letter to the Johannine community, who makes this point when testifying of an experience of the divine. The author refers to his/her message as a revelation of life which the audience has heard (ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν), seen (ὁ ἐώρακάμεν) with their eyes, beheld (ἑθεασάμεθα) and touched (ἐψηλάφησαν) with their hands (John 1:1). Van Deventer explores the means through which the Fourth Gospel, and potentially other narrative biblical texts, can be imaginatively

experienced as drama and analysed accordingly by building on the existing methodology of narrative criticism with insights from the field of theatre criticism. The chapter seeks to transform readers into audience members who see, feel, smell, hear and taste the happenings of biblical narratives.

Reading the book of Tobit, slightly pre-dating the New Testament writings, through the lens of trauma, **Helen Efthimiadis-Keith** focuses particularly on Tobit's dysfunctional relationships and his subsequent recovery. In order to do so, she uses a Jungian psychoanalytic hermeneutic that regards all aspects of the text as manifestations of Tobit's psyche. Efthimiadis-Keith argues that the pervasive 'otherings' dominating the first section of the book represent Tobit's psychic fragmentation, regression and ailing relationships, while the effects of his psychic integration and recovery, spurred on by Tobias's marriage to Sarah and evident in transformed relationships, are illustrated in the last section of the book.

Amidst great strides forward towards the equality and dignity of all persons, specifically in terms of gender, many spaces within theology, faith communities and biblical scholarship (in Southern Africa and elsewhere) still remain ambiguous. **Nina Müller van Velden** questions traditional notions of the "natural given" of male dominance (often biblically motivated), since they continue to be a challenge for inclusion. The Gospel of John – regarded by many as offering a positive portrayal of female characters and demonstrating a welcoming stance towards women in the attitude of Jesus towards women – also contains such ambiguity in terms of gender. Positive strides towards inclusive notions are present in the narrative, yet traditional, patriarchal power relations are equally present, even in the character of Jesus. Muller van Velden proposes that it is precisely the ambiguous portrayal of gender relations in Johannine narratives, and John 12:1-8 in particular, that contribute meaningfully to contemporary discourses on gender and power relations, and thereby to the construction of open and inviting spaces for all.

The *second part* of the volume contains six essays which focus on reading specific texts. **Lilly Nortje-Meyer** presents a decolonial reading of the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4, partly based on an Afrikaans commentary on the Gospel of John which serves as intertexture that correlates with its social-cultural context. The original book by Erdman (1916) is an explanation of the Gospel of John, freely translated into Afrikaans. The ideology of the white Afrikaans male author has clearly influenced his view of the person of the Samaritan woman and her conversation with Jesus. The book serves as a cultural text that is central to the strategies of modern imperialism. The way in which Jesus and the Samaritan woman are interpreted demonstrates how these representations are governed by the politics of interpretation, theological persuasion and ideological motives of the coloniser. From a decolonial feminist perspective the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4 will be reread in a search of the female sage.

**Annemarie de Kock-Malan**'s contribution is situated in the midst of South Africa's multifaceted moral and social crisis, a society where poverty, gender-based violence, rape and HIV/AIDS are pervasive. These moral dilemmas in actual fact represent a deeper, primarily theological dilemma, since faith communities are not necessarily portraying their identity in Jesus Christ with integrity and wisdom, as alternative communities, as the letter of James suggests. The author of the letter of James perceived or anticipated a moral crisis in the historical situation of his audience. He reacts to this by arguing for alternative perspectives that his audience clearly did not see. This chapter investigates the "rhetorical situation" of the letter of James and the writer's reaction. The author of the letter of James challenges the dominant ideologies of the time in order to propose his own ideology or alternative perspectives as the alternative reality of God. The author speaks on behalf of the voiceless and marginalised in order to open the eyes of the audience to this alternative reality. The "rhetorical situation" of this ancient text is not identical to our situation, but the text holds a key that may help us to challenge our own situation in similar ways.

Following Elna Mouton's lead in the search for texts' transformative potential, **Slindile Thabede** reads Tamar's story through a postcolonial feminist lens in search of the subaltern's voice. She argues that Zulu women have so much to say about their marital oppression, and thus aims to allow these voices to emerge from the gutters of oppression in her rereading of the narrative. Zulu women's pain can become the new frontier for cultural reform, as it cries for new cultural norms that consider the reality of women and recognise that both males and females are equally important to the family and the society at large. Even though Judah needed sons to continue his tribe, it took Tamar's subtle intervention for him to achieve that. The postcolonial feminist lens may be helpful to Zulu women as they seek new ways to resist not only their patriarchal culture but also the oppressive powers of the colonial world in whose shadows they continue to live. Tamar's model of resistance may therefore be an important tool for empowering Zulu women to resist injustice.

**Jacobie Visser** pursues the gendered discourse – a particular focus in Elna Mouton's work – in James 1, showing how the Jesus followers are exhorted to live up to 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Greek and Roman images of manliness: being perfect (1:4,) complete (1:4), lacking in nothing (1:4), being able to endure trials (1:12) and ready to be tested (1:12). The believers are considered blessed (1:12) and promised the crown of life (1:12) if they are able to adhere to these manly traits, but all in the name of being faithful to God. Visser investigates the intersections of 1<sup>st</sup> century masculinity and religion, as they are constructed in James 1, in order to expose the different elements involved and their intersectionalities. The effects of postulating religion and its discursive impact on contemporary attempts to re-masculinise religion are considered.

Taking her cue from Elna Mouton's involvement in teaching the spirituality course in the Master of Divinity programme at Stellenbosch, **Angelique Havenga** shows Elna's sensitivity to and awareness of the *sacredness* of *time* and *space*. For Elna, an essential part of our *spiritual formation* is learning to see that each moment and each place has the potential to be *holy*; that each moment and each place can convey

the presence and glory of the Triune God; that each instance of *chronos* can become an instance of *kairos*. Inspired by Elna's mentorship and friendship over the years, Havenga explores this notion of the sacredness of *time* and *space* by specifically looking at how the sacrament of the Eucharist *reconfigures* our understanding and perception of the temporal and spatial dimensions of our earthly existence. Building on the thoughts of various theologians, she argues that the Eucharist – where we meet Christ and participate in the *drama* of his life, death and resurrection (*in* and *through* everyday bread and wine) – imbues people with what can be seen as a *sacramental vision*, which alters the way people see and *live* their lives in the space-and-time-bound realities of this world.

**Marius Nel**, one of the book's editors, engages with the topic of Elna Mouton's inaugural lecture, the pathos of New Testament Studies, pathos being the “persuasive power, reception and lasting effects in people's lives” of the interpretation of New Testament texts. In agreement with Mouton's emphasis on the importance of the pathos of New Testament interpretation, since it directly influences people's understanding of God and their own identities, Nel specifically focuses on the possible life-affirming or life-threatening pathos of interpreting Matthew 18:15–20 as an example. He argues that while interpreters should take responsibility for their interpretations of the New Testament, a possible life-threatening pathos of a specific interpretation of a text such as Matthew 18:15–20 cannot be used in a simplistic manner to negate the potential meaning of a text. It is instead important, as suggested by Mouton, to determine if the pathos of an interpretation of a specific text is in line with the grain or the intention of the text.

In the four papers constituting the *third and final part* of the volume, four scholars honour Elna's legacy by identifying how her work impacted on their very specific areas of research. **Denise Ackerman** touches on what arguably is one of the defining elements of Elna Mouton's work – and person – namely, spirituality. Ackerman described the ways in which we experience the enigma of longing will differ, depending on varied contexts, personal histories and faith traditions, but showing also those constants through time. Exploring the longing for the Holy One shapes the practice of prayer and increases the desire for silence and solitude. Exploring longing is not without pain and times of darkness, for there are no short cuts in the desire to deepen the relationship with God. Yet our longing does not allow us to turn away from mystery. We find that in the darkness of ‘unknowing’, truth about God is revealed. Ackerman argues that people cannot and dare not ignore that enigmatic longing which draws them ever deeper into life in Christ.

In his celebration of Elna Mouton's leadership, **Nico Koopman** not only identifies her leadership as situated within vulnerability, but also portrays such leadership as being aware that where vulnerability is acknowledged, accepted and affirmed, the way is paved for leadership that serves with humble assertiveness and leadership that seeks justice for all. Exploring vulnerable leadership, Koopman first explores

vulnerability in terms of a Trinitarian anthropology. In the two last sections of his essay, Koopman shows how humble assertiveness and the quest for justice for especially the most vulnerable are two vital features of leadership in vulnerability.

Drawing on her own research expertise, **Birgit Taylor** examines the role of women in the funerary customs in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean culture. Among the funerary rites, the mourning customs are highlighted. The role of women in this context is discussed against the backdrop of public and private spheres of the prevailing culture. Funerary rites demonstrate that women played an essential role in the death and mourning customs in Ancient Judaism. Apart from preparing the body for burial, women grieved loudly in a lamenting act during a funeral procession, giving voice to society's grief. While in general the public domain may have belonged to men, in the funerary rites the domain of public mourning belonged to the women.

Finally, the contribution of the other editor of the volume, **Jeremy Punt**, links up with a theme which Elna Mouton often used to describe her and others' involvement in theological studies, namely the metaphor of the journey. He unpacks this notion in the Pauline letters and legacy, which as a whole are closely connected to travelling, with the apostle and others moving around and crossing boundaries of various kinds. These movements occurred at a time (1<sup>st</sup> century CE) and in a context (Roman Empire) in which, on the one hand, travel happened more frequently than often thought, even if differently compared to today, and on the other hand, 1<sup>st</sup> century travels were interconnected with issues of identity formation and acculturation which fed into the rich yet complex tapestry of 1<sup>st</sup> century life not always or immediately evident in the texts of the NT. Among other considerations, one important aspect informing the broader picture of 1<sup>st</sup> century travels was the ubiquity of the Roman imperial setting and its influence, aspects of which resonates in our modern context shaped by migration and other forms of people movement.

These eighteen contributions of fellow scholars and friends of Elna Mouton are indicative of the interests of these scholars, but also of their engagements with the different areas in which and themes about which Elna stirred up and promoted conversation, and challenged established ideas, in her committed, studious and earnest academic research work and scholarship, and in her persistent and ongoing endeavours, her persistent attempts to always read writings right!

Section A | ***RIGHT READING***



# Chapter 1

## Reading Rightly?

### On Hermeneutics of Trust, Hope and Commitment

*Dirk J Smit*

*Appropriating the perspective of the New Testament ... like mountaineering ... is a narrow road which calls for a hermeneutic of trust, hope and commitment.*

(Mouton 2002:260)

#### **“True Proclamation of the Gospel”?**

Although we attended different schools in the same region, we knew one another at school and later as students. We met when we both represented our respective schools at an annual conference for potential youth leaders, sponsored by *Die Burger*, an Afrikaans newspaper. During our final school year we attended several activities of the Christian Students’ Movement together. We were in fact together at such a weekend event in Riebeeck West when the large earthquake struck the Boland area and caused major destruction in her home town of Ceres. As students at Stellenbosch University we knew one another very well and participated together in student life in many different ways.

I have many vivid memories of Elna Mouton from those early days, many of them quite remarkable. At the end of our final school year we were members of a *stranddiensspan*, groups of students who spent a few weeks during the December holidays keeping smaller children in seaside resorts busy during days and evenings by playing games, hosting cultural events and providing spiritual and moral instruction and guidance. One Sunday evening the whole group went on a picnic at a favourite spot in the countryside, alongside a dam, and sat together listening to the worship service on the