

'ARE WE STILL OF ANY USE?' SITUATING RUSSEL BOTMAN'S THINKING ON POVERTY, EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION IN OUR CONTEMPORARY TIMES.

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Introduction

In the Christmas of 1942, four months before his arrest by the Gestapo, the Nazi Germany secret police, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a letter to his closest friends entitled 'After Ten Years: A Reckoning Made at New Year 1943'. 'After Ten Years' was an offering of care to a group of people wracked by despair, guilt, internal disagreement and self-doubt. Nazism had wrought on their collective souls a debilitating moral uncertainty. Reflecting their state of mind, Bonhoeffer asked, "(a)re we still of any use":

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the art of equivocation and pretense; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use? ...Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough, and our honesty with ourselves remorseless enough, for us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness. (Bonhoeffer, 1997: 1)

Behind Bonhoeffer's question was a conscience formed in the fire of self-reflection. Through it he would develop an awareness that the process of his own social formation – his upper middle-class history – had taken place around an ontological ideal which was implicitly *othering*. It struggled with the voice of the poor. While there is a debate about the extent to which Bonhoeffer was able to renounce his class position and identify with the disadvantaged, as there is now reservation about whether Gandhi and Mandela were able to free themselves from the socially dominant ideologies which surrounded them, there is no doubt that he had come to the unquestioned position of the primacy of social justice (see Barnett, 2015; Desai & Vahed, 2016 and Everatt, 2016).¹ Of course, his theoretical tools were of his time. The lexis of the 1940s did not have at its disposal either our contemporary discursive frameworks such as Michel Foucault's description of the ubiquity of power which has helped us to understand agency in completely new ways, or our current vocabularies which speak of marginalisation and inclusion. But Bonhoeffer was aware of how privilege

¹ It must be noted that Bonhoeffer's identification with the disadvantaged has been the subject of some critique. Nigel Oakley (2004: para 6), writing in a *Whitefield Briefing* commented that "...sympathy and working with people", and he is referring, inter alia, to Bonhoeffer's well-documented experience of working with African-Americans in Harlem, New York, "is not the same as identification with them." What Oakley looks for in this critique is a repudiation by Bonhoeffer of his upbringing. He refers to the letter that Bonhoeffer wrote to his great-nephew and godson 'Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of Dietrich Rüdiger Bethge'. In this letter Bonhoeffer says "The urban middle-class culture embodied in the home of your mother's parents... will give you, even before you are aware of it, a way of thinking and acting which you can never lose without being untrue to yourself" (Bonhoeffer, 1977: 294-295). Oakley (2004: paragraph 8) suggests in his critique that this was an autocratic attitude, an attitude in which 'duty was owed by the powerful to the powerless – not a duty to enfranchise the oppressed.' This critique does not engage with the fullness of the Bonhoeffer oeuvre. In this very same letter to Dietrich Bethge, Bonhoeffer says "It will not be difficult for us to renounce our privileges, recognizing the justice of history. We may have to face events and changes that take no account of our wishes and rights" (Bonhoeffer, 1953: page numbers not supplied in this online version.)

produced its own optics. Did they, these fighters against Hitler's tyranny, most of whom were drawn from the ranks of the socially advantaged, understand the world from the perspective of those who were outcasts, oppressed and marginalised? Did they, as Daniel Adams (2015:6) asked in his masters' thesis on the prison writings of Bonhoeffer, have the capacity to view the world from 'the perspective of the victims of world history'?

Bonhoeffer's question has deep relevance for the situation in which we find ourselves today. It has relevance as we struggle to come to terms with the bombing of Aleppo, the shooting of African-American men in the alley-ways of Charlotte, North Carolina, the drowning of thousands of desperate people seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea, and, of course, here in our own backyard, the struggle of students for the right to be educated, and, most pertinently for our discussion, the remorseless growth in the number of unemployed and impoverished. The relevance is heightened, moreover, by the current anger being demonstrated by young South Africans on our university campuses. They are saying that we, their parents, have sold them out. Delivering the keynote address at the 15th Ruth First Lecture at Wits University Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2016) in August this year, remarked that the anti-apartheid generation had become afraid of the future. She spoke of the idea of revolution which was running through the thoughts and language of the student protest which is currently underway. "Revolution" she said,

warrants attention in particular because it is starkly contrasted by the quick dismissal of talk of revolution by an older generation of anti-apartheid activists. I have heard them say over and over again, 'we are not in a time of revolution', as they shake their heads knowingly. Or they say, with certainty, 'you cannot justify such action because we are far from the conditions of revolution', 'it's not the time for this or that because we are already in a democracy',... Or perhaps most earnestly, they say 'there is no *need* (emphasis in the original) for revolutionary action because the laws and institutions of post-apartheid are sufficient'.

Quite simply – and this is what I wish to discuss tonight in relation to the question of rage and violence – *we are living in different times*. Or at least, our time is disjointed, out of sync, plagued by a generational fault line that scrambles historicity. The spectre of revolution, of radical change, is in young people's minds and politics, and it is almost nowhere in the politics of the anti-apartheid generation.

(Naidoo, 2016: paragraphs 2-5)

Of what use are we in these desperate times? Of what use are we when the conclusion to which Naidoo, speaking for young people, comes is that little of what the anti-apartheid generation has done and is doing is of any value.² Rejecting this generation, she says that, "(t)here has to be a shutdown in whatever form, for the future to be called" (ibid).³

² See also, interestingly, the perceptive comments of Milisuthando Bongela (2016), a strong supporter of the students who, in talking from her position as a working person, struggles over what she should be doing: "A lot of us feel frustrated when watching these events unfold from a distance... the frustration emerging from helplessness and powerlessness. 'What do we do?' This is a question I've been hearing a lot in the newsroom and in conversations with my friends."

³ The issues in the student protest are first and foremost about the access of the poor to higher education and the character of the university, but they are also directly about the strategies of social change. In the current

Russel Botman was acutely aware of the possibility of this moment of shutdown in the new South Africa. He saw, and I will talk to this at greater length later, how easily ascent into privilege could precipitate a breakdown of trust between those who were no longer disadvantaged and those who remained in struggle. It was this anxiety about the usefulness of the struggle generation that brought him, composing the Afterword to the papers collected at a conference on Bonhoeffer in South Africa in 1997, to speak deliberately to John de Gruchy's reiteration of Bonhoeffer's question – 'are we still of any use?' (Botman 1997). Professor Dirkie Smit (2015), in delivering the first Russel Botman Memorial Lecture in October 2015, recognized this anxiety in Russel's work. The title of his lecture, "Making History for the Coming Generation", spoke to Russel's concern for the world that the older generation was bequeathing to its children (Smit (2015:5-6). He showed how much this concern was stimulated in part by Bonhoeffer. Smit explained that, "perhaps it was th(e) plea by Bonhoeffer – for concrete responsibility, looking for significant contributions and fruitful solutions now, so that the generation to whom the future belongs will be able to live, even if such contributions seem humbling to ourselves" that prompted Russel to urge the Stellenbosch University community to shift its language in thinking about itself from 'success' to 'significance'.

In this talk this evening, I stay with Russel's concern about 'significance' and 'relevance', the word he prefers in many of his addresses. I stay, as a sociologist largely in the space of his thinking about the social and work with the ways in which he analyses the new South Africa to draw out the urgency of 'relevance'. I am not a theologian.⁴ Any deconstruction of Russel's work, however, has to acknowledge the ubiquitous presence of the Christological in his thinking on almost anything. To get to Russel's thinking on 'relevance' - his reply to the question about the use of the older generation and its relationship with the future of young

context differences of opinion around these strategies have been presented as inter-generational in their basic form. I do not find this characterisation of how the debate is playing itself out entirely useful. It obscures other social, psychological and political factors that are at work in the ways individuals and groups come to their historic positions. Critical, as one factor in the mix of causal animators in the situation, and Russel was very aware of this as I try to show in the sermon he gave at the induction of Anne-Marie Cloete-Damons (Botman, 2004a), is the rapid growth of the black middle-class, of which the students are a manifestation, and the complex experience this class goes through in accessing what it believes it is entitled to. In making this observation, I acknowledge, nonetheless, the view that there is an inter-generational dialogue that needs to take place. There are many realities about being young and privileged and young and poor that older people need to better understand. Likewise, there are explanations of the pain that living in apartheid had produced that younger people need to hear too. How these differences have played out elsewhere in the world are useful for South Africans to understand. Noam Chomsky's (2012) *Occupy* is particularly helpful in pulling back from definitive preoccupations with words like revolution and reform. The work of the philosopher Richard Rorty, reflecting on the differences between what he called the old and the new left is also helpful. Charles Marsh (2012), reprising Bonhoeffer's question for the new millennium and quoting Rorty, offers the following observation: "...by the end of the 1964, as the civil rights movement began going 'cosmic' and the rhetorical pyrotechnics of student militancy and Black Power drowned out the less stimulating planning sessions of grassroots organizers, the Left became increasingly Manichaeian in its perceptions. It is the new Left's children one hears in the trendy sobriquets of contemporary culture studies, postmodern theory, and other insular 'discourses' of the guild. Since 1964, the Left has increasingly operated as a 'spectatorial', disgusted, mocking Left rather than a Left that dreams of achieving our country, a fashionably cynical rather than a responsibly hopeful Left."

⁴ My approach to this is that of a sociologist. It is located in the emerging field of cognitive sociology which is concerned with meaning-making processes and their social implications.

people – I begin with a discussion of his ‘Afterword’ in the collection of papers put together for the South African Bonhoeffer Conference. In that ‘Afterword’, written only four years after the coming of democracy to South Africa in 1994, I suggest, is crisply and presciently captured his articulation of the dilemma of usefulness confronting us now almost 25 years into our post-democracy era. I show how he returns to the original Bonhoeffer question and de Gruchy’s repeating of it and amends it to draw out its contextual specificity. It emerges then as ‘Is Bonhoeffer Still of Any Use in South Africa?’ (Botman, 1997:366). In putting the question in this way Russel was doing two things. He was, firstly, asking whether Bonhoeffer remained relevant for South Africa and, secondly, building on that, he was placing the abidingly human and timeless psychological dimensions of Bonhoeffer’s question – our senses of relevance, self-worth, courage and agency – in the immediacy of the South African context. How he framed the answer to these questions in these few pages of this text is crucial. It is this that I use here today in making sense of the significance of the contribution that Russel Botman makes to all of us. This contribution, I suggest here in beginning this talk, subsists in the relationship between *knowing* and *doing*, or, more academically, in the ontological entailments of our epistemologies.

As I attempt this important work of making sense and of interpreting Russel’s significance, I wish to thank Beryl, Russel’s dear wife and partner, for initiating the invitation to me. Her role alongside of Russel as a crutch, confidante and critic is inestimable. She has my deep admiration. I would like to thank too the Faculty of Theology here at Stellenbosch for facilitating and managing the arrangements for this occasion and the Curatoria of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, the Dutch reformed Church and the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology for the support and help they have provided me.⁵ It is a great honour to be here.⁶

Knowing and Obligation

The sense-making opportunity that Russel’s thinking makes possible for us in the theological and higher education communities is deeply provocative. We should be grateful for it. It provides us, we the privileged, with the opportunity to foreground and subject to critical

⁵ I would like to thank too my colleagues in my office at the Human Sciences Research Council, Marizane Rousseau and Sandy Fortuin who have been of great assistance to me in preparing for this talk and to my wife, Lyn, for reading earlier drafts of this critically.

⁶ Russel Botman, simply because of his stature as a public figure, was well-known to me. But I only really came to know him personally from the time that he became the Rector at Stellenbosch. I began to work with him closely in my capacity as a board member and then the Chair of the Cape Higher Education Consortium. In the many opportunities we had to talk we discovered that we had one important experience in our lives in common, we both lived in the historic place of Kliptown, Johannesburg for periods of our lives. Curious about Kliptown is that it can lay claim, with varying degrees of intensity and with some poetic license, to interesting role-players in the contemporary higher education scene. Russel completed his matric there, Professor Yunus Ballim, the current Vice-Chancellor of Sol Plaatje University, was born there, Ms Nasima Badsha, the former Deputy Director-General of Education and currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Cape Higher education Consortium has strong family connections to the area, and I, however one might wish to place me, was also born there. There are others too – some well-known, others less so. I have no atavistic pretensions, but would not wish to minimise the significance of the journey that each of us has travelled in our lives for the subject of our individual and collective relevance in the society in which we find ourselves – the challenge that a place such as Kliptown constituted for our families and the people with whom we grew up to where each of us is now.

scrutiny the lineaments of our material, social, political and cultural advantage. It is about, at one level, the extent of our awareness of our privilege, our ability to manage a sociological meta-positioning of ourselves, to see ourselves, so to speak, as from on high, to recognise ourselves in the larger ecology of being - being in all its multiplicity and difference. It is, as it should be for all bearers of power anywhere, about our capacity for self-awareness and the obligations that come with awareness.

The opportunity for scrutiny is, however, of greater significance than this. This significance begins with an acknowledgement of the existential crisis of the self that our individualising modernity has stimulated almost everywhere, but moves on to an engagement with the multiple implications, beyond the needs of the self, that arise for us as individuals and as groups of people of living with what I call *knowing in this place and time* of South Africa. I have tried to argue elsewhere that South Africa occupies a special place in the world (see Soudien, 2012:5). It is an ontological hotspot. How do you make *knowing*, that which you have cognitively assimilated and internalised, morally and practically consequential in this hotspot? How do you move, in this place, from knowing to the realm of praxis? How do you move from thinking to doing – action, which Russel regularly spoke about. The issue is fundamentally about the ethics of knowing or what Miranda Fricker (2007: 2) has described as the ethics of epistemic conduct. The core of my contribution today is to argue that Russel, as a wide-awake South African, had understood that knowing brought with it obligation. He understood what Denise Ackerman was saying at the South Africa Bonhoeffer conference when she said, “(w)hat can be useful for me as a white woman doing theology in a post-apartheid South Africa at the end of the twentieth century” (Botman, 1997: 367). His understanding went beyond the problematiqués of whiteness, however. It encompassed and posed in both metaphysical and practical ways the question of blackness. It demanded that he confront his own complex privilege in the specific context of South Africa.

What Russel’s privilege was is important to understand. It was greater, in some senses, than that of others around him. It was greater because it was not just material. He did not only have his worldly possessions to defend. He had to account for other advantages and affordances, advantages and affordances, I want argue, that did not come easily to others. Principal amongst these was what has variously in the social science literature of the last hundred years come to be described as *double consciousness* by WEB Du Bois (1990: 8) or *the third space* by the cultural theorist Homi Bhabha (1994: 50), himself drawing on Frantz Fanon. Bhabha spoke of this *third space* as a space in which multiplicity of identity ‘cannot be contained within the analogical sign of resemblance’ (ibid). Russel had the capacity to see into and make sense of this third space. He saw others, but he particularly saw himself with all his historic complexity in it – most obviously as a victim and a victor but also, to borrow Elleke Boehmer’s (2008:5) description of Mr Mandela as a shape-shifter, as one who could play many different roles simultaneously. It was a way of seeing, as Miranda Fricker (2007:71) put it, in moral colour. This moral colour was his deep knowing about the pain of human subjection – his own subjection as an historically and racially inscribed black person – and the indignities it generated and, extraordinarily, the pain of others. It was also, moreover, a profound awareness of the extraordinary experience he was going through,

right up to the time of his death, of holding power and being able to see and understand what was happening to himself, he as the head of an institution of privilege with the agencies that came with privilege. Powerfully, he could see all of this. He *knew*. He was able to reflect on his own ascent from the grip of apartheid into a position of great privilege and power. What obligations did knowing all of this place on him? What kind of leadership and what kind of obligation did this knowing require of him?

In confronting this reality Russel Botman had intuited the enormity of the paradox of our modernity - we know and, yet, actually *do not know*. We sit in the midst of the most extraordinary knowledge revolution with respect to our physical world that human civilisation has experienced in the last 7,000 years of our history as people living together in conscious community. And yet we demonstrate, in the ways we choose to manage ourselves and the larger environment over which we have the power of choice, little understanding, or if not little understanding then certainly reckless disregard of the significance of what we know. With all our knowledge we find ourselves beset, on so many fronts, with challenge and risk. On the personal front there is challenge and personal risk in our lifestyle choices, inter-personal risk in the ways we continue to provoke hatred and fear in our dealings with each other as human beings, risk in our failure to listen to the cries for help around us. We are, on the one hand, overwhelmed with the conceit of our superiority, and on the other, incapacitated by our sense of inferiority. Hubris and servility. There is also, on the global front, utter disdain for the larger world in which we live, a heedlessness with which we are managing our planet – wanton greed imperilling our capacity to guarantee a future for our children, an atmosphere overloaded with carbon emissions, polluted oceans and rivers, the production of inappropriate food. In relation to these challenges and risks, the question has to be posed – do we really know?

The contributions of Fricker are useful here. She effectively takes a lament such as that of Ackerman and asks that it comes to an understanding of itself, of what went wrong, or what the British philosopher Mills (2015:58) calls our non-ideal history – the history of what he describes as the illicitly expanded rights and opportunities held by privileged people. What Fricker is asking is that we come to a sense of the causal factors in Mills' non-ideal history. She says 'if one is interested in justice, then it is helpful to look first at forms of injustice; if one is interested in equality... look first at forms of inequality' (Fricker, 2015:73). The aspect of inequality as described by Fricker that is most helpful and relevant for our discussion is, as she describes it, what unequal people or individuals bring to their interrelationship. Fricker, working with Martha Nussbaum's list of capabilities, documents all the human functioning capabilities that are at issue in realising equality between people. On that list of capacities, she says, is the capacity for 'practical reasoning'. Valuable as this is, she says, it does not accord any weight to what she calls

rational functioning in what is surely the most basic and truly human mode of theoretical reason: our functioning as contributors to shared information and understanding. One of our most basic needs is to use our reason in order to discern the everyday facts and social meanings that condition, constrain, and make sense of our shared lives. Indeed many other functionings depend upon it. (Fricker, 2015:75)

This is essentially what a colleague of Fricker, Putnam (2015), was referring to when he was talking about intelligibility – understanding between people. Inequality will continue to be fundamental when mutual intelligibility is absent in our relationships with each other. It is absent, as Fricker says, in big and small ways. How does one create the conditions for marginalised people to make their interests intelligible?

It was the apparent absence of this intelligibility and its implications for *being* – the kinds of ontologies we could imagine for ourselves - that troubled Russel. Where many interpretations of Bonhoeffer focused on his epistemological discomfort – how could one come to know from the perspective of the victims of history - Russel took from it too the question's sheer viscosity. The issue, as he read Bonhoeffer, was both epistemological and ontological. It reached into the depths of his being. He responded, as a consequence, in the affirmative to both the question of Bonhoeffer's use in South Africa and the original question posed by Bonhoeffer himself. Bonhoeffer remained of use. He remained intensely moved by what Bonhoeffer had said about Christian knowing, but it was what Bonhoeffer's explanation of Christian *being* which struck him in profound ways:

If we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ's large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour. The Christian is called to sympathy and action, not in the first place by his own sufferings, but by the sufferings of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered. (Bonhoeffer, 1977)

How to show real sympathy, large-heartedness – understanding - was the great anxiety that drove Russel in his work. He agreed with Bonhoeffer that what was needed in the challenging times in which he found himself were "...not geniuses, or cynics, or misanthropes, or clever tacticians, but plain, honest, straightforward men (sic)" (Botman, 1997:371). But he went further. Understanding required more. How did one make then the connections between the epistemological and the ontological? The point about Bonhoeffer's explanation of understanding one's Christianness was that it was not something that simply sat in one's head. It involved one personally. It was about oneself and the choices one made in life. It was about one's own history, about oneself as a participant in that history, a subject with choice – a perpetrator, a bystander or a victim. And so he would concur with Bonhoeffer's implicit call to action. His Christian faith compelled him to remain committed to the building of a new social order. But he took from this the urgent necessity to be contextual and to be utterly practical. He had to act. How he acted, however, was by no means self-evident. It was out of this that he came to qualify his reply with his own question: "Of use, yes", he said, "but to whom?"

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'Useful yes, but to whom' brings together the whole complex of Russel's thought, choices and decisions and actions in the last twenty years of his life. 'Useful yes, but to whom' does not provide the full explication of his 'Pedagogy of Hope' philosophy, but within it was portended the major elements that came to give *Hope* and the work that Russel set out to

do at Stellenbosch its intellectual substance. 'Useful yes, but to whom', contained within it, on the one hand, the religious, ideological and moral point of awareness he had arrived at in his life, and, on the other, the political analysis he had developed of his social context. Together, these defined for him his life of personal obligation as a human subject. Of what use would he, H. Russel Botman, be? The religious, ideological and moral position, came straight from Bonhoeffer. It was about what it meant to live a life in the image of Christ. In terms of this there was no question about being of use. He was compelled to think of himself as a useful person. His socio-political analysis was somewhat different. The accumulated experience of having grown up as an oppressed person, his political conscientisation at university, and, then, of being in the company of many who reminded him on a daily basis of the on-going struggles of the poor, in the context of his commitment to Christianity, required that his usefulness should be aimed at the outcast. John Klaasen, the young student at the South Africa Bonhoeffer conference had made the point at the conference that post-apartheid South Africa had not been successful in its attempts at integrating young people into the mainstream of society. It was the urgency of this, the political implications of being black in the historical sense and the difficulties of overturning this history which loomed large in his political analysis. Put together, this religio-ethical sensibility and his political awareness, constituted for Russel what he described as his theological anthropology (Botman, 1994:1) – his philosophy of what it meant to be a human being constructed in the image of God in this time and place. It presented him, in the choices he made and in the positions he took, as a critical Bonhoeffer scholar. He would remain in the Bonhoeffer tradition but would rearticulate it to make it relevant to his own time and space. He was indigenising it.

In his Afterword in the South African Bonhoeffer conference readings Russel would say, (t)here are so many voices demanding to be recognized, demanding our usefulness. (But) (t)o whom ought we to be of use? I ask this question as a black person who has discovered that the demands placed on black people in our post-apartheid society have become increasingly strenuous and varied. Government expects our usefulness, civil society requires our usefulness, and employers demand our usefulnessThe result is that we see less of these people in the struggles of the communities crying out from below... (Botman, 1997: 371).

His socio-political analysis made clear to him, in the confusion of obligations thrown up by the post-apartheid order, that as a 'black' person he continued to have a special responsibility in society to the cries from below. He was acutely aware of how responsibility had come to be interpreted in politics and business, and how it was being deployed away from where it was most urgently required. His question made clear that he thought that it was being placed, mistakenly, at the disposal of the state or one or other cause which presumed to be working in the interests of the people. However, as a knowing person who had gone through the hard debates of the black consciousness movement in the 1970s and the 1980s, he was aware that this was not the case. He was aware of how this new post-apartheid order had come to produce a social landscape in which some of apartheid's problematics had been resolved and some reproduced. He was aware too, this post-colonial

and post-apartheid subject with the proverbial *third eye*, that the new order had, critically so, generated completely new sets of social and moral problematics.

In these problematics poverty and inequality were uppermost in his thinking. Talking at a Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk Konferensie on Poverty and Education in 2011 he said that “poverty is an issue that is close to my heart, and it is also a major focus at my institution. In fact, eradicating poverty is one of the five key themes of Stellenbosch University’s HOPE project” (Botman, 2011: 1). He described at this conference the relationship between poverty and education and drew attention to the issues raised by his colleagues such as Servaas van der Berg, which emphasized the absence of leadership in poor schools, the low levels of accountability and motivation amongst teachers. But to place the emphasis only there, he argued, was inadequate: “Maar om in ons armoedebekamping net op onderwys to fokus is te eenvoudig, te instrumenteel.” Quoting his Dean of Education, Yusef Waghid, he argued that “’n Meer sistemiese benadering is nodig wat na ’n hele rits sosio-ekonomiese oorsake van armoede kyk” (Botman, 2011:5). He then proceeded to speak of the challenges in this socio-economic environment including the need for developing new cultures of reading and learning in both the home and the school, and of the privileged giving of their facilities and time.

But he was careful not to patronise the poor. The poor, he argued, drawing on Paulo Freire, had to ‘free themselves’. How they did this, however, involved the use of people such as himself who were required to facilitate the availability of *material hope*, the resources which the poor needed to transform their reality; *Socratic hope* which called for both educators and students to ‘scrutinise their lives and actions within an unjust society, however painful such a process may be’; and audacious hope which demanded “of educators to show solidarity with the pain of their students, many of whom may be suffering the effects of ‘social toxins’, such as poverty, discrimination and violence” (Botman, 2011:5-6).

Solidarity with the Pain: Knowing and Its Ontological Obligations

What he saw in this rearranged post-apartheid time and space, listening to the cry from below and formulating for himself a way of responding is worth pausing over. It provides, I want to suggest, some insight into the dilemmas he was working through and the approach he would take in his life. At the heart of these dilemmas was the complexity of the new socio-political order. It had become possible for people such as himself to be absorbed into the ranks of the privileged. It had not done so for the majority of the country’s young black people. In the process it had effectively rearranged the social landscape and rendered complex the old inherited binaries of black and white. Class had come to reconfigure the brutalities of colour. Russel Botman had a deep awareness of his own positionality in this dynamic. He was now a person of privilege. But it was not ordinary privilege. The history of oppression, of being black, remained a deep part of his consciousness. But so was his awareness of the new social space he and others had entered. So there it was – in front of him - old and new contradiction, side by side. This capacity to read helped him to locate himself, to locate his own privilege, his own privilege as a black person in the time after

apartheid. But he could not take his privilege for granted. It was this conundrum that lay behind his question, 'useful yes, but for whom?': "... we see less of these people in the struggles of the communities crying out from below." It was what his audacious hope was all about. He and Stellenbosch had to show that they understood the pain of the poor.

Where do we see this grappling with the pain of those who remained *othered* in the new social order in Russel's work? We see this awareness in the decisions he would make as an academic, as a scholar and as a minister. He focused his teaching at UWC around poverty and inequality. In 1996 he developed a master's course entitled *Christianity and Society* when he still taught at the University of the Western Cape which looked at the relationship between the church and the poor. He wrote about it in the many articles and book chapter contributions he made. He preached about it regularly. A particularly important entry in his archive are his hand-written notes for the sermon he gave on the occasion of the induction of Anne-Marie Cloete-Damons at the beginning of February 2004 in Elsies River (Botman 2004a). He had already become the Vice-Rector at Stellenbosch. In this sermon which he based on the book of Nehemiah and the prophet's outrage at the destructive elites of Israel, one sees how he deconstructs and analyses the role of the minister in the church and of privileged people such as himself. The sermon is, even in its point form, an early manifesto of conscience for the post-apartheid black self of privilege. It began with the line, 'Die Prediker = die Onderwyser'. He or she, he said, had the job to interpret times in relation to the changes that the world was undergoing. Those changes, for him, were fundamentally about 'Ekonomiese en sosiale situasie'. 'Die prediker', he said, was required to make sense of these situations. 'Die Prediker', he said 'moet (p)raat met mense wat skielik 'n nuwe wereld van die finansiële mark beleef' (emphases in the original).

What sense did he make of the situation in front of him? He saw how the world of South Africa had changed. He spoke of the rise of the new middle class and the advantages that were accruing to them. But he saw too the problem of the poor. He had begun to argue in 2004 already in a paper he wrote entitled 'Human Dignity and Economic Globalization: A Covenantal Eco-Theological Struggle for Being', that South Africa had "won (its) democracy at a time of rapid globalization.... (There) was a conflict between the restoration of human dignity and the agency of economic globalization... respect for human rights.... (is)... often at odds with respect for the bottom line" (Botman, 2004b:5). The problem, he said, was that 'Die koek raak nie gou genoeg groter nie!! Tog moet transformasie plaasvind. Die ballinge kan nie arm bly nie'. He made the wry observation that 'where there is money will come problems with taxation!' He was deeply troubled by this. How could this situation be approached? It was through his theological anthropology that he came, I would like to suggest, to a sense of what a personal manifesto for himself would be. He had before him the reality in which the poor found themselves, particularly their voicelessness. 'Wat sé die ondergeskikte?' he asked? But it was the responsibility that came with being privileged which was of immediate concern to him. Did the privileged understand the poor? And, more directly, did the privileged understand themselves and their obligation? He had made the point early on in his career that self-understanding was a deep part of the apartheid problem. He gave a talk in 1984 in which he described the alienation of white privilege from its own history:

Verdedigers van die afsonderlikheidsideologie is stelselmatig vervreem van sowel hulle eie geskiedenis... en veral! – in en deur die kerk bepleit is, asook van die ‘ander kant’ se belewenis van hierdie lewensbeskouing. Oor die psigologies en sosiale faktore en prosesses wat hierdie sort vervreemding-tot-veronstkundig moontlik gemaak het en steeds moontlik maak, kan nie hier gehandel word nie. Die resultaat is egter dat bevooroordeelde ondersteuners van apartheid vandag nog volkome on- of a-histories daaroor dink. (Botman, 1984)

How could he, newly privileged in the post-apartheid forget his own learning? And so, ‘Wat sê die oorsieners?’, *oorsieners* such as himself, he asked. His analysis of the newly privileged was that they were being incorporated into the mainstream of the economy. He saw and was sensitive to their anxieties. He saw their fear of the situation in which the cake was not growing fast enough - fear of losing the gains that they had made. But Russel Botman was troubled by the job that remained undone: The scale of the problems in the country were that this new middle-class, ‘oorsieners’ such as himself, were, in their fear for themselves, becoming ‘weerloos’: ‘Die mense wat werk vir verandering raak moedeloos’.

Summing his sermon up Russel Botman noted the two reactions that were beginning to take shape in society. The first was that ‘alles (was) tevergeefs’ – the ‘are we still of any use?’ despair. The second was productive outrage. It was with the second that he himself wished to be associated with. Describing this outrage he referred to the book of Nehemiah Chapter 9, verses 7 to 9, which, in closing with the lines, “And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea”, called for those who could, to heed the cries of the poor.⁷ He had started the sermon with Nehemiah Chapter 5 as his point of departure. The elites of Israel were reconstructing the hierarchies they had thought they had left behind in Egypt. As Marcus Borg (2001:127) said, ‘Egypt had been established in Israel’.

Powerful in this reading from Nehemiah are verses 4 to 6 which go as follows:

4. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the King’s tribute, *and that upon* our lands and vineyards.
5. Yet now our flesh *is* as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and daughters to be servants, and *some* of our daughters are brought into bondage already; neither *is it* in our power *to redeem them*; for other men have our lands and vineyards.
6. And I was very *angry* when I heard their cry and these words. (Nehemiah, 5, v 4-6, KJV.)

This provided for him the context of his own political choice. At his installation as rector he would express his outrage in the most productive way he could. He analysed and deconstructed what was happening in the country and would again and again speak of what not only he but the whole university community needed to do. He referred to the desperation of the poor and their sense of despair, “Is it in our power to redeem them?” He

⁷ I do not know which version of the Bible Botman was using. That it was an Afrikaans version is very probable. This version from which I quote is a King James Version printed by Samuel Bagster in the 1940s.

would repeatedly say in this inaugural talk what he viewed his obligation to be: “I am not here simply to do a job”, he said, “I am here to answer a calling, because, I do not really belong to myself. My highest loyalty is to the one who called me” (Botman, 2007:7). He who called him, he explained, was on the side of the poor (Botman, 1984:4). He saw how the ‘upward’ movement of black leadership had left the church and the people for ‘parliament, business, consultations, foundations and lucrative institutions’ (Botman, 2007:3720).⁸ His own calling required him to confront the fact that what the globalized South Africa urgently required was suspicion of privilege. Dignity, Equality and Freedom were paramount. Dignity, Equality and Freedom he said, quoting Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson delivering the Bram Fischer lecture in 2000, “will be achieved only when the socioeconomic conditions are transformed to make this possible” (Botman, 2004:5). The country, Russel said,

must also seek a deepening of the transformation so that dignity is restored to those who struggle to make a living in the remotest village of our country. It points to the need for a deepening of equality so that the daughter of the farm worker would have the same opportunity to success as the son of the farmer. Deep transformation constitutes the need for transformation at the anthropological level. Deep transformation is restoration at the level of dignity.

How did he mean to make himself and his institution speak to *deep transformation*? It was in his insistence on providing to those previously excluded what can be termed *access with dignity*.

‘After Twenty-three Years’: Reckoning our Relevance

Russel would say in a talk he gave at a colloquium on institutional culture at the University in 2008 that “the universities of today are vastly different from the ones that we ha(d) known fifteen years ago. Different in the manner that they pursue their core functions; different in the composition of their students and staff; they are now different places where people with different backgrounds, cultures and world views come together to study and work together” (Botman, 2008: 2). He would acknowledge the changes at Stellenbosch itself. Against this, how would he have reacted had he seen the *Open Stellenbosch* facebook page today, twenty-three years after the arrival of democracy? What would he have made of the extraordinary exchange between the participants on this page? A depressing moment strikes one on the site when *Open Stellenbosch* announces its intentions of having a General Meeting on “the way Forward” on Monday April 11th 2016. The first response from a participant is devastating. It says: “I think the way forward is the way out the door. It’s just more logical” (<https://www.facebook.com/openstellenbosch>).

⁸ A poignant commentary he makes on an undated note he was using for a sermon goes as follows: Ons Markus teks.... Daar is baie mense i/d geskiedenis wat hieroor ernstig geraak het (he is referring to poverty) en

1. Alles uitgedeel what hulle gehad het
2. Liggame op die brandstapels laat uitbrand.

Hierin het ek my dissipelskap bewys. Dis verkeerd!!

1 Kor 13:3 En al sou ek al my goed uitdeel, en al sou ek my liggaam oorgee om verbrand to word, en ek het nie die liefde nie dan sou dit my niks baat nie.

“The way forward is the way out the door” - Russel would have been extremely angry. He would have been angered by the insensitivity, the incapacity to hear the pain. But he was not naïve. For the son of the farmer to understand the life of the daughter of the farm worker would not be easy. Twenty-three years of democracy could not be expected by fiat and diktat to undo more than 350 years of sedimented inequality. He wished for the reconciliation of these sons and daughters of the country and would take the message of reconciliation that he had played such a large role in developing in the Dutch Reformed community into his pedagogy of hope at Stellenbosch. But he was not naïve. Russel was aware of the difficulties that some of his students experienced in coming into the University. He commented at this same Institutional Culture colloquium in 2008 that “(o)ver the last few years we have increasingly heard voices of disillusionment from these new enrollments (people of colour) about the alienation that they experience on a daily basis...” (Botman, 2008:3). In this speech he anticipated the cry from the Open Stellenbosch movement and gave notice of the University’s intentions to begin a process of Courageous Conversations. Underpinning these conversations was the Pedagogy of Hope.

When I was appointed Rector... I dedicated my term to the realisation of this commitment to future generations. I proposed the development of a critical pedagogy...in connection with Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Hope*. His contributions are linked to the idea that education should help to transform the world, especially by empowering people to become agents of change themselves. It is a critical pedagogy.... It seeks to transform broken realities.... (it) is an opportunity to unveil the hope that we have for future generations. It is hope that seeks action and leads to the transformation of the world. (Botman 2010a:2)

He was under no illusion about the difficulty of realising the fruits of Hope. He said at the Colloquium that “it is one thing to walk through an open door, it is a different matter altogether once you’re in to discover an alien world that threatens the very reason for your presence...” (Botman, 2008:8).

How would this be changed? It was through education with relevance. Relevant was a word Russel used a great deal in his explanation of what his *Pedagogy of Hope* was all about. He gave countless talks on the Pedagogy of Hope after his inauguration. By 2010, three years into his first term as Rector and after the University had formally adopted the HOPE project, he would lose no opportunity to explain what he meant. He would talk to the subject of Hope on both the international stage and at every occasion which arose inside of the University itself. At a talk he gave at the World Innovation Summit for Education at Doha, Qatar in December of 2010, he told his audience that

The demand in our transformation was for educational institutions to translate their relevance in society into the idea of how science can change society to create a better context and a better world. Clearly this has universal application, but in distressed societies such as ours, educational institutions face not only an educational obligation but also a moral obligation. It is from this morality that values emerge and the debate of values is driven in all our institutions. (Botman, 2010a:1)

Relevance would take its foundation from radical inclusivity. Inclusivity began, he would explain repeatedly, with ensuring that the University was representative: "This would take the form of building a staff and student core that was demographically more willing to welcome others into the institution.... It would be a community more representative of the South African society" (Botman, 2010a:2). But, there was, he said, also "the other question. How can we secure that we continue to serve our next generation? ...We are at a point now where there is broad consensus... that the University is no longer the preserve of any specific group or language group...." (ibid). This was an important first step. It would break the automatic link between privilege inside the University with privilege outside of it. The University would no longer be an automatic rite of passage for the reproduction of the politically and economically dominant. The next step would be more difficult. He quoted Professor Anton van Niekerk of his philosophy department who had, in turn, quoted the other van Niekerk, Professor Marlene, of the Afrikaans and Nederlands department. She said "die samelewing (is) 'n ossewa wat stadig beweeg en nie vining gedraai kan word nie" (Botman, 2010b:2). He continued to refer to the philosopher van Niekerk who said, "As dit die geval is dan kan die universiteit beskou word nie as die drywer wat die sweep klap nie, maar as die touleier wat die weg wys" (Botman, 2010b:2-3). The metaphor of die 'touleier' is in Russel's cosmology rich in its possibilities. I will return to it in a moment. It is important first, however, to complete the argument which Russel was building on in the van Niekerks' thinking. This argument bore on and underpinned the entire value edifice that he would build to account for his usefulness. Central to this argument was commitment to the truth. It was not the truth for truth's own sake. It was not an abstract value. It was the truth for the sake of the use and the value that it made available to the world. He went on to say, "'n Baie belangrike onderskeid wat Anton tref, is tussen diensbaarheid en dienstigheid. Daar is niks verkeerd daarmee om ons navorsing en onderrig ten behoeve van die samelewing aan te wend nie, maar weens ons verbintenis tot die wetenskap lê ons lojaliteit by die waarheid, al is dit nie wat die owerheid wil hoor nie" (ibid). Here he was urging the university to move beyond form to substance. He was asking it to be true to its founding mission. "In the learning and teaching context", he went on to say,

the way to exploit this potential is to return to our very academic foundations – by stimulating debate, like Socrates did more than 2000 years ago. It was Socrates who famously said that 'the unexamined life is not worth living.' Socratic hope, ... asks of both educators and students to scrutinise their 'lives and actions within an unjust society', however painful such a process may be" (ibid).

Old-fashioned wisdom as this was, it was rooted in his capacity to see. He was re-authorising this wisdom to retain its relevance for the time and space in which he found himself - a space of danger but also of bounteous possibility. The road ahead was still long. Courage was needed. But it was knowing the truth that was more important. A university was a university only in name if it did not put its science behind the search for truth. "There is still injustice in our society", he said, "even though we are in a post-oppression stage. Contributing to the public good is especially important in our situation. What is required is a common learning process on both sides of the former divide.... 'n kritiese pedagogie bied hoop deur die waarheid te soek en die ware uitdagings wat ons in die gesig staar te

konfronteer, nie te ontduik nie” (ibid). It was from confronting the danger and learning the truths inside it that hope came. This was a different kind of hope. No romance. No Fantasy. It was hope that was born in truth. It would be difficult. About that he had no illusions. But it also contained possibility. The possibility of personal and social enrichment. Of freedom and dignity. And he would be its *touleier*. He would lead into and through the dangers – dangers that he could see and dangers that he urged others around him to look out for too. He would be of use. But so too was it the responsibility of everybody else who could see. Therein lay possibility as yet unimagined.

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