


# Jurie le Roux: Master of many academic trades

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In this article, Jurie Hendrik le Roux's contribution to the theological endeavour is explored. His wide interdisciplinary interest that bears fruit in various fields of his work proved (at least in his case) that the adage 'Jack of all trades and master of none' is invalid. His research in sociology, Church history and philosophy will be discussed in so far as it contributed to his main interest, Old Testament Studies. In what follows, I will therefore make some remarks on Le Roux's work on sociology, Church history, ancient Israelite historiography, research history and also on exegetical methodology, Pentateuchal studies, philosophy and hermeneutics. My method will be to indicate the links between these disciplines as facets of one huge theological endeavour.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article gives an overview of the theological contribution of the Old Testament scholar Jurie le Roux. Over many years, his work in the field of Old Testament Studies stretched into many other fields – as indicated in the article – such as sociology, Church history and philosophy.

**Keywords:** J.H. le Roux; Pro Pent; History; Sociology; Academy.

## Introduction

I need not give a *laudatio* on how great a friend Jurie le Roux is of mine. Everybody could observe that. However, what is of importance is that our friendship is not based on agreement we have on every topic we discuss, or even our religious, philosophical and political world views. On love and sex we do agree, but I will not discuss this here except of referring the interested reader to his article 'Die lyf se troos' [The body as comfort], written in 2006 when he was 62 years of age, approximately the same as my age writing now (cf. Le Roux 2006).<sup>1</sup> To the contrary, our friendship exists despite our disagreement on so many issues. One may even go further, it exists *because* we disagree on so many things. That is why it is so special. I must also say that the friendship is to a large extent made possible by Jurie's generosity, his endless patience with me and his ability to apply the rule of *audi alteram partem*. In two words that will recur below: his empathetic understanding.<sup>2</sup>

I am not the first one to employ this genre of writing about Jurie le Roux, and I won't be the last (e.g. Lombaard in this volume). Excellent contributions have already been written about him. In fact, I do not think any other South African Old Testament scholar has elicited so much response in his own lifetime. Dirk Human's contribution contains much biographical information (therefore not much of this in this contribution) and reports on Jurie's academic diversity. Bosman (2013) and Jonker (2013) discussed his passion for a history and a historical approach. Dirk Human's contribution (2006), as well as Lombaard (2006; cf. Lombaard 2019) discussed his views on exegesis, texts and hermeneutics as counterpoint to the (at that stage) dominant University of Pretoria school (note, not Unisa) of structuralism or the synchronic approach. Veldsman (2013) critically dialogued with Le Roux on his notion of in-feeling or empathetic understanding. In a to my mind extraordinary and profound article, Jaco Gericke (2013) constructs Le Roux's philosophy of religion, with a profound conclusion (see below).

So what is there left for me to do? Exploring one aspect of his work could have been a possibility. However, I decided to attempt to indicate that his wide interdisciplinary interest is a necessary consequence of his approach to theology and it bears fruit in his study of the Old Testament. At least in his case, the adage 'Jack of all trades and master of none' is invalid. For him, having a wide interest in itself, besides that it prevents boredom, has a heuristic value. At least in some cases, the often well-meant academic practice to specialise on one topic is uncalled for. In what follows, I will make some remarks on Le Roux's work on sociology, Church history, historiography,

1. For those who are interested in comparison: In 2008, the author wrote an article on sex and eros (Scheffler 2008) without having read or even being aware of Le Roux's article.

2. His friendship also reminds me of an adage expressed by Jürgen Moltmann at a meeting during his visit to South Africa in 1978: 'Besides the obligation for Christian brotherhood there exists fortunately also the privilege of Christian friendship'.

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research history, exegetical methodology, Pentateuchal studies, philosophy and hermeneutics. My approach will be to indicate the links between these disciplines as facets of one huge theological endeavour. In the process, I will, as far as possible and by means of not too long quotations, give Le Roux himself the word.

## Sociology and the influence of religious ideas on society

Shortly after his basic theological training, Le Roux completed an honours degree in sociology, which as such provided him a broad in-depth introduction to the subject. His knowledge of sociology and its value can therefore not be confined to his MA dissertation on Max Weber (Le Roux 1971). However, for the explorer of Le Roux's thought, this is the main document that we have (see also Le Roux 1985a).

In the dissertation, Le Roux researched the question whether Calvinism is responsible for the spirit of Capitalism. According to Weber, the doctrine of election is central to Calvinism, with the result that Calvinist believers, in order to ensure their own election by God, endeavour to be economically successful, the latter being a sign that God blessed them and elected them. Many Calvinists won't find themselves in the view of Weber, and one should keep in mind that Weber himself did not come from a Calvinist tradition. In his dissertation, Le Roux criticises – may be as an impetuous 26-year-old youngster – Weber's thesis. Said Calvinist Le Roux (1971, my translation):

In our criticism, we emphasise the fact that there were indeed certain countries which were economic strongholds without any influence of the Calvinists. Before there was anything like Calvinism the spirit of Calvinism already existed. ... Max Weber really did not understand Calvinism. Certainty of our salvation is surely not inspired by greater economic activity but through the Holy Spirit. The influence of the doctrine of predestination on the behaviour of man is not economic activity, but that man is full of joy and assurance in the knowledge that he is one of the elect. It is more the sovereignty of God that is the central dogma of Calvinism. (p. 107)

Although Le Roux criticised Weber, and it can be a matter of debate whether his criticism holds water, the importance for Le Roux is that Weber indicated that from a sociological viewpoint religious and philosophical ideas can shape a society (cf. also Le Roux 2004b). For this very reason, sociology is of utmost importance for the study of the Old Testament which expresses religious ideas embedded in a contingent society. This important insight remained with Le Roux in his lifelong endeavour of interpreting the Old Testament. In a 1985 article with the specific title 'Some remarks on sociology and ancient Israel', Le Roux (1985a) concluded:

If a sociological study is to be undertaken, a thorough knowledge of the theories, concepts, methods, etc. of this subject is required (e.g. micro- or macrosociology, functionalism or conflict theory – EHS). Such knowledge should not only provide an important

theoretical framework to understand the life and thought of ancient Israel, but it should also shape our research of the Old Testament. Sociological questions are thus not raised at the end of the study, but influence the research strategy right from the outset. (p. 12)

## Church history and training as historiographer

After completing his master's degree in sociology, Le Roux did not regard himself as good enough to study Old Testament under A.H. van Zyl. He enrolled in 1970 for Church history under Jan Stoop, and on the latter's insistence, he studied Early Church history (Stoop's special interest). However, at the same time he was appointed as a lecturer in Old Testament at Unisa. According to Le Roux, locally Stoop had the greatest influence on his life. He admired Stoop's focus on original textual study. The following quotation on Stoop not only shows that Le Roux can give credit where credit is due but also reveals the proper training that he received from Stoop which shaped him as a true historian (Le Roux 1985b):

For 5–6 years, he [Stoop] introduced me to the wonder world of the Early Church, he made the wonderful early centuries relevant to me, he let me realise the necessity of the *patres* for today's theology. No theology can do without it. ...The study of the early Church implies the endless reading of original (Latin) texts. An image of Stoop which I cherish even now is his thorough textual study. Even now I see him working in an almost typical posture behind his desk ... First a thorough study of the source (in Latin but sometimes also Greek) is made in different textual editions. Then, the editions are compared and a decision is made on the 'best' text. Sometimes, he created his own text to work with. Then, a translation is made, followed by the forming of an own independent interpretation, which is then compared to other ancient and modern authors. Only after this, an article would be written. (n.p.)

Le Roux (1977) followed this method when he wrote his dissertation on the views of Gaudentius of Brixia (to be dated in the late 4th century) on the Passover. It consists of an analysis of the 10 Passover sermons of Gaudentius delivered during the Passover week to catechumens. The sermons deal with the salvation implied by Passover, baptism and its consequences, and the Passover lamb and the Eucharist. The latter entails a most interesting and delightful allegorical exposition of Exodus 12<sup>3</sup> as applied to Christ as the lamb slaughtered for the sins of humankind. Le Roux employs here the method of empathetic understanding. He does not expose the typological and allegorical method of Gaudentius as being flawed, which would have been easy. He also compares Gaudentius's views with that of Abrosius,

3. Exodus 12:1–13:6 deals with the institution of the Passover. According to the notes in the Catholic Truth Society Bible 2007:95, Chapter 12 '... in fact give instructions for the annual celebration of two originally separate festivals. (1) A nomadic festival at the first full moon of spring as the move to summer pastures began, the sacrifice of one animal to turn away divine jealousy from the flock. The blooded doorposts indicate to the passing angel that this has been done. This festival was used to communicate the great trek to new pastures in Canaan. It had originally been a family festival and came to be a public celebration only at the reforms of Josiah, 2 Kings 23:22. (2) An agricultural festival about the same time of the year, at the start of the barley harvest (possible only when Israel had settled in Canaan), a fresh start was signified by clearing out all old leaven.'

Augustine, Cyrill of Jerusalem, Hyppolytus, Irenaus and others. As such, the dissertation (unfortunately only accessible in Afrikaans) provides a window into the thinking and theologising of the Early Church. The exposition of the reality of the salvation experienced in Christ that is reflected in the sermons is uplifting. For me, it explains many beliefs that we still cherish today without knowing where they come from. Impressing, almost poetic, is Le Roux's discussion of the time of the Passover, and why it should be held in March–April (the northern spring, irrelevant for South Africans<sup>4</sup>). These views are not of Gaudentius himself (who only referred to spring in terms of creation and recreation) but from various contemporary church fathers. The following quotation of Le Roux (1977) provides a glimpse into this (my translation):

Eusebius concluded that for the Passover spring is the most suitable time from all the periods of the year. It stands against the whole year as the head over against the body. With spring the terrible storms of winter, the long nights and the floods disappeared. The trees are covered with weeds and the sailors can sail on a calm sea. For Hyppolytus, spring time is the first flower of creation and the beauty of the world. It is the time when the trees are covered with fruit blossoms, plants appearing everywhere, flowers are seen everywhere, the flocks are born, the whole earth getting green and the trees labouring under the heavy loads of their fruits. It is the time when the farmer loosens the yoke of the ploughman, when the seed is put into the soil and the heavenly rains are expected, when the shepherd milks his goats, the bees making sweet honey combs, the sailor joyfully entering the sea and with courage facing the waves. For Gregorius, ... the air is clean, the sun shines at its highest and clearest, the moon is at its most beautiful and the stars shine most clearly. The fountains are at their clearest, the rivers in flood and liberated from the bounds of ice. The fields are filled with delightful fragrances, everywhere green sprouts appearing and lambs grazing. At full sail ships leave the harbours and dolphins accompany them with gladness. Shepherds and cattle-herds tune their flutes and play a melody. (n.p.)

In his exposition of Gaudentius sermons, Le Roux demonstrates that for the catechumens the Passover experience is just as joyful as spring, in fact a continuation of the experience of spring. So much for a combination (or transcendence) of natural theology versus salvation history (see also Le Roux 1975).

## Historiography of ancient Israel as a necessary backdrop for understanding the Old Testament in context

Impressed by Von Harnack (Le Roux 2003) who argued that theology is a historical enterprise involving the intense study of primary sources, the effect of Le Roux's study in Church history was that he also wanted to understand the Old Testament historically. He describes this as an inextinguishable desire amidst the rising of structuralism in South Africa. Convinced that the only real understanding

of an ancient document is an historical understanding, he embraced historical criticism. According to Le Roux (2003):

... [F]or me the link between Church history and the Old Testament lies in the fact that Church history was formed by the Bible, that Church history is the history of the way in which the church reinterpreted the Bible. The Bible becomes the cord that binds me with the Church fathers, for example Augustine. (n.p.)

Understanding the Old Testament historically by means of historical criticism implies that the history of Israel should at the same time be studied to provide the context for the interpretation of Old Testament texts. This also involves archaeology in which Le Roux showed a great interest, amongst others, by leading an excavation tour of Unisa students to Lachish and thereafter making a thorough tour of biblical sites in Israel. Incidentally, the first book authored by Eckardt Otto (cf. Otto 1980) which I saw Jurie reading was not on the Pentateuch but on the archaeology of Jerusalem, while we toured Israel together in 1991. For Le Roux, historiography and historical critical exegesis are not steps that always follow successively but can happen simultaneously.

As far as historiography proper is concerned, Le Roux wrote on two periods of Israel's history. The first, ironically on the Roman Period, to my mind is a *Fremdkörper* in a rather conservative book on the history of ancient Israel (although one of the first in Afrikaans). His qualification in Church history made him the right person to write this chapter which still serves scholars of the New Testament well. To provide a glimpse of Le Roux as an empathetic historiographer at work, I quote the English translation from his description of the Bar Kochba war of 131–135 BCE (Le Roux 1979):

The famous rabbi Akiba greeted Bar Kochba as the 'star of Jacob' as expected according to Numbers 24:17. This view of Akiba was in conflict with that of the rabbis of that time. They usually distanced themselves from any rebellion against Rome. Nevertheless, this struggle was initially very difficult for the Romans, since the insurgents waged a deadly war from grottos and caves. So serious was the situation that Hadrian himself had to go to the front. It was entrusted to Severus to suppress the rebellion. Systematically he captured the caves, one after the other. This guerrilla war lasted 3 and a half years and the last stronghold was Beth-Ther south west of Jerusalem. In the year 135 AD, the struggle ended. Once again the consequences were terrible. Jerusalem became a Roman city with the name *Colonia Aelia Capitolina*. No Jew was allowed to enter the city. Circumcision was forbidden for the Jews. On the temple mount a sanctuary arose for Jupiter Capitolinus. From coins of that period it also appears that a temple was established for Venus. The appearance of the city also completely changed: a network of roads came into being, the city was divided in seven quarters and a Greek population replaced that of the Jews. Theatres and hippodromes came into existence. The whole character of the city changed. In the year 135 AD, the history of ancient Israel as a people in Palestine came to an end. (pp. 289–290)

Ten years later, in 1987, Le Roux published a 50 page chapter on the history of the exile, with the title *Theology in a crisis*

<sup>4</sup>It is interesting that African theologians that often emphasise the 'coloniality' of 'Eurocentric theology' have thus far not challenged the fact that the date for Passover in Christianity is set by Europeans!

(Le Roux 1987a:101–159). In this chapter, the historical events and the text are related to one another. We learn about the different responses of Lamentations, the Deuteronomist, Ezekiel, the Priestly Document, Second Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah to the traumatic events. This chapter was also reflected in Le Roux inaugural lecture at Unisa (Le Roux 1987c). Le Roux's own subjective involvement or concern – which according to him forms part and parcel of any historiography – in writing about this period of crisis in Israel's history can clearly be discerned, as South Africa was itself in a period of crisis as the writing was against the wall for the apartheid regime. True to his unfaltering faith during the whole of his theological endeavour, Le Roux (1987a) concluded his history of the exile (written for students) on a note of hope:

This history illuminates an age old problem: the perspectives of different groups differ, and the result is different theologies. From the beginning of the Church's history until today, believers read the Bible from different perspectives, and for that reason, different theologies are construed. Tension and estrangement between believers are the outcome thereof. However, this should not push anybody of the track because Yahweh is the Lord of history. He leads his Church to reach his goal. The same happened to the post-exilic faith community. Despite differences in interpretation and theology, they did not scatter into different groups. A bond of unity remained beneath the surface because all worshipped Yahweh and wanted to honour him with their views. Yahweh walked with his people all the time. With the disaster of 586 BC, for example, he wanted to teach them that a theology can be very dangerous if one only hides behind it without worshipping him with total surrender. Later, he brought the two conflicting views closer together. Perhaps, the best example is the inclusion of the books of the law and the prophets in the canon. From the ranks of the Sadokite priests, the Priestly document originated as well as the last reworking of the Pentateuch. For the latter, the cult was of importance, and therefore, they portrayed it as revealed as such to Moses. On the other hand, the Levites and other excluded groups in the Judaeen community did not regard the cult as of such importance, but emphasised correct conduct more, giving more attention to the future. Their thoughts found expression in the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic movements, and in the Prophets – as in Trito-Isaiah and the writers of Zechariah 9–14. Nevertheless, both groups' writings were included in one canon. Perhaps Yahweh wanted to affirm that both views, the 'God is with us' or 'the here and now theology', as well as the 'salvation in the future theology', belongs [sic] together in one faith community, namely the Church. (pp. 158–159)

## Research history as empathetic understanding of fellow pilgrims, past and present

Because all the work of Le Roux has as its aim to serve his theological endeavour, he devoted himself to the study of fellow travellers on the road. *Forschungsgeschichte* (research history) is therefore for him of utmost importance. This is one of the most remarkable and praiseworthy aspects of Le Roux's work because it is not typically South African. My diagnosis is that South Africans suffer from an unnecessary academic minority complex and are therefore not inclined to

read one another and to refer to one another in their work. They would rather refer to international scholars to gain 'intellectual respectability'.

Le Roux's research history of South African Old Testament scholarship, *A story of two ways*, published in 1993, goes against this trend.<sup>5</sup> Le Roux read almost all Old Testament dissertations and monographs and discussed them empathetically. It was written during the heydays of the synchronic–diachronic debate, hence the title. It elicited much (even organised and hectic) debate and was internationally acclaimed. Le Roux (1993b) concluded this book by remarking that:

... [T]he past three decades of work [that is from about 1960 to 1993 - EHS], which is of an exceptionally high standard and importance, has been executed by an enthusiastic generation of Old Testament scholars. Those neglecting this intellectual accomplishment will forever remain theologically poor. Whether this high level of research will be continued depends on us and future generations. (p. 353)

Today, we are 25 years further along the road and I opine that much has been done in terms of, for instance, archaeological research, Septuagint studies, the publication of international commentaries and hermeneutical studies. Le Roux's research history stands in need of a radically reworked edition. May the Lord spare him for us.

However, one should not conclude that the history of the research done by Le Roux is confined only to this book on Old Testament scholarship. He has written various articles exploring and dialoguing with the views of various prominent scholars, past and present, and also in other disciplines. The first is perhaps the discussion of Ian Eybers, his promoter for his Old Testament dissertation (Le Roux 1981), and the latter is the confessional approach to the Old Testament, published in 1983 (Le Roux 1983b). An article on Jan Stoop as church historian (of which I gave a taste above) appeared in 1985 and 'Johannes du Plessis as Biblical scholar' followed in 1986 (Le Roux 1986). An article on his predecessor A.H. van Zyl<sup>6</sup> followed in 1988 (Le Roux 1988a; cf. also 2009). In 1989, he published an article on W.S. Prinsloo's understanding of the psalms, as well as an article on Charles Fensham (Le Roux 1989a, 1989c), being up to that point in time perhaps the most quoted South African scholar in overseas literature. In 1993 and 1994, articles followed on the hermeneutics of Ferdinand Deist and Willem Vorster, respectively (Le Roux 1993a, 1994a). For a church history periodical, he even wrote an article on Andrew Murray, the famous Dutch Reformed minister of the 19th century (Le Roux 2002). In 1995 and 1999, there followed articles on church historians Carl Borchardt (1995) and Eddie Brown (1999). He also wrote four articles on the work on the Gospel of Matthew and the historical Jesus of one of the most prolific South African New Testament scholars, Andries van Aarde

<sup>5</sup>See also Le Roux (1987b:90–102) in which he took trouble to discuss the research of all his colleagues in the Department of Old Testament at Unisa.

<sup>6</sup>Le Roux was also instrumental in the fact that the latter received an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria.

(Le Roux 1996a, 2002a, 2011a, 2011b). In 2002, he published articles on Gerhard von Rad and Hans George Gadamer and in 2003 on Von Harnack and Augustine. While he was at Unisa, he wrote on the Unisa Old Testament Department, reporting on the work of every member (Le Roux 1987b), and while at the University of Pretoria (from 1987), he wrote two articles on all its members, from the establishment of the department in the 1930s up to this day (Le Roux 1988b, 2009). And of course, he wrote much on Eckardt Otto (e.g. Le Roux 2009, 2010 and this volume). Let me conclude this section by quoting (rather extensively) from Le Roux's (2009) autobiographical remarks, reporting on himself as one of the University of Pretoria's Old Testament Department's members (2009:6) under the heading 'Texts and their life contexts':

Jurie le Roux joined the Faculty in 1987 and followed a historical interpretation of the Old Testament. He first studied church history, focussing on the early church, and only later turned to the Old Testament. While toiling with patristic texts he came to realise the importance of historical work for life and theology. (Körtner 2006:11–15; Pannenberg<sup>7</sup> 1970:36–37)

Each historical document or text, such as the Hebrew Old Testament, took shape in real human life and was thus embedded in true-life experiences and therefore expresses these life experiences. This can only be understood by means of re-enactment ('Nacherleben') or reliving of Israel's past. (Grondin 2002:36–51)

History is thus extremely human and it deals with life, our lives. All history must start with the humbleness of our own humanity and our own humble existence. Historical investigation illuminates the many facets of our shared humanity; it is a way of relating to life and its challenges, a way of discovering life's meaning by understanding the lives of others, a way of understanding humanity's hopes and fears, and a means of providing some direction and orientation in this life. (Ankersmit 1990:45–77, 1993:5–50; Heidegger 1998:496–497)

However, it is this human frailty that enables us to enter Israel's world through the text of the Old Testament, which is also a very human book. It narrates God's history with Israel as understood, experienced and re-told by Israel itself. Israel interpreted and described the mighty deeds of Yahweh (like the creation, patriarchs, exodus, desert, Sinai, conquest and later the promise to David) from his perspective. And the Israelites interpreted these deeds differently in different epochs of their history (Le Roux 1992:291–300, 2004b:123–130; Von Rad 1971:9–86, 1973:289–312). To be more precise, God's acts in the past were interpreted and made contemporary within a context; people actualised God's historical deeds in the light of their present situation; they contextualised their history from their perspective of faith; and they continuously re-told, relived and re-enacted their past.

There thus was a movement in Israel's constant reflection and re-telling of their faith, and we must attempt to become part of that world. One way of entering that world is to continue the re-telling of Israel's story and to relive it in our own minds (Ankersmit 2007:78–107). To be able to narrate the Bible or to make it actual and relevant for our times, we must first of all feel our way into the life experiences of Israelites, relive their past experiences, re-enact that past in our mind and, especially, re-tell

that story (like Israel) in our own words. Thus, the actualisation of the Old Testament for the present day depends on the exegete's competence to immerse himself or herself in the text and relive Israel's past.

To be able to re-live and re-tell Israel's past, we once again have to discover the possibilities of historical-critical investigation. During the 20th century, this way of understanding came under great pressure, and its shortcomings and limitations were exposed dramatically, but in the end, it remains a very efficient way of describing the Old Testament's origins and growth, as well as Israel's historical context (cf. Kraus 1969:1–100). Linking up with historical criticism and the historical insights of the past two centuries, we can at least understand some aspects of Israel's constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation, appropriation and actualisation. In the historical-critical understanding of the Old Testament thus lie the impulses that can enable us to understand something of the process of exegesis and actualisation. It remains, of course, an imaginative construction and a creative remaking of Israel's past, but one that can enable us to experience something of Israel's world (Berlejung 2009:59–192; Gadamer 1990:9–15, 108–129, 133–139, 276–290; Gertz 2009:193–311; Le Roux 2007:1–18). (p. 6)

## Methodology: Historical criticism as a prerequisite to keep the text human and alive

As one already would have gathered, Le Roux kept the flame of historical criticism alive while most scholars<sup>8</sup> followed a synchronic approach. He therefore specifically and apologetically and playfully (cf. Le Roux 1996b) reflected on historical criticism over against text immanent approaches (cf. Bosman 2013; Lombaard 2006). In various publications, Le Roux reflected on his historical approach (1990a, 1993a, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2007). It must be stated that Le Roux's historical approach is hermeneutically inclusive – he does not study history for its own sake alone. The past should be 'relived' (Le Roux 2015a). To my mind, his view is most poignantly expressed in his 1994 article on historical criticism (Le Roux 1994b):

Why must we cultivate a historical understanding of reality and text? Because we are badly in need of history. Each day we are being challenged to give meaning to our lives. History can play a vital role in this regard. To put it differently, we are invited to become involved in the creation of life's meaning and historical interpretation can make an important contribution. Husserl referred us to our human life-world. Science must be rooted in man's life-experience; his *Lebenswelt* must become part of his scientific understanding and his history-writing. In this regard the concept of 'constitution' plays an important part; each one is constituting his own reality, as well as his historical reality. History-writing can thus become a very important way of constituting meaning in life. (p. 201; cf. Kearney on Husserl 1986:12–24)

Suffice to say that, without underestimating the relative value of the synchronic approach, Le Roux and historical criticism won the day.

7.1 include the bibliographical details of the authors quoted, thereby also giving an (partial) indication of what constitutes preferential theological literature for Le Roux.

8. Especially his colleague until 1996, W.S. Prinsloo, cf. Le Roux (1993:212–245, 277–292).

It is also important to mention that Le Roux also studied the history of Old Testament interpretation (Le Roux 2011c) through the centuries. According to him, the reader of the Bible should constantly be aware that he or she is not the first interpreter. Biblical interpretation has come a long way, in fact it commenced in the Bible itself.<sup>9</sup> Although there is always room for a creative new look, note should be taken of what previous readers (who form the bridge between the biblical text and today, cf. on Gadamer below) have done. Besides the 2011 article, Le Roux published no less than 27 brief articles on the website (<http://teo.co.za>) dealing with various topics related to the history of interpretation (e.g. on Irenaeus, Augustine, the Middle Ages, Luther, Calvin, the Enlightenment, Wellhausen, Gunkel, Von Rad, to mention but a few).<sup>10</sup>

## Understanding the Pentateuch as a prerequisite for understanding the Old Testament

Although Le Roux published widely on the Old Testament, the main focus of his work has been on the Pentateuch. For him, the adage that in 'the study of the Pentateuch the men are distinguished from the boys' is applicable in a special sense. According to him, the other books of the Bible (even the New Testament) are standing in constant intertext with the Pentateuch.

Le Roux's study of the Pentateuch can be distinguished in two phases, namely the period before the establishment of Pro Pent in 2000, and the years thereafter. It is therefore important to note that he started his study of the Pentateuch long before Pro Pent.

His doctoral dissertation was obtained (like the one on Church history) at the University of South Africa<sup>11</sup> in 1981. In his dissertation, he investigates Von Rad's views on the Exodus and Sinai traditions. He explores why the credo of Deuteronomy 26:5-9 does not contain the Sinai tradition (see also Le Roux 1976). The conclusion is that the notion of 'the whole people of Israel entering the land en bloc' is a later projection. This is affirmed by a study of the Hexateuch. His doctoral dissertation had a lasting influence on Le Roux's thought. Although the Pentateuch should be studied historically, the results of that very study is that the Pentateuch does not reflect the early history of Israel, but Israel's own views of their past.

9. To mention but a few obvious examples: the rewriting of the books of Kings in 1 & 2 Chronicles and the writing of Matthew and Luke using Mark's Gospel.

10. It is important to note that according to Le Roux, these articles do not represent popular theology, but scholarship in a condensed form ('wetenskaplike klein-kuns' = scientific 'small art'). All the articles can be read at <http://teo.co.za>. An updated version in English (translation) is to follow soon. It is also noteworthy that Le Roux over the years published more than a 100 further articles on various theological topics on this website, with open access.

11. Unisa was Le Roux's first employer. Although he went to the University of Pretoria in 1987, he always maintained a good relationship and involvement with his Alma Mater. An article reflecting the results of his doctoral dissertation appeared in 1983 (Le Roux 1983a).

Besides general studies on the Pentateuch (e.g. Le Roux 1990b,<sup>12</sup> 2001b, 2005), throughout his career Le Roux paid special attention to the figure of Abraham in Genesis (especially chapters 15 and 17) and his meaning for us. Le Roux also lectured in this topic in Utrecht in the Netherlands<sup>13</sup> and wrote several articles about it (Le Roux 1982, 1989c, 2001, 2015; see also a shorter article on <http://teo.co.za>). According to him two views are reflected in the Abraham traditions, namely an inclusive and a more exclusive one. Israel entertained both views.

I myself have been with the Project for the study of the Pentateuch from the very beginning.<sup>14</sup> At the IOSOT congress in August 1998 in Oslo, Jurie le Roux, Dirk Human and myself celebrated Dirk's birthday in a pub<sup>15</sup> and met Eckardt Otto there. Otto was previously in South Africa but did not have much contact with Le Roux. In Oslo, they discussed the possibility of having a project for Pentateuch study between the University of Pretoria and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. It was established in August 2002, and they have both lead it since (cf. Le Roux 2012a). From 2000, every year meetings have taken place of about 20 scholars on invitation, mostly in South Africa but also in Munich (2004, 2007, 2013). These events took place in a secluded environment and were meticulously organised by Le Roux, and everyone attending the events had to deliver a paper. Many well-known scholars from overseas and Africa attended. Otto's new theory on the development of the Pentateuch (with no Yahwist or Elohist and Deuteronomy as the 'linchpin' within the Hexateuch; see Otto 2000, 2009, 2012a) has served as a 'working theory', without restricting the authors. The Pentateuch was often related to the rest of the Old Testament (e.g. the Psalms, Deuteronomist and the Prophets), and in a very successful meeting in 2018, a thematic approach was followed when 'The Pentateuch and sexuality' was discussed. The value of Otto's approach (working with both synchrony and diachrony) is that it aims at integrating Pentateuch theory and ethics, the historical context and the theological questions of the time (then and now). During this period, Otto also wrote his voluminous commentary on Deuteronomy consisting of four volumes (2012a, 2012b, 2016, 2017). Le Roux also at different occasions reflected on the Pro Pent Project (2012a), which is widely regarded as the 'flagship' for research at the theological faculty of the University of Pretoria. Le Roux also on several occasions reflected on the work of Otto (cf. articles on <http://teo.co.za>; 2010, as well as in this volume). He also co-edited two volumes with Otto on the Pentateuch (Le Roux & Otto 2005, 2007).

12. This article deals with Bishop Colenso, who was both a missionary and a biblical scholar.

13. This is besides his numerous lectures on the Pentateuch to his students at the University of Pretoria, which he gave to them in study guides. These guides are of such a quality that they stand in need of publication.

14. Having a wide interest myself, I must categorically state that if it were not for the Pro Pent project I would never have given so much attention to the Pentateuch. Pro Pent has enriched me and I cannot thank Le Roux and Otto enough for this.

15. I paid (in today's terms) about R500 per beer, Oslo being terribly expensive.

## Philosophy, unavoidable partner for theology and facilitating hermeneutics

Shortly after he went from Unisa to University of Pretoria in 1987, Le Roux realised the importance of philosophy for hermeneutics. His comprehensive approach to theology with the explicit goal to serve the church made such an engagement with philosophy unavoidable. He therefore enrolled (*in cognito* as it were) for the honours course in philosophy at Unisa after which he continued with the study of Gadamer (1990).<sup>16</sup>

Although Le Roux took interest in Hegel with regard to the latter's grotesque concept of the Absolute Spirit that develops and engulfs the whole world, and how this could be related to the theological endeavour, Le Roux took the most interest in the concept of *Horizontsvermeltung* of Hans Georg Gadamer. Several articles have been devoted to this (Le Roux 2002c, 2004a). According to Le Roux, the concept of 'merging of the horizons' is extremely useful in the process of understanding an ancient text and appropriating it for today. Whereas Gabler reminds us that there is a 'garstige breite Graben' [a huge broad abyss] between our context and that of the biblical text, Gadamer's concept offers a solution but no easy one. There is no quick jumping over the abyss possible. By studying the history of interpretation of the text, in other words, painstakingly studying all the historical aspects of the text in terms of its contemporary context and origins, as well as its *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history), a bridge is built from the time of the text to till date. This view takes the appropriation of the text seriously but is a far cry from a direct fundamentalistic application of the text, pretending to know all the answers. For all this and more, the reader is referred to Le Roux's (2002c; 2004a) articles on Gadamer and Jaco Gericke's (2013) brilliant construction and analysis of Le Roux's philosophy of religion, which is hereby recommended as 'compulsory' reading.

I want to conclude with remarks Le Roux made about 'loss' in the study of history. According to Le Roux, the older he got, he experienced the tragedy of the past which lies in the fact that we can never experience the fullness of the past. The past is passed and always evades us. This also implies that we cannot understand the Bible fully, which is a document of the past. Le Roux in this regard also refers to Jacob Burckhardt who asserted that everything is about loss and that history only emphasises this. In an excellent article on two African philosophers, Augustine and Derrida, Le Roux (2012b, see also Le Roux 1998) explores this theme:

Augustine, even after his conversion, experienced loss because he could not understand the Trinity and failed every time he tried. The same holds true for the understanding of the Bible which contains many inexplicable sections. Augustine could

16. His view was therefore the opposite of that of the famous Karl Barth, who when he was asked why he doesn't engage with philosophers in his Church Dogmatics, replied: 'I don't read philosophers, they read me'.

only conclude that these sections are there to keep us humble and that we should do exegesis with love to discover love. (pp. 197–202)

As far as Derrida<sup>17</sup> is concerned, allow me to quote from Le Roux's (2012b) discussion of Derrida, who could not deny his Jewishness, just as Le Roux cannot abandon his Christian faith:

The tragedy of human existence lies in the feeling of loss about reality. It is a feeling of loss as nobody can get a grip on reality. That is why Derrida did not call himself a post-modernist, but rather a man of the Enlightenment. That was his way of undermining the certainties of the old Enlightenment that still lived on in modernism. Typical of this type of thought was the emphasis on reason and the mediation of knowledge by means of a method. This type of thought, like border police, set beacons to the field of study and then patrolled it to make sure that everybody remained within the circumscribed territory; that everybody followed the correct method and confessed the fixed truths. Derrida wanted to transcend this obstacle of an absolute reason, a certain method and fixed truths by talking differently about the Enlightenment and the human being of the Enlightenment. There was another side to the person of the Enlightenment which was of importance to Derrida: the person who is profoundly conscious of his or her limitations, who knows the borders of his or her knowledge, who knows that a firm grip on reality is impossible, that nothing can be experienced in its full presence. (p.196)

And because direct access to the events and foil presence are impossible, we will have to be contended with footprints, traces, marks and signs. To explain it again in terms of our example of history: all what the historian has are traces, and not past reality in its fullness. What we know about the past is actually not what has happened. It will forever escape us. All that we have is what is bound into everybody's horizon of understanding. We also could explain it differently. A clear distinction should be made about the 'that' (the *quod*) and the 'what' (the *quid*) of the event. Historiography 'works' with the 'that' of what has happened. At the 'what' we will never be able to arrive. When the historian asks about the 'what' of the 'that', he abandons it; he loses it like running sand from a grasping hand (my translation).

## Conclusion

Gericke makes the following remarkable statement about Jurie Le Roux which to my mind highlights the latter's remark on Derrida. According to him (Gericke 2013:6), 'Le Roux's philosophical-religious profile reveals a man who appears to carry an intellectual load beyond what most people would survive without losing their mind'. Qohelet's adage (1:18) 'Much wisdom, much grief, the more the knowledge the more the sorrow' seems to be true in the case of Le Roux. In Chapter 9:7–10, Qohelet provides some positive advice which his reader could follow as an antidote<sup>18</sup> against the loss (*hebel*, Qohelet's term).

17. Derrida's reasoning is difficult to understand. Cf. Collins and Mayblin (2011) for an understandable introduction.

18. For a discussion, see Scheffler (1996).

What, *mutatis mutandis*, would be Le Roux's own antidote? From my discussions with Jurie and as I have observed him over several decades, I want to mention four ingredients of his antidote.<sup>19</sup>

Firstly, to keep to the *faith*, to experience God in prayer, how ridiculous it may seem from the outside. In this, his knowledge of the early Church fathers and their piety of experiencing Christ in the Eucharist are of great help to him.

Secondly, hard *work*. Working consistently has a therapeutic effect for Jurie. This is confirmed by Qohelet, psychologically by Freud (cf. his 'love and work' as the ultimate advice) and the Jesus of the Gospel of Thomas (lift the stone and I am there).

Thirdly, the celebration of life in *art and music* (definitely not Rugby) which function as a great comfort for Le Roux.

Fourthly, what helps Jurie to survive is an open charitable heart and an inborn non-judgemental *generosity*. He loves his fellow human beings and takes them seriously with empathetic understanding, even their academic work.

For this reason, Jurie Hendrik le Roux is loved, respected and honoured. To be able to call him a close friend is nothing but undeserved grace.

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<sup>19</sup>Quite a while after I have written this, I listened to a radio programme on which it was said that the psychologist Carl Jung mentions five aspects that make for a happy and meaningful life: (1) keeping the body and spirit healthy, (2) having good relations with other people, (3) observing beauty in nature and in art (aesthetics), (4) hard and meaningful work and (5) having something to believe in. Keeping oneself healthy is not mentioned above regarding Le Roux. However, my observation is that it is true as far as he is concerned as well.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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