

## The Theologian's Speech: Stuttering and the Beauty of Christ

Robert Falconer and Dan Lioy

### Abstract

Testimony, scholarship, and pastoral-devotion form a triad to this journal article on stuttering and its relationship to the beauty of Christ, for the theologian who stutters. The paper begins with some of the personal struggles of stuttering highlighted in a personal testimony. Stuttering can be described as disfluency of speech, characterised by frequent stoppages in the flow of speech, usually with a repetition of sounds, syllables, or even one-syllable words. Along with the vocal impediment, certain emotional characteristics may be evident, such as anxiousness, shyness, timidity, and lack of assertiveness. While this may not always be the case, it is usually the general perception of others. According to research, those who do stutter are often regarded as having undesirable personality characteristics, which may intensify the problem. Aside from the general facts about stuttering, which we explore, the issues of the cause and cure of stuttering are of interest. While little is known about the direct cause of stuttering, recent research does indicate that it may be neurological, and therefore there is yet no cure. However, studies on the cause of stuttering in light of the neurological sciences indicate that a cure may be available in the not-too-distant future. The paper also offers an exegetical study on Moses, focusing on his speech defect,

### Keywords

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

and how YHWH had created Moses and knew intimately the limits of his abilities. Nevertheless, YHWH promised Moses that he would be with him as he spoke. Even Moses' stutter was not an obstacle for the all-powerful Lord. The exegetical study from the New Testament examines the Apostle Paul and his willingness to put aside his intelligence and shrewdness for the sake of allowing the Holy Spirit's wisdom and strength to work through him, thus being a vessel for the beauty of Christ evident in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters. Drawing from the earlier sections of the paper, the final discussion offers a pastoral-devotional approach, exploring stuttering in relation to the beauty of Christ, with a special focus on the stuttering theologian. The paper argues that stuttering may become an inconspicuous crucible for the beauty of Christ, and in so doing, becomes something beautiful, being overshadowed and transformed by the beauty of the divine.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is the result of thinking one morning, a few months ago, that I ought to put together a devotional piece about my stutter, and then that afternoon, and without him knowing, my colleague Prof. Dan Lioy sent me a link to an online interview with Gerald McDermott, himself a stutterer, on *Empowering Unlikely Leaders*, discussing his recent book, *Famous Stutterers: Twelve Inspiring People Who Achieved Great Things while Struggling with an Impediment*. After sharing my thoughts with Lioy, he suggested we collaborate on a research project, and as a Bible scholar, he would work on the exegetical sections. It was at this point that this journal article was birthed. This is a very personal journal article, blended together with scholarship. The first section is a brief, but honest reflection of my, Robert Falconer's, life as someone who stutters. After which a scholarly overview of stuttering is offered, exploring, (1) what stuttering is, (2) the emotional aspects of stuttering, (3) facts about stuttering, and (4) a discussion on the cause and cure of stuttering. The next two sections offer detailed exegetical studies on Exodus 4:10–17 and 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:5, first considering a contextual overview of both passages and then offering a descriptive analysis of each. The last section, rather than focusing too heavily on academic scholarship, takes a pastoral-devotional approach, exploring the idea of stuttering in light of the beauty of Christ.

## 2. A Testimony of a Young Theologian<sup>2</sup>

Ten years ago, September 2008, I knelt on my knee on the sandy shore of Iona, a small island in the Inner Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland, famous for its ancient monastery and its Celtic monk, Saint Columba, who brought Christianity to Scotland. Kneeling nervously, with a ring in hand and a clammed mouth with only four words to speak. The words were forced out over a minute later in spluttering gibberish. Two days later Rayhuewin returned her ring.

I have never known fluency for any extended period. I started to speak late and probably stuttered on my first word. At the age of six, my parents took me to Sunday school at the local Baptist church. The teacher did not know what to do with a six-year-old introverted stammerer, so every week she sent me to the 'naughty corner'. I spent most my Sundays there looking down at my knees shamefully.<sup>3</sup> The story did not end well.

3 Cf. Iverach *et al.* (2017:543-547) for discussions on interactions between young children in pre-school who stutter and their fluent peers during play sessions.

My schooling was mostly unpleasant. Most of my schooling was in a special school for those with learning disabilities. Giving orals in front of my class was difficult enough, but reading the class set-work book aloud in class was humiliating, being stripped of the option of substituting difficult words for easier ones – I had mastered my synonyms. On more than one occasion, upon walking out of the classroom to the school speech therapist, after a spoiled speech or poem recitation, I overheard the teacher shouting to the pupils in my earshot, how, 'If Robert only tried harder...'. Years later while studying architecture at university, reading aloud from Righini's *Thinking Architecturally: An Introduction to the Creation of Form and Space* (Righini 1999), was equally humiliating. At least my fellow students were mature enough not to ridicule me as they often did in my schooling career. Introducing myself and saying my name was always difficult, it still is, as it is for any person who stutters. In my youth, I remember a team of us standing in front of a church having been asked to introduce ourselves, after 3 minutes of incoherent sounds and contorted expression, my dear friend next to me, kindly introduced me, 'This is my friend Robert, he is from Port Elizabeth'.

Since childhood, I had always wanted to be an aviator. My father sent me to *Progress Flight Academy* to study for my commercial pilot's licence. After two weeks of flying, the flight school called my father and told him that my speech impediment was a severe hinderance and that I should pursue something else. So, I did, I studied architecture and theology simultaneously. The disappointment and humiliation were oftentimes unbearable. Countless prayers were offered up to God to take away my stutter,

with no response. One Sunday morning my youth pastor prayed for me. I was healed. I shared my testimony two weeks later at youth group. A few days later the stutter returned, along with many painful questions.

With a calling for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, from my youth, and speech poorly suited for the pulpit, the church, and its pastors, up until recently, treated me with caution, at arm's length with no opportunities, even after I had completed a PhD in theology. I felt undervalued and misunderstood. I remain uncertain as to whether it was because of my speech, or distrust because of my inquisitive mind for things theological. Nevertheless, five years ago I became a missionary to Kenya for three years where I taught and preached from the pulpit frequently and led a discipleship school. During this time, I met Barack Obama's grandmother and told her about Jesus. I now preach periodically at our church, here in South Africa, and have presented several academic papers. I currently work as a senior academic at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS), where I communicate daily with colleagues and students over Skype.

My dedication to SATS is largely a result of my stutter. I will probably never be able to reach thousands to proclaim this exquisite gospel of our Saviour, but together my students can. And without sounding egotistic, I like to think that every lesson taught, and every sermon preached by one of my students, in one way or another has my fingerprint on it. In this way, I fulfil my calling in remarkable, though unexpected ways, through the faithfulness of others.

I still stutter. Some days or some months are worse than others. However, I was helped immensely a few years ago by a British speech therapist. She sat with me over dinner and with 'napkin diagrams' she explained how stuttering was normal for a person whose brain was wired as mine was. From that moment on I accepted my stutter, which in turn allows me to peer into the transforming and illuminating beauty of Christ, and that gives it meaning. Part of the beauty of Christ has been his extraordinary faithfulness to that which he has called me, and not least, giving me a beautiful and supportive wife, Catherine, who does not fail to accept and love me. We have two adopted sons, Ezekiel and Gabriel.

### 3. An Overview of Stuttering

#### 3.1. Introduction

Stuttering is a complex disorder, generally misunderstood by others (Everard 2007:21). The 2010 movie, *The King's Speech*,<sup>4</sup> took the world by storm and made the public aware of stuttering. The film was a gripping psychological drama, depicting King George VI's painful struggle with stuttering, revealing his inner frustrations and his relationship with the Australian speech therapist Lionel Logue (McDermott 2016:online; Hooper 2010). The previous section of this paper was deeply personal, this section is somewhat more scholarly as the science of stuttering is explored in some detail.

#### 3.2. What is stuttering?

One might describe stuttering simply as disfluency of speech.<sup>5</sup> Such disfluency is characterised by stoppages in the flow of speech, usually evidenced by a repetition of sounds, syllables, or even one-syllable words. Prolongations of sounds and 'blockages' or 'blocks' are also manifestations of stuttering (Guitar 2013:7; National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online; Lavid 2003:3; Iverach *et al.* 2017:540).

Stuttering may also be exasperated when the person who stutters reacts to the disfluency by blocks, repetitions, and prolongations by forcing words out by use of extra sounds, words and even distorted facial and bodily movement.<sup>6</sup> These are employed in an effort to become unstuck, or to avoid becoming stuck on a word (Apel 2000:7; Guitar 2013:8). Such movements usually include 'various kinds of movements such as jerking of the head, shutting of eyes, sticking out the tongue, clenching the fists, gasping, and sudden expiratory thrusts of air' (Mulligan *et al.* 2001:25). Yet, people who stutter know exactly the words they want to say, but they experience physical difficulty in saying them (National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online).

Scientifically, stuttering is a 'neurodevelopmental disorder whose primary symptoms are disfluencies, involuntary disruptions in the normal flow of speech' (Smith and Weber 2017:2483). Disfluency in stuttering arises 'when the motor commands to the muscles are disrupted, and normal patterns of muscle activity required for fluent speech are not generated', thus creating 'breakdowns in speech motor processes'. For adults who stutter, the cause of stuttering is not 'excessive muscle activation', and neither is it a 'consistent symptom of stuttering'. Instead, the only 'neurologically abnormal muscle activation pattern' seems to be tremor, that is, 'involuntary rhythmic muscle contractions' (Smith and Weber

<sup>4</sup> The first part of the title for this paper was inspired by the title of the film.

<sup>5</sup> One ought to be aware that there is a difference between stuttering as an actual speech impediment and simple speech disfluency that is evident in many children, some teenagers and even adults who experience slight speech disfluencies every now and again (Apel 2000:7).

<sup>6</sup> These are typically called secondary behaviours (National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online); Mulligan *et al.* (2001:26) say that about 75% of the movements related to secondary behaviour occurred during stuttering but that some of these movements, notably the blinking of the eyes, were not related to stuttering, and are 'just as likely to occur with fluent speech' or with what might be termed normal dysfluencies. Yet, earlier they argued that these 'movements have been traditionally classified as a conditioned or learned response to stuttering' (2001:25).

2017:2487). Recent studies that employ modern imaging techniques have suggested that there is a dysfunction in stuttering ‘within the cortical and subcortical areas of the motor control system wider than that pertaining to speech motor alone’. If this is true, then ‘motor deficits extending beyond and unrelated to the production of speech in people who stutter’ could be expected (Mulligan *et al.* 2001:23).

New research shows dramatic variances during the ‘course of cortical excitability, during the speech motor planning and motor initiation phases’ in adults who stutter compared to those who speak fluently. Those who are fluent displayed ‘a left motor cortex facilitation of tongue motor neuron excitability during the 300-ms interval prior to speech onset’.<sup>7</sup> Those who stuttered did not display a left or even ‘a right facilitation of tongue muscle activation in the pre-speech interval’. The research findings provide a good reason to believe ‘that speech motor programming is typically left lateralised for fluent speakers but not for’ those of us who stutter. It appears that the amount of decrease<sup>8</sup> in primary motor cortex pre-speech excitability is associated with stuttering severity (Smith and Weber 2017:2488).

Regardless of how one might wish to define stuttering, the impediment does not only affect speech, but most certainly also leads to anxiety, frustration, embarrassment, and lack of self-confidence. For this reason, those who stutter avoid difficult words and difficult speaking situations, if they can. Oftentimes this may affect the way they come across to other people (Everard 2007:21). Everard points out that some who stutter have developed successful strategies to hide their stutter; such ‘hiding strategies’ are a coping mechanism, sometimes called ‘avoidance behaviours’. However, more often than not, these become part of a larger problem (2007:21).

### 3.3. Emotional aspects of stuttering

According to Boyle, people who stutter are regarded as having undesirable personality characteristics, which may include anxiousness, shyness, timidity, and lack of assertiveness. As a result, they are thought to be less employable than those who enjoy fluency of speech, especially when a specific profession requires a high level of speaking. He continues to explain that they ‘are perceived as less intelligent or competent in a variety of jobs in which communication is highly valued compared with fluent co-workers’ (Boyle 2017:921; Guitar 2013:19–20). If stuttering is a speech disorder which is characterised by involuntary speech disruptions, it is not surprising that it may hinder effective communication in both performance and social situations (Iverach

7 Cf. Mulligan *et al.* 2001:24.

8 Smith and Weber (2017:2494) explain that ‘studies using functional imaging techniques consistently show that AWS (adults who stutter) have reduced activity in left hemisphere areas specialised for speech and that they over activate homologous areas of the right hemisphere... It has been hypothesised that the right hemisphere overactivation arises as an attempt to compensate for the structural and functional deficits in the left premotor and primary motor speech areas’.

9 Boyle is no doubt correct; it is critically important that the public stigma of stuttering and all that is associated with it must be challenged. Such stigmatisation, negative social identities, and stereotypes, often exaggerated by avoidance, segregation, or discrimination, ought to be reduced and prevented through various strategies (Boyle 2017:921). The movie, *The King's Speech*, directed by Hooper (2010) offered a powerful challenge to the public perception of stuttering (cf. Boyle 2017:923). Nevertheless, the Slovenian Marxist philosopher, Slavoj Žižek describes the film as 'reactionary', saying that the king's stutter displayed 'a minimum of common sense, experiencing the stupidity of seriously accepting that one is king by divine will' and then proclaims that the Australian speech therapist rendered the king as 'stupid enough to accept his being a king as his natural property' (Žižek 2012:421).

10 Iverach *et al.* comment that according to the American Psychiatric Association, 'Social anxiety disorder is a prevalent, chronic, and disabling anxiety disorder ... characterised by intense fear of social or performance-based situations, or situations with the potential for scrutiny by others'. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, identifies social anxiety disorder as being 'associated with physical and motor symptoms, such as, "blushing, trembling, sweating, stumbling over one's words"', which individuals fear will be negatively evaluated by others. Such a pronouncement of fearing negative responses from others include 'fear of embarrassment and humiliation, with anxiety occurring across a broad range of situations, including public speaking, meeting new people, speaking to authority figures, giving presentations at work, and socialising at formal or informal gatherings. Individuals with social anxiety disorder tend to avoid these situations' (Iverach *et al.* 2017:541).

11 It is also noted by Iverach *et al.* (2017:547), that socially anxious people engage in cognitive and behavioural strategies to reduce anxiety temporarily.

*et al.* 2017:540). Despite such perceptions<sup>9</sup> regarding inferior intelligence or poor competence being unfortunately misplaced, these misconceptions are somewhat understandable. It is not surprising then, as Smith and Weber explain, adults who stutter experience a high rate of social anxiety<sup>10</sup> as a result of social interactions affecting the overall quality of life (2017:2492). Iverach *et al.* in the journal article *Maintenance of Social Anxiety in Stuttering: A Cognitive-Behavioral Model*, wrote that,

Mounting evidence has confirmed that stuttering is frequently accompanied by social anxiety, with approximately 22%–60% of adults who stutter meeting criteria for a diagnosis of social anxiety disorder<sup>11</sup>... There is also preliminary evidence that adolescents who stutter may demonstrate a high rate of anxiety disorders, such as social anxiety disorder (2017:540).

McDermott, himself one who stutters, reminds us that when one's stuttering becomes particularly bad, it is easy to fall into despair and self-hatred, believing that things will never improve; wondering why life has treated us this way, nursing feelings of self-pity, anger, and bitterness (McDermott 2016:124).

The public generally reacts negatively to people who stutter, which affects their personal wellbeing and participation in communication.<sup>12</sup> Communication and social interaction are no doubt essential 'to relationships, education, work, and quality of life' (Iverach *et al.* 2017:540). People who stutter are very much aware of 'negative social attitudes' from others and these are often internalised, says Boyle. These contribute to high levels of anxiety and depression, and low levels of hope, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, not to mention little hope for a brighter future (Boyle 2017:922). Yet, people who stutter underestimate themselves, largely because their speech is their primary focus of concern, and are therefore, 'particularly likely to underestimate the quality of their speech and overestimate the severity, frequency, and conspicuousness of their stuttering'. Viewing themselves from their own perception of their audience's perspective confirms their negative self-impression, this may indeed compound social fears (Iverach *et al.* 2017:544–45).

While this overview offered some facts about stuttering, it focused primarily on its emotional features. The next section, however, offers facts about stuttering in more general terms. It is not an exhaustive catalogue of facts, but it is hoped that it will offer the reader a greater awareness of the impediment.

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12 Accordingly, the ideal social environment for those who stutter would be an enlightened one 'about stuttering, understanding of the experiences of people who stutter', being 'accommodating, assisting, sympathetic, and accepting' (Boyle 2017:923).

### 3.4. Facts about stuttering

Generally, when an acquaintance walks up to me and says, ‘May I ask you a personal question?’ I know without fail that they want to know something about my stutter; they have heard me speak and have a curious question. Such questions, along with others are answered here in this section.

To begin with, you will never hear a person who stutters stutter when he or she is singing. Also, stuttering becomes fluency when one who stutters reads along with another who speaks fluently (McDermott 2018:online). Most people who stutter are able to predict with a degree of certainty which words they will stutter on, sometimes even a sentence or two before they get there; this is especially true when reading aloud (Guitar 2013:20). They also have specific words or sounds at certain times in their lives that they find difficult to say with any fluency (Everard 2007:21).

Stuttering affects 1% of adults, irrespective of race and language (Guitar 2013:20; National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online). Yet, at some point, about 5% of young children have difficulty in fluency of speech, but most will achieve fluency later, often with help from a speech therapist. And while in early childhood the ratio between boys and girls is almost equal (Action for Stammering Children 2018:online), the approximate ratio of adult males to females who stutter is 4:1. The recovery rate for girls is considerably higher than their male counterpart (Smith and Weber 2017:2486, 2495).

According to Everard, stuttering has been known to run in families<sup>13</sup> (Everard 2007:21). Studies have shown that ‘DNA is a significant factor when determining whether one will stutter into adulthood’<sup>14</sup> (Smith and Weber 2017:2487).

The severity of stuttering varies from person to person, from situation to situation and from day to day, week to week, or even month to month. Saying one’s name or speaking to an authority figure can also be particularly difficult. Stress, tiredness, fatigue, illness (like a cold or the flu), and time pressure may also exacerbate the stutter of some individuals. Further, attempting to hide one’s stutter may worsen one’s fluency (National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online).

Despite what some may think, research has demonstrated that those who stutter are ‘as emotionally stable as the general population’, and that stuttering is not an indication of one’s competence or intelligence (National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online). However, recent research on the brain suggests ‘that there may be an underlying neurological/physiological cause of

**13** Cf. Apel 2000:5.

**14** Differences in brain activity patterns also exist between adults who stutter and those who do not. Such differences can apparently also be ‘observed in speech perception tasks with both auditory and visual linguistic stimuli’ (Smith and Weber 2017:2494).

15 Cf. British Stammering Association 2016:online.

16 I made use of the VoiceAmp for about 6 months. It works by tricking the mind in believing that another person is speaking simultaneously, which alleviates stuttering. It takes the voice from the speaker and delays it for about half a second and gives distorted feedback in the ear of the speaker. It is initially very effective. However, it has the following problems: (1) In time it begins to have continual white noise, (2) Every other sound, including others speaking is picked up and is fed back into the ear of the user. (3) If the user tampers with its settings, the speech therapist needs to reset it, and this is often an unnecessary consultation. (4) The mind eventually gets used to the device and can no longer be tricked into thinking there is another person speaking in unison ('VoiceAmp' 2018:online; cf. British Stammering Association 2016:online). Perhaps others have had a better experience with this than I had.

17 Some young children who stutter begin to recover without treatment. Yet, 'for others, early intervention may be needed to help the child develop normal fluency and prevent the development of a chronic problem'. However, 'once stuttering has become firmly established... and the child has developed many learned reactions, a concerted treatment effort is needed' (Guitar 2013:5).

18 Lavid explains that, 'functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) is a revolutionary neuroimaging tool that provides the most detailed information on brain functioning; molecular genetics is the study of how genes operate at the molecular level' (2003:69).

stuttering in some people (Everard 2007:21), suggesting a fundamental difference between those who stutter and those who do not.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, if stuttering seems to be neurological or physiological, one is inclined to inquire about the causes of stuttering and its cures.

### 3.5. Cause and cure

Every now and again someone recommends an aid or a cure for my stutter, ranging from speaking with pebbles in my mouth, as in the case of Demosthenes, the Greek statesman and orator (McDermott 2018:online), using some obscure traditional medicine from a dubious back alley shop, singing instead of speaking, speaking staccato, and using a VoiceAmp<sup>16</sup>—all very well intentioned. Throughout the ages stuttering has been subjected to ridicule, predisposition, and misguided 'cures'. Apparently, at one time it was believed that stuttering was the result of abnormalities of the tongue which led to cutting the organ or burning it (British Stammering Association 2016:online). But as already mentioned, stuttering may be hereditary or triggered by environmental factors. Thus, one's stuttering may be the result of the family you were born into (Apel 2000:5).

Although these offer some clues as to the cause of stuttering, along with neurological and physiological factors, scientists have still not discovered the direct cause, and thus it remains a mystery (Guitar 2013:5). Therefore, while 'stuttering is basically neurological and physiological', it is not psychological in nature (National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online). The onset of stuttering usually 'occurs when the child's linguistic abilities are developing very rapidly, such as rapid growth in mean length of utterance... and phonological skills' (Smith and Weber 2017:2490). There are three kinds of stuttering, namely (1) developmental stuttering, this is the typical scenario, as in my case, where one simply begins stuttering from childhood, (2) neurogenic stuttering, which is usually developed as result of a stroke or trauma to the brain, and (3) psychogenic stuttering as a result of severe emotional trauma (British Stammering Association 2016).

At present, there is no known reliable cure for stuttering.<sup>17</sup> However, various forms of speech therapy may prove to be helpful, but relapses are common and not every method of speech therapy will help every individual (National Stuttering Association, n.d.:online). Nevertheless, there are two promising research fields, neuroimaging and molecular genetics,<sup>18</sup> which may contribute to a better understanding of the brain and its processes that facilitate stuttering, and in turn, may offer a cure for stuttering.

Researchers are employing the latest advances in these fields to search for a cure (Lavid 2003:69).

### 3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter a response to ‘What is stuttering?’ was offered. This led to a discourse on the various emotional aspects of stuttering. Interesting facts about stuttering were then provided, and lastly, the causes and cures were explored. There is, however, hope that there may soon be a cure for stuttering. The next two sections of the paper offer detailed scholarship on two Biblical passages that we find relevant for the topic of stuttering. The first is the account in Exodus 4:1–19 of Moses’ speech deficiency, often believed to be a stutter, and the second is 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:5, where Paul describes his personal limitations which were employed to magnify God’s power.

## 4. An Exegetical Study of Exodus 4:10-17

### 4.1 An overview of Exodus 1-3<sup>19</sup>

The book of Genesis reveals how Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers; but, in time, Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt and became the prime minister.<sup>20</sup> When famine struck Canaan, Joseph’s brothers sought relief in Egypt.<sup>21</sup> While there, they happened upon their long-lost brother and discovered that he was able to obtain the resources they needed to prevent starvation. Joseph forgave his brothers; and since the famine was continuing to worsen, he urged them—along with their families and his father, Jacob<sup>22</sup>—to resettle in the land of Goshen.<sup>23</sup>

As a result, Jacob and his family settled in Egypt.<sup>24</sup> Genesis 46:8–27 and Exodus 1:1–4 list the names of Jacob’s sons who made the journey. Including Joseph, who was already living in Egypt at the time, Jacob’s clan numbered 70.<sup>25</sup> Sailhamer (1992:241) observes that by including these names at the beginning of Exodus, Moses<sup>26</sup> signalled the book’s tight literary connection with Genesis. The narrative of Exodus 1 reveals that throughout the long ordeal the Israelites endured, they remembered their ancestry and the God whom their patriarchs worshipped.

Eventually, the first generation of Israelites who relocated to Egypt died.<sup>27</sup> Apparently, Jacob’s descendants liked Goshen, for they did not return to Canaan when the famine ended. In fact, they were to remain in Goshen for 430 years.<sup>28</sup> During those centuries, God’s chosen people had numerous children and

**19** The discourse that follows in the next two sections presumes the authenticity and textual integrity of Exodus. The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the overview of chapters 1-3: Brueggemann (1994; 1997); Cassuto (1983); Childs (1976); Cole (1973); Durham (1987); Dyrness (1977); Fretheim (1991); Goldingay (2016); Jacob (1958); Kaiser (1990; 2008); Keil and Delitzsch (1981); Merrill (1991); Osborn and Hatton (1999); Sailhamer (1992); Sarna (1991); Schreiner (2013); Seters (1994); Smith (1993); Vos (2000); Waltke and Yu (2007); Wells (2009).

**20** For a detailed consideration of the Genesis account of Joseph (Jacob’s son), cf. Coats (1992); Longacre (2003); Pfeiffer (2009).

**21** For a comprehensive overview of Egypt and the Egyptians within an ancient Near Eastern context, cf. Kitchen (2003; 2009); Ward (1992).

**22** For an assessment of Jacob’s life and legacy, as presented in the Tanakh, cf. Rigsby (2003); Walker (2009); Walters (1992).

**23** Goshen was part of the Nile River Delta; cf. Gen 45:9-13, 17-18; 46:3-7.

**24** Cf. Gen 46:26-27.

**25** Cf. Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5.

**26** Hereafter, Moses is the presumed human author of the entire Pentateuch. For an assessment of Moses as Israel’s premier lawgiver and an iconic figure within Judaism and Christianity, cf. Allis (2009); Chavalas (2003); Gillman (1992).

**27** Cf. Exod 1:6.

**28** Cf. Exod 12:40-41.

grandchildren. Indeed, their population multiplied to the point where the whole region of Goshen seemed to be overrun by them.<sup>29</sup>

29 Cf. Exod 1:7.

Moses described the prosperity of the Israelites by using the language of the creation account. Long ago, when God brought humankind into existence, he commanded them to be fertile and have many children.<sup>30</sup> As a reflection of God's blessing on his people and in fulfilment of his promise to Abraham,<sup>31</sup> he enabled the Israelites to flourish in Egypt. Without Joseph's presence and influence in the royal court, it is unimaginable that any Israelite clan of nomadic shepherds would have received such a gracious welcome from Pharaoh in the sophisticated, cosmopolitan nation over which he ruled.<sup>32</sup>

30 Cf. Gen 1:28.

31 Cf. Gen 12:1-3.

32 Cf. Gen 47:1-12.

While the Israelites were treated well during Joseph's time in office, a new ruler eventually came to power who had no memory or appreciation of Joseph.<sup>33</sup> The monarch also claimed to be ignorant of the Lord, Israel's covenant-keeping Creator. Enns (2000:147) explains that at this point in the Exodus narrative, the Egyptian ruler is 'presented as an anti-God / anti-creation figure' who 'repeatedly places himself in direct opposition' to the Creator's salvation-historical, redemptive 'purpose'. The unfolding account indicates that Pharaoh would learn through a painful series of events that the Lord is the one true, and ever-living God.

33 Cf. Exod 1:8.

When Pharaoh began to fear that a group of Semitic foreigners, such as the Hebrews,<sup>34</sup> might rise up and oppose him, he forced them into slavery and tried to reduce their numbers through the mass killing of all their male offspring. In effect, Pharaoh's decision was state-mandated infanticide.<sup>35</sup> Sarna (1991) posits that the edict might have been motivated by the unpleasant memory of the approximately century-long rule of the Hyksos over Lower Egypt.<sup>36</sup> Wells (2009:166) describes them as 'Semitic foreigners', whom the Egyptians 'eventually ousted'. Throughout the period of Hyksos domination, the indigenous population 'retained power over Upper Egypt'.

34 In the Old Testament, the noun, עִבְרִי, occurs 35 times and refers to the Hebrews as a distinct ethnic group; cf. Harris (1980); Koehler and Baumgartner (2000); Swanson (2001). Durham (1987:12) elucidates that the noun appears in the 'narrative of oppression' solely as a 'derisive epithet intelligible to the Egyptians'.

35 Cf. Exod 1:9-22.

36 From about 1630-1530 BC.

37 Cf. Exod 2:23.

38 Cf. Exod 1:24.

39 Cf. Gen 12:1-3; 15:18-21.

40 Cf. Gen 17:21.

41 Cf. Gen 35:10-12.

42 Cf. Exod 2:25.

Tragically, when this tyrannical Egyptian ruler died, the severe oppression of the Hebrews continued unabated under his successor.<sup>37</sup> As God's chosen people toiled under the hot Egyptian sun building monuments for the nation's monarch, they cried out to the Lord for deliverance. In turn, the Creator heard the Hebrews' cries and remembered the covenant oath he had made<sup>38</sup> with Abraham,<sup>39</sup> Isaac,<sup>40</sup> and Jacob.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, God's awareness of and concern for the Hebrews<sup>42</sup> prompted him to choose and commission a deliverer for them. Specifically, Moses was the person the Lord summoned to lead the

Hebrews out of Egypt and into the promised land. Moses was raised for 40 years in Pharaoh's royal court;<sup>43</sup> nonetheless, Moses did not ignore the plight of his Hebrew peers. He rashly and foolishly murdered an Egyptian whom Moses caught beating a Hebrew slave.<sup>44</sup> Then, to escape Pharaoh's retribution for committing the capital offence of homicide, Moses fled into the wilderness of Midian.<sup>45</sup> Another 40 years passed, during which Moses—now a fugitive in exile—married, started a family, and tended sheep.<sup>46</sup>

By now, Egypt had become a distant memory for Moses; yet, at the right moment, God disclosed to the 80-year-old shepherd the plan the Creator had in place all along.<sup>47</sup> It revealed his love and concern, not only for Moses, but also for all the Hebrews. Moses was to be the Lord's hand-picked instrument in leading his chosen people out of captivity from Egypt and into the promised land. At first, the task seemed impossible to Moses; yet, God pledged that he would be with his bondservant.<sup>48</sup> Moses did not have to fear his inadequacies whether real or imagined, for ultimately it was the Lord who would rescue the Hebrews from their plight.

#### 4.2. A descriptive analysis of Exodus 4:1-19<sup>49</sup>

Even after the Creator had instructed Moses about what to do when he returned to Egypt, he still had deep reservations about his ability to carry out his divinely-appointed task. So, he began to raise objections. Brueggemann (1997:580) describes the exchange as Moses' 'vigorous protest', followed by the Lord's abrogating 'response'.

Moses first expressed concern that the Israelites might question whether God had really appeared to the shepherd.<sup>50</sup> Moses no doubt recalled the reception he had received the last time he tried to assist one of his fellow Hebrews. Specifically, an unnamed peer had asked, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us?'<sup>51</sup> Should one of the Hebrews openly voice that question again, Moses wanted to be prepared to give an answer.

The Creator evidently accepted Moses' concern that the Hebrews might not believe him, especially since they had no basis for trusting the erstwhile shepherd. Accordingly, the Lord gave Moses three signs of his God-given authority. In turn, Moses could use these to authenticate his message and validate his credibility. Jacob (1958:225) explains that these miracles, in addition to signifying that both the messenger and the message were from God, would also authenticate God's 'promise' to the Hebrews and 'strengthen' their 'faith' in him.<sup>52</sup> Keil and Delitzsch (1981:448) add that the miracles likewise 'served to strengthen Moses' faith'.

**43** Cf. Exod 2:1-10; Acts 7:23.

**44** Cf. Exod 2:11-12; Acts 7:24.

**45** Cf. Exod 2:15; Acts 7:29. Midian was located directly southeast of the Gulf of Elat and extended south along the shore of the Red Sea.

**46** Cf. Exod 3:1; Acts 7:30. Waltke and Yu (2007:353) point out that along with 'Moses', the 'founder' of Israel as a 'nation', God likewise summoned 'David' from 'tending flocks' and commissioned him to enlarge the 'kingdom to its promised dimensions'.

**47** Cf. Exod 3:2-22; Acts 7:31-34.

**48** Smith (1993:118) clarifies that Jesus, in what is called the 'Great Commission', similarly pledged to 'be with His disciples' at all times right up to 'end of the age' (cf. Matt 28:18-20). For an accessible consideration of how the Father operated in the life of Moses to prefigure and unveil the redemptive work of the Son, cf. Selvaggio (2014).

**49** The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the descriptive analysis of Exodus 4:1-19: Brueggemann (1994; 1997); Cassuto (1983); Childs (1976); Cole (1973); Durham (1987); Fretheim (1991); Goldingay (2016); Jacob (1958); Kaiser (1990); Keil and Delitzsch (1981); McDermott (2016); Osborn and Hatton (1999); Sailhamer (1992); Sarna (1991); Seters (1994); Smith (1993); Vos (2000); Waltke and Yu (2007); Wells (2009).

**50** Cf. Exod 4:1.

**51** Cf. Exod 2:14.

**52** Cf. Gen 9:12-13; Judg 6:17; 1 Sam 2:34; 10:1-7; 1 Kings 13:3; 2 Kings 19:29.

For the first sign, the Creator told Moses to throw his ordinary-looking shepherd's staff to the ground. When Moses complied, the Lord turned the staff into a snake. Then, God told Moses to pick up the snake by its tail. Even though at first Moses recoiled from the sight of the snake, he obeyed the Lord's order. As the shepherd grasped the serpent, it turned back into a staff.<sup>53</sup> To the Egyptians snakes represented fertility, wisdom, and healing.<sup>54</sup> They were even worshipped as the patron deity in Lower Egypt.<sup>55</sup> Hence, this sign was meant in part to show God's authority over the pagan deities the Egyptians venerated.<sup>56</sup>

53 Cf. Exod 4:2-4.

54 Cf. Beck (2011); Fabry (1980); Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998).

55 Lower Egypt refers to the Nile Delta region.

56 Cf. Exod 4:5.

57 The underlying Hebrew verb, צרע, refers to some form of rash or fungus-like malady of the skin that most likely is different from clinical leprosy (or Hanson's disease); cf. Lev 13-14; Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1977); Harrison (1997); Koehler and Baumgartner (2000).

58 Cf. Exod 4:6-7.

59 Cf. Harrison (1986); Merrill (2003:412-3); Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998).

60 Cf. Exod 4:8-9.

61 Cf. Alexander (1980); Bergman (1980); Ross (1997).

62 Cf. Exod 4:10.

63 For a detailed lexical and theological deliberation of the divine names used in the Hebrew sacred writings, cf. Baker (2003); Kuhn (2009); Rose (1992).

For the second sign, the Creator told Moses to put his hand into the fold (or top part) of his cloak, and then to remove his hand. When he did so, his hand became afflicted with what Osborn and Hatton (1999) describe as a 'flaky and scaly' skin disease, perhaps similar to 'psoriasis'.<sup>57</sup> Then, God told Moses to put his hand back into his cloak. When Moses pulled his hand out a second time, it was fully restored.<sup>58</sup> In ancient times, a variety of skin diseases were prevalent in Egypt, as well as elsewhere throughout the Fertile Crescent, which people considered to be incurable.<sup>59</sup> The second sign would reveal the Lord's power, for only he could heal the incurable.

In case the Hebrews remained unconvinced by the first two signs, God offered Moses one more to perform;<sup>60</sup> however, Moses would be unable to enact this demonstration of divine power until he arrived in Egypt. So, for the third sign, the Lord told Moses to take water from the Nile River and pour it on the ground. The Creator promised that when the shepherd did so, the water would turn into blood. The sight of the spectacle would be particularly sobering for the Egyptians, since they considered the Nile to be their source of life and productivity.<sup>61</sup> Turning the Nile's water into blood would prove that God had supreme power over the Egyptians' lives.

Still, despite all the preceding reassurances, Moses shied away from his divinely-ordained task. He respectfully addressed God as the 'Lord',<sup>62</sup> which renders the Hebrew noun *adonay*.<sup>63</sup> It emphasises the authority, rule, and majesty of God over all creation. 'God' is the typical rendering for *elohim* in the Hebrew. Despite the plural form of the noun, it is consistently used in the Old Testament as a singular term. *Elohim* portrays the Lord as the one, true, and unique God.

'Lord' renders the four Hebrew letters making up the divine name, *yhwh* (or *Yahweh*). According to Fretheim (1991:63) this distinctive term for the covenant-keeping God of Israel stresses the Creator's 'faithfulness' to his promises. Brueggemann (1994:714) carries the analysis further by drawing attention to God's eternal existence,

supreme power, and active involvement in human history. In short, the one whom Sarna (1991) refers to as ‘absolute Being’, is the ever-present, ever-living God.<sup>64</sup>

64 Cf. Exod 3:13-14.

The preceding observation notwithstanding, Cole (1973:21) points out that Israel’s Lord is ‘dynamic, not static’ in his existence. Moreover, the totality of scripture leaves the impression that the Creator is unique in his ontological essence, the fountain and source of all things, and the one who unifies all the forces of space-time reality. For this reason, as observed by Goldingay (2016:20), the immortal Lord stands in marked ‘contrast’ with the ‘lifeless gods and images’ venerated by pagans.<sup>65</sup>

65 Cf. Jer 10:14; Acts 14:15.

Moses’ deferential form of address in Exodus 4:10 might be paraphrased, ‘Pardon your bondservant, Lord’. The shepherd put forward the excuse that he was an inept speaker who lacked eloquence, regardless of whether it was the past or the present. As observed by Cassuto (1983:48), the Hebrew text is literally rendered, ‘heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue’. Expressed differently, Moses claimed he routinely became tongue-tied. One intriguing possibility for the shepherd mangling even the words he uttered is that he severely stammered or stuttered.

Marshall (2003), after evaluating the ‘biblical evidence and post-biblical commentary’ (71), concluded that Moses’ ‘speech condition’ (73) was not due to ‘structural or organic factors’. Gruber (1986:5), when taking into account ‘Moses’ hesitations, his dialogue with God, and the eventual confrontation with Pharaoh’, deduced that the lawgiver’s ‘speech impediment’ was ‘stuttering’. Similarly, Leon-Sarmiento, Paez, and Hallett (2013:231), as a result of their ‘analysis of ancient descriptions’ through the prism of ‘current research’, conclude that ‘stuttering is the most likely pathology’ experienced by Moses. The authors also surmise that there is ‘clear evidence for both genetic origin and environmental triggers’ associated with Moses’ stuttering.<sup>66</sup>

66 Cf. Exod 6:12, 30; Garfinkel (1995); Gruber (1986); Leon-Sarmiento, Paez, and Hallett (2013); Levin (1992); Marshall (2003); McDermott (2016:1-14); Rosman (2014); Shell (1986).

The above notwithstanding, it remains unclear whether Moses was exaggerating the actual extent of his speech impediment, for Acts 7:22 quotes Stephen as declaring that Moses was ‘powerful in speech’. In any case, God used a series of rhetorical questions to remind Moses that due to the Creator’s omnipotence, he determined everyone’s abilities and disabilities. Specifically, he made a person’s mouth.<sup>67</sup> The Lord also decided whether people spoke or were mute, could hear or were deaf, and could see or were blind.<sup>68</sup> In the case of Moses, God had created the shepherd and intimately knew the limits of his abilities.

67 The mouth is a metonymy for the human organ of speech; cf. Caird (1980:136-7).

68 Cf. Exod 4:11.

So, the Lord once again commanded Moses to go to Egypt. God reassured the reticent shepherd by promising to be with him as he spoke. Put another way, the Creator would work through the organs of speech, which he had created, to enable Moses, as the Lord's prophet,<sup>69</sup> to successfully accomplish his divinely-ordained task.<sup>70</sup> God even pledged to 'teach',<sup>71</sup> or instruct, Moses in 'what to say'. In short, his perceived lack of eloquence—regardless of its cause and extent—was not an obstacle for the all-powerful Lord.

69 Concerning the role and function of the Old Testament prophets as God's authorised spokespersons, cf. Buller (2003); Möller (2005); Shields (2008).

70 Cf. Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9.

71 Cf. Exod 4:12.

72 Cf. Exod 4:13.

73 Cf. Exod 3:6.

As Sailhamer (1992:248) notes, Moses' audacious counter-response indicates that he remained extremely 'reluctant' in accepting the task God had given the shepherd. Thus, Moses pleaded with the Creator to send anyone else but his bondservant to do what God wanted.<sup>72</sup> Earlier, when the Lord announced his sacred presence from the burning bush, Moses covered his face because he feared the possibility of looking directly at God.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, when summoned by the Lord to carry out a redemptively important task, Moses dared to turn down the divine call. The Hebrew text of Exodus 4:14 literally says that, as a result, 'the anger of Yahweh burned against Moses'.

74 Cf. Exod. 7:7.

75 Cf. Exod 4:14.

Graciously, the Lord sought to alleviate Moses' intense anxiety by telling him that Aaron, his older brother,<sup>74</sup> would be his spokesman. The Creator informed Moses that 'Aaron the Levite'<sup>75</sup> was already on the way to meet him. Childs (1976:62) observes that since both Moses and Aaron were descended from the tribe of Levi, the mention of Aaron as the 'Levite' points to his 'religious office'. Kaiser (1990:329) builds on this premise by stating that the biblical text anticipates Aaron's instalment as a priest after Israel's exodus.<sup>76</sup> His ability to 'speak well'<sup>77</sup> would enable him to perform a vital priestly function, namely, to instruct others—including Pharaoh and his court officials—about God through various judgment oracles.

76 Cf. Exod 28.

77 Cf. Exod 4:14.

The Lord noted that when Moses and Aaron were reunited, Aaron would be filled with delight. Perhaps the gladness in his heart would be due in part to the fact that the Creator had revealed himself to Moses and intended to use him to set the Hebrews free from their Egyptian taskmasters. When Moses spoke to his brother, he would tell Aaron what to say. God also pledged to help the duo speak and would even instruct them concerning what they must do.<sup>78</sup>

78 Cf. Exod 4:15.

In this cooperative arrangement, Aaron would be Moses' agent and declare what he wanted the Lord's chosen people to know. Also, Moses would be like God to Aaron whenever Moses told his brother what to say to others about what the Lord was thinking and deciding.<sup>79</sup> Later in biblical history, the Creator would likewise

79 Cf. Exod 4:16.

inspire his prophets to declare his judgment oracles to monarchs and people alike.<sup>80</sup> The Lord concluded by telling Moses to take his staff, for it would be the means for bringing about the wondrous ‘signs’<sup>81</sup> the Creator had promised.<sup>82</sup>

Moses apparently ran out of excuses to avoid God’s call for the shepherd to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt; or, perhaps Moses realised he had angered the Lord, and did not want to exacerbate the situation any further. In either case, Moses journeyed east back to Jethro’s camp and obtained permission from his father-in-law to leave Midian and travel to Egypt. Jethro granted Moses’ request to depart and wished him well.<sup>83</sup> The door of opportunity allowing Moses to return to Egypt was open. As further encouragement, the Lord assured Moses that the Pharaoh who had wanted him killed was now dead.<sup>84</sup> Moses could travel to Egypt without the fear of putting his life in jeopardy.

## 5. An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

### 5.1. An overview of 1 Corinthians 1:1-9<sup>85</sup>

The first-century AD church at Corinth was relatively young when it began to be plagued by one crisis after another.<sup>86</sup> The congregational issues included disunity, abuse of church ordinances, disorder during worship services, theological disputes, and the extremes of lax morals and legalism. This long letter to the church was Paul’s pastoral attempt to deal with the congregation’s problems.<sup>87</sup>

Regarding the city of Corinth, it was located on a narrow isthmus of land in southern Greece about 45 miles from Athens, in the Roman province of Achaia. Then, as now, the lower portion of Greece was connected to the rest of the country by this four-mile-wide isthmus. So, all traffic between the two areas of the country passed by Corinth. The isthmus was bounded on the east by the Saronic Gulf and on the west by the Gulf of Corinth.

Sea captains could literally have their ships rolled across the isthmus on a stone tramway and avoid a 400-kilometre trip around southern Greece. As a result, the city prospered as a major trade centre, not only for most of Greece, but also for much of the Mediterranean area. The latter included North Africa, Italy, and Asia Minor. Nearby Isthmia hosted the Isthmian games, one of the two major athletic events of the day.<sup>88</sup> In turn, this event created more human traffic through the city and thus increased the potential for business and prosperity.

**80** Cf. Exod 7:1-2.

**81** Cf. Exod 4:17. Kruger (1997) observes that the ‘salvation-history of the Israelites is one area where the application of the sign is particularly prominent’. According to Deut 4:35, miraculous events occur so that all humanity would recognise Yahweh alone as the one, true, and living God. Stolz (1997) advances the discussion by pointing out that both the writings of Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament build upon the theological emphasis found in the Old Testament.

**82** Cf. Exod 3:20.

**83** Cf. Exod 4:18.

**84** Cf. Exod 4:19.

**85** The discourse that follows in the next two sections presumes the authenticity and textual integrity of 1 Corinthians. The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the overview of 1:1-9: Barrett (1968); Beale (2011); Bruce (1986); Fee (1987); Furnish (2003); Garland (2003); Gill (2002); Goldingay (2016); Grosheide (1984); Guthrie (1981); Kaiser (2008); Lenski (1961); Longenecker and Still (2014); Lowery (1994); Marshall (2004); Morris (1990; 2001); Sampley (2002); Schreiner (2013); Thielman (2005); Thiselton (2000); Verbrugge (2008).

**86** Cf. Hafemann (1993); McRay (2000); Murphy-O’Connor (1992).

**87** Hereafter, Paul is the presumed human author of the 1 Corinthians. For differing views on the optimal approach to assess the apostle’s theological perspective, including his way of looking at salvation, Jesus’ significance in the divine plan of redemption, and Paul’s aspiration for the churches he established, cf. Campbell (2012; post-new perspective view); Johnson (2012; Catholic view); Nanos (2012; Jewish view); Schreiner (2012; Reformed view).

**88** The Olympic games were the other major athletic events of the era.

As a commercial city with a constant influx of visitors from nations around the known world, Corinth also became notorious as a centre for rampant immorality. Greek philosophy was deliberated, and wisdom was emphasised, yet, such considerations in no way bridled the debauchery practised throughout the city. Indeed, in some respects, Corinth's religious makeup helped create this atmosphere of depravity.

Even though the Jewish residents had established a synagogue near the city's forum, at least 12 temples to various pagan deities existed in Corinth. In turn, these heathen shrines overshadowed the city's Jewish influence. One of the most famous of these temples was dedicated to Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love, pleasure, beauty, and procreation. Here, at one time, there were more than 1,000 priestess-prostitutes serving the shrine's patrons.

It was into this setting, while Paul was on his second missionary journey,<sup>89</sup> that he brought the gospel. Next, before leaving the city to continue his evangelistic excursion, the apostle established a church made up of a growing number of Christian converts. Sampley (2002:777) relates that the parishioners included both Jews and Gentiles, higher classes and lower classes, free persons and slaves. According to the assessment of Thielman (2005:276), 'Gentiles' most likely were 'in the overwhelming majority'. Fee (1987:4) adds that they were mainly from the 'lower end of the socioeconomic ladder'.

Upon Paul's departure, the philosophical, sexual, and religious temptations within Corinth took their toll on many of the new Christians. Garland (2003:8) argues that the central 'problem' involved 'too much of Corinth' infecting the 'church' located there. After a while, the deteriorating situation began to break down the unity of the faith community. When the apostle learned about the divisiveness and immoral practices arising among the believers, he sought to address in writing these and other issues the Corinthians were experiencing.<sup>90</sup>

According to 5:9, Paul previously sent a letter to the congregation,<sup>91</sup> which the early church did not preserve. After that, he received either a personal or written report from members of Chloe's household about several issues that were threatening the faith community and its ministry.<sup>92</sup> Admittedly, in line with the assertion made by Sampley (2002:803), there is minimal information concerning the 'identity of Chloe and her people'. Even so, Barrett (1968:42) represents the consensus view that Chloe was a female believer who lived in Corinth. According to Gill (2002:110), Chloe likely dispatched some of her 'domestic

**89** Paul's second missionary journey transpired from AD 49-52; cf. Acts 15:36-18:22. For a chronology of the major events in the life Paul, including relevant data found in Acts, the apostle's canonical letters, and extrabiblical sources, cf. Alexander (1993); Porter (2000); White (1992). For the sake of expediency, the chronology adopted herein is based on the dates appearing in Carson (2015).

**90** Cf. the representative list of issues listed in the opening paragraph of this section.

**91** The missive possibly was delivered to Corinth by itinerant missionary-evangelists.

**92** Cf. 1 Cor 1:10-11.

servants' (whether 'slaves' or 'freemen') to the apostle about the ecclesial situation unfolding in the city.

Paul, in response, began composing his treatise, which would become a vital resource for sustaining the ongoing work of the Corinthian congregation. Grosheide (1984:13) surmises from 16:8 that the apostle wrote the epistle from Ephesus during his third missionary journey.<sup>93</sup> Since he stayed in Ephesus over two years,<sup>94</sup> he likely authored the letter around AD 54. In that day, epistles normally started out with an introduction that listed the names of the sender and the recipients. Next came a formal greeting in which the author expressed thanksgiving, followed by the body, or purpose or writing. The letter usually concluded with appropriate remarks and a farewell.<sup>95</sup>

In general, Paul's epistle followed the preceding literary pattern. Thiselton (2000:82) remarks that the apostle replaced the typical generic greeting with a salutation combining Christian 'grace' and Hebrew 'peace'.<sup>96</sup> The apostle's expression of gratitude was also more than a formality. It was a sincere statement of appreciation for the well-being of this congregation, even though it was struggling. His farewell at the end of the epistle was similarly warm and personal, containing both individual greetings and a benediction.<sup>97</sup>

When thinking about the numerous problems that existed in the church at Corinth, it is impressive that Paul would offer thanksgiving to God for these believers. After all, earlier, when the apostle wrote to the theologically wayward Galatians, he struck a more sombre and strident tone.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps with respect to the Corinthians, Paul realised that it was better to begin his epistle to them on an affirming note. Even though he could not totally commend them for their noble deeds, he could praise the Father for the grace he had bestowed on them in union with the Son.<sup>99</sup>

## 5.2. A descriptive analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10-2:5<sup>100</sup>

As noted in the preceding section, reports had reached Paul that factions and quarrelling had developed within the Corinthian congregation. Though the apostle had the God-given authority to issue commands to his readers, he instead appealed to them as fellow believers. Paul urged them, as those living under the Saviour's lordship, to discontinue bickering among themselves and begin to cultivate harmony, rather than hostility, within their faith community. He also implored them to be of one mind, whether it involved their thoughts, plans, or actions.<sup>101</sup>

In this diverse faith community, the parishioners favoured different prominent ministers of the gospel.<sup>102</sup> Some followed Paul,

**93** Paul's third missionary journey transpired from AD 52-57; cf. Acts 18:23-21:16.

**94** Cf. Acts 19:8, 10.

**95** For a synopsis of Greco-Roman epistolary features, including their forms, types, and functions, cf. O'Brien (1993); Stowers (1992); Weima (2000).

**96** Cf. 1 Cor 1:3.

**97** Cf. 1 Cor 16:19-23.

**98** Cf. Gal 1:6-10.

**99** Cf. 1 Cor 1:3-4.

**100** The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the descriptive analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10-2:5: Barrett (1968); Beale (2011); Bruce (1986); Eastman (1999); Ellingworth and Hatton (1993); Fee (1987); Furnish (2003); Garland (2003); Gill (2002); Goldingay (2016); Grosheide (1984); Guthrie (1981); Kaiser (2008); Ladd and Hagner (1997); Lenski (1961); Longenecker and Still (2014); Lowery (1994); Marshall (2004); Morris (2001); Schreiner (2013); Sampley (2002); Thielman (2005); Thiselton (2000); Treat (2014); Verbrugge (2008); Wells (2009).

**101** Cf. 1 Cor 1:10-11.

**102** For an extensive assessment of the four cliques Paul listed in 1 Cor 1:12, cf. Thiselton (2000:123-33).

103 Cf. Acts 18:24-19:1.

104 Verbrugge (2008:266) expresses the view that the so-called 'Christ party' sought to 'rise above any human leaders'. Guthrie (1981:249) goes further by suggesting that in 1 Cor 1:12, Paul might have been 'combatting' the assertions of a clique whose adherents denigrated Paul for not having 'any contact with Jesus' according to the flesh. Ladd and Hagner (1997:423) explicate that such a 'perspective' regarded the Saviour merely 'from a human point of view' (cf. 2 Cor 5:16).

105 Cf. 1 Cor 1:13. Sampley (2002:783) defines 'rhetoric' as the 'art of persuasion'. For an overview of classical rhetoric, including public oratory techniques used in the proclamation of the gospel, cf. Majercik (1992); Stamps (2000); Watson (1997); Winter (1993). According to Winter (1993), 'orators used three accepted proofs to persuade their audience', as follows: (1) *ethos*, or 'acting out of character'; (2) *pathos*, or 'manipulating' the 'feelings' of an 'audience'; and, (3) *demonstration*, or 'arguments' used to convince listeners. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1-2, predominantly made use of the third category, especially as he attempted to convince his readers to become more Christlike in their attitudes and actions.

106 Cf. 1 Cor 1:14-16. For a discussion of baptisms and baptismal ceremonies in the New Testament, including the letters of Paul, cf. Beasley-Murray (1993); Hartman (1992); Wainwright (1997).

107 Cf. Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:16; Gal 1:8.

their spiritual parent, while others listened only to Apollos, an eloquent teacher and missionary from Alexandria, who had served in Corinth after Paul left to evangelise elsewhere.<sup>103</sup> There was also a faction devoted to Peter, whom Morris (2001:40) notes was the lead disciple among Jesus' 12 original followers. Marshall (2004:253) hypothesizes that the most spiritual-sounding congregants portrayed themselves to be ardent followers of the Messiah.<sup>104</sup>

Paul used a series of rhetorical questions to signal to his readers that they were creating divisions within the metaphysical body of Christ.<sup>105</sup> The apostle wanted them to realise that while the Father used different believers to proclaim the good news of salvation, they were all united in their message and focused on pointing the lost to the Son. On the one hand, various ministers of the gospel are portrayed in the New Testament as having teaching worthy of consideration; yet, on the other hand, the Redeemer alone died on the cross to atone for the sins of unsaved humanity.

Regrettably, the believers at Corinth had over-identified with one or another of their spiritual mentors rather than the Messiah. For this reason, Paul deemphasised the baptisms he performed while ministering among the Corinthian converts.<sup>106</sup> The apostle was not minimising the importance of this religious rite; instead, he was emphasising the supremacy of the Son in all situations. Beasley-Murray (1993) adds historical perspective by noting that from the earliest days of the church, ecclesial 'communities' regarded the practice as both a 'corporate' and an 'individual rite'. Furthermore, Paul leveraged this 'understanding' in his 'protest' to the believers at Corinth against all forms of 'individualism taken to an extreme'.

The Corinthians also displayed such worldly attitudes as self-centredness and immaturity. Their narcissistic, shortsighted preference for one minister of the gospel rather than another caused them to argue repeatedly with their peers over which evangelist they alleged was better. In this way, the congregants childishly lauded particular human spokespersons more than the Father's message of salvation centred in the cross of Calvary. They failed to appreciate what Sampley (2002:811) describes as the Father's 'decisive action' in the Son's 'death and resurrection', a series of historical events that 'inaugurated the apocalyptic end times'.

In response, Paul declared that his divine mandate was to proclaim the gospel, and that is what he exclusively focused on doing.<sup>107</sup> He refused to use clever speeches or high-sounding elocution to tell the unsaved about their need for redemption; rather, the apostle heralded the good news of redemption in plain

language. His intent was that the cross would not be emptied of its power to save the lost.<sup>108</sup> Paul was not opposed to those who carefully prepared what they said; instead, he was against orators who tried to impress others with their erudite knowledge or impressive speaking ability.

Factionalism among the believers at Corinth was not limited to favoured personalities. Many congregants also took sides on the issue of God's wisdom versus worldly learning; and, at the centre of many of their arguments was the necessity of Jesus' death and the certitude of his resurrection. In turn, these philosophical debates were drawing recent converts away from the key truths of the Christian faith anchored in the cross.

Paul acknowledged that though the cruciform message he and others proclaimed had the power to save lives eternally, it was sheer folly to unbelievers; yet, when they rejected the gospel as being irrational and absurd, they remained eternally doomed. In contrast, those who were saved because of trusting in the Messiah demonstrated the Creator's eschatological power to break into the temporal realm through the proclamation of the good news.<sup>109</sup>

Paul, quoting the Septuagint version of Isaiah 29:14, stated that the Father used the gospel to demolish heathen expressions of shrewdness and annihilate pagan forms of erudition.<sup>110</sup> Many people in the apostle's day claimed to be experts in philosophy and ethics; by way of concession, the Greeks were famous for being some of the most educated people in the first century AD. The luminaries of the day included Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Indeed, their contributions to world literature, mathematics, and metaphysics are still studied in the most acclaimed universities around the globe.<sup>111</sup>

The above statements notwithstanding, as Paul had done in 1 Corinthians 1:13, he likewise used a series of rhetorical questions in verse 20 to reinforce his argument against arrogant Hellenistic intellectuals and Jewish thinkers.<sup>112</sup> Many of the elitists had earnestly looked only to wisdom in this age in the hope of finding God and miracles to show beyond doubt that he operated within space-time reality.<sup>113</sup> They failed to realise that the Creator did not intend secular, pagan erudition to be the means of knowing him; instead, he wanted people to encounter him through faith in his Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

Divine wisdom is the ability to evaluate a range of options and to follow the best course of action. One's decision is based on biblical knowledge and understanding.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, human wisdom uses philosophy and reasoning to fathom the mysteries of existence and

**108** Cf. 1 Cor 1:17.

**109** Cf. 1 Cor 1:18. Guthrie (1981:591) defines Paul's understanding of 'faith' as 'essentially acceptance of God's message'. Thiselton (2000:223) goes further by pointing out that 'faith' denotes an outlook that 'includes both an intellectual conviction of truth', along with a 'stance of heart and will' that displays a reliance upon the Father's 'salvific act' in the Son.

**110** Cf. 1 Cor 1:19. For an exposé of Paul's use of military symbolism in elaborating the apocalyptic and cosmic significance of the gospel, cf. Macky (1998). He maintains that Paul portrayed the Father as the 'warrior at the head of the eternal Kingdom of Light' (4). In addition, the Son is depicted as the Father's 'regent over the earthly realm of light'. 'Satan' is pictured as the 'Prince of Darkness' who presides over an 'opposing army', which consists of 'angelic rulers of nations'. Their temporal counterparts are 'human rulers', who operate as 'earthly agents of darkness'. Within this context, 'sin' and 'death' jointly function as the devil's 'agents' who overrun and subjugate the 'lives of individuals'; yet, through the Messiah's 'death' and 'resurrection', the Creator vanquishes all the 'powers of evil' arrayed against 'believers'.

**111** For an exploration of classical Greek schools of thought, especially their treatment of logic, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, cf. Dillon (2000); Graham (2018); Paige (1993); Violatti (2013).

**112** Cf. the comparable and suggestive wording of the LXX version of Isa 33:18.

**113** In conjunction with 1 Cor 1:21, cf. Matt 12:38-39; Mark 8:11-13; Luke 11:16, 29-32; John 2:18-22; 6:30.

**114** Cf. Prov 2:6.

115 Cf. Prov 1:7; 11:2.

116 Cf. Prov 17:24; Jas 3:13-18. For an appraisal of the concept of wisdom in the Pauline corpus, cf. Patzia (1997); Ridderbos (1997:242-5); Schnabel (1993); Schreiner (2001:92-4, 173-5); Wenham (1995:129-33).

117 Cf. 1 Cor 1:22-23. For a disquisition of the centrality of the cross in Paul's proclamation of the gospel, cf. McGrath (1993); Ridderbos (1997:182-93); Schreiner (2001:91-4); Stott (2006:38-45); Wenham (1995:147-55). McGrath (1993) highlights the following three points of emphasis: (1) the 'cross is the exclusive ground of salvation'; (2) the 'cross is the starting point of authentically Christian theology'; and, (3) the 'cross' is the 'centre of all Christian thought'.

118 Cf. 1 Cor 1:24.

the universe. Whereas people with mere human wisdom may brag about how much they know, those with divine wisdom humble themselves before the Lord in reverence and worship.<sup>115</sup> The worldly-wise flaunt authority and live for themselves, while the divinely-wise prioritise heeding the laws of the land and obeying the Creator.<sup>116</sup>

Paul readily admitted that both educated Jews and Greeks struggled to accept the crucicentric logic and apocalyptic imperative of Jesus' sacrificial death; nonetheless, as Treat (2014:144) elucidates, 'throughout redemptive history', the Father always intended to 'establish his kingdom' through the Son's 'crucifixion'. Regrettably, the divine plan of salvation involving the cross appeared to be utter madness to the worldly-wise; yet, a message that was offensive to Jewish elitists and lunacy to Greek sophisticates was the only way for people to arrive at a true knowledge of the Creator.<sup>117</sup>

The Greek phrase rendered 'Messiah crucified' was a startling contradiction in terms. Verbrugge (2008:270) clarifies that to the heathen elitists—regardless of their ethnicity—the noun translated 'Messiah' was associated with grandeur, dominance, and victory. In contrast, Fee (1987:75) indicates that the verb rendered 'crucified' denoted 'weakness', 'humiliation', and 'defeat'. Despite that, Jesus of Nazareth—the divine, incarnate Redeemer—was the locus of God's 'power'<sup>118</sup> to pardon iniquity and 'wisdom' to overcome the scourge of depravity. Garland (2003:63) adds that by means of the 'cross', humanity's social 'pyramid', including its caste system of iniquities, was upended.

In 1 Corinthians 1:25, Paul used sarcasm to challenge unsaved humanity's understanding about reality. By means of this literary technique, the apostle revealed a twofold, piercing irony. First, though the Creator appeared to be foolish, he was infinitely wiser than any person or group. Furnish (2003:40) comments that divine wisdom belongs to an 'entirely different order', for it 'transcends the boundaries of time and space'. Second, even when it seemed as if God was weak, he proved to be infinitely stronger than anyone or anything else in the entire cosmos.

Paul's broader point was that the Father, in his eternal wisdom and sovereign grace, deliberately chose a means of salvation that garnered the scorn of the world's acclaimed philosophers. Conventional expressions of sagacity reasoned that an all-powerful Creator would never allow his Son to die ignominiously on a cross; instead, such a truly supreme monarch would intervene and deliver his Son. None of this, though, mattered to God, for he used

the cross as a completely different and counterintuitive means to open wide the door of salvation to the lost.

It was not just the cross that the elitists regarded as being absurd. Likewise, in the view of unbelievers at Corinth, their Christian counterparts were deemed to be fools. Paul conceded that few, if any, of them were intellectually impressive, at least according to the sophisticated benchmarks of the day. This might be why the apostle's readers, as explained by Fee (1987:10), were tempted to incorporate some aspects of Hellenistic philosophy into their belief systems.<sup>119</sup> Allegedly, doing so would give them a greater status and respect among their peers.

Against the preceding backdrop, Paul warned his readers not to carry favour with their detractors. He reminded them that before becoming Christians, many of them did not occupy positions of power or originate from eminent families.<sup>120</sup> This situation contrasted sharply with pagan religions of the day, which favoured proselytes who had noble pedigrees and considerable wealth. Indeed, the aristocrats looked down upon the majority of the Corinthian converts as being feeble, contemptible, and deserving scorn.<sup>121</sup> Amazingly, it was to the rejects of society that the Creator entrusted the most valuable message the world has ever known.

Paul explained that the presence in the church of believers who had no rank or standing completely negated what secular, human culture deemed to be important. In this way, God disgraced the worldly-wise and overturned their warped perspective. Moreover, through the despised message of the cross, the Creator demonstrated conclusively that the lost could do nothing to earn their salvation. Consequently, no one had any basis for bragging before God that they deserved to be pardoned.<sup>122</sup>

So, all the effort in the world—along with all the wisdom in the universe—could never bring the unsaved any closer to the Lord. Regardless of whether it was the desire to be declared righteous, obtain holiness, or be redeemed from spending an eternity in hell, none of it was secured apart from faith in the Messiah. Beale (2011:476) is close to the mark when he refers to the Saviour as the 'complete and perfect eschatological' embodiment of these and every other eternal verity. Ladd and Hagner (1997:589) point out that the emphasis in 1 Corinthians 1:30 is on the ontological reality of the Son as the enfleshment of the believers' 'righteousness, holiness, and redemption'.

Accordingly, as Paul surmised in his paraphrase of Jeremiah 9:24, no person had any right to celebrate his or her own accomplishments; rather, he or she was to centre his or her

**119** The amalgam of Hellenistic philosophy and Christian theology amounted to religious syncretism. For a synopsis of this phenomena within a Greco-Roman cultural context, cf. Arnold (1997); Pearson (2000); Schermerhorn (1924).

**120** Cf. 1 Cor 1:26.

**121** Cf. 1 Cor 1:27-28.

**122** Cf. 1 Cor 1:29.

123 Cf. 1 Cor 1:31.

124 Cf. 1 Cor 2:3.

125 In the first century AD, Macedonia was part of northern Greece.

126 Cf. Acts 16:8-10.

127 Cf. Acts 17:16-34.

128 Cf. Acts 18:1.

129 Cf. Acts 18:2.

130 Cf. Acts 18:3-6.

131 Cf. Acts 18:7-8.

132 Cf. Acts 18:11, 18.

133 Cf. 1 Cor 2:1.

134 Cf. 2 Cor 10:10.

135 Cf. 1 Cor 2:1. Metzger (1994) spotlights a textual discrepancy in 1 Cor 2:1. A larger number of pertinent Greek manuscripts read μαρτύριον ('testimony'; cf. TR1881; SBLGNT; KJV; NKJV; RSV; NASB; ESV; Lexham; NRSV; NIV; NET), whereas a smaller number read μυστήριον ('mystery'; cf. Westcott; NA27; NA28; NRSV; CSB; NLT). Within the letters attributed to Paul, some form of the phrase 'mystery' plus either 'of God' or 'of Christ' is common (cf. 1 Cor 2:7; 4:1; Eph 3:4; Col 2:2; 4:3). There is one instance of the phrase 'testimony of our Lord' (cf. 2 Tim 1:8), and another of the phrase 'testimony of Christ' (cf. 1 Cor 1:6). Elsewhere, within the writings of Paul there is no other occurrence of 'testimony of God'. According to Fee (1987:91), the latter phrase, then, signifies the harder reading in 1 Cor 2:1, which explains why it enjoys stronger preference among various modern English language translations.

confidence and exultation only in the Lord.<sup>123</sup> This declaration remained true even for the apostle, who, as Ellingworth and Hatton (1993) point out, was 'weak from a human perspective' when he first arrived at Corinth.<sup>124</sup> This fact explains why he referred to himself as a relevant example of someone who though once eternally lost, found redemption through faith in the Messiah.

Even though Luke did not say anything in Acts about Paul's correspondence to the Corinthians, Luke did provide some background information about the apostle's founding of the church during his second missionary journey. Paul had come to Macedonia<sup>125</sup> after a vision he experienced while in Troas.<sup>126</sup> Before heading to Athens, he established churches in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. The apostle's time in Athens convinced him that worldly wisdom was the epitome of folly.<sup>127</sup>

Next, after leaving Athens, Paul journeyed to Corinth.<sup>128</sup> There, with the support of an influential, married, Christian couple named Priscilla and Aquila,<sup>129</sup> the apostle preached in the local synagogue, that is, until Jewish opposition forced him to redirect the focus of his ministry on the resident Gentiles.<sup>130</sup> As a result of Paul leading a number of people to trust in the Saviour, a congregation was established.<sup>131</sup> The faith community consisted of both believing Jews and Gentiles. To them the apostle ministered for more than 18 months, and he accomplished a great deal of eternal good while headquartered in the city.<sup>132</sup>

As in Athens, the Hellenistic culture that Paul encountered at Corinth evaluated the presentation of new ideas on the basis of its eloquence and intellectual depth. So, in order for a message to be accepted, it had to be persuasively delivered; yet, three years later, as the apostle wrote about his earlier visit to Corinth, he recalled that he deliberately rejected this approach when proclaiming the gospel to the unsaved.<sup>133</sup>

Grosheide (1984:57) clarifies that a missionary such as Paul had the ability to speak like a well-trained Greek 'orator'. In that day, rhetoricians studied how to make clever speeches and use important-sounding words to convince an audience. Remarkably, the apostle rejected this option and, instead, heralded the good news in a simple, unpretentious manner.<sup>134</sup> The Greek phrase literally rendered 'testimony of God'<sup>135</sup> could refer to Paul's message about the Creator, the witness God made through the apostle, or his testimony initiated by God.

Regardless of which interpretive option is preferred, Paul declared divinely inspired and authoritative truth concerning Jesus' crucifixion. Indeed, the apostle intentionally decided to focus all

his attention on the cross-event.<sup>136</sup> Despite the contrarian consensus opinion voiced by Paul's detractors, the Spirit blessed the missionary's efforts. Nothing else could explain why so many unsaved people were converted as a result of the apostle's evangelistic ministry at Corinth.

Moreover, there was nothing either winsome or laudatory in Paul to attribute to his success. After all, before the apostle first arrived in the city, he had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, expelled out of Thessalonica and Berea, and spurned in Athens.<sup>137</sup> This harrowing set of circumstances is the basis for his statement that at that time, he was completely exhausted, felt totally inadequate, and feared for his life.<sup>138</sup>

The implication is that Paul's physical health, emotional state, and psychological condition kept him from preaching at his best. To the Corinthians listening to the apostle, he must have seemed poorly prepared to deliver a compelling witness; yet, despite Paul's run-down condition and dishevelled appearance, he received sustaining power from the Spirit to minister effectively to the lost in the city.<sup>139</sup>

Neither Paul's oratory skill nor his wide-ranging knowledge could explain the amazing number of conversions that resulted in Corinth.<sup>140</sup> The wonderful results could be traced only to the presence and power of the Spirit enabling the apostle to proclaim the gospel in straightforward terms and with unmitigated conviction.<sup>141</sup> As he looked back on those earlier days, he reminded his readers that what had taken place was a work of God and not anything based on human erudition and cleverness.

Expressed another way, Paul neither resorted to staged theatrics nor rehearsed techniques to manipulate a response from the people who heard the gospel. Garland (2003:84) infers that while the apostle undoubtedly studied and prepared his messages in advance, he did not rely upon his own shrewdness and brilliance to achieve his missionary goals; rather, he looked to the Spirit's wisdom and strength. In turn, this encouraged the Corinthians to do the same.<sup>142</sup>

Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 might contain an implicit allusion to some visitors in the city who were guilty of distorting the apostle's teachings with their own human-centred views about the Messiah. If so, it is possible to surmise that these opponents of the apostle claimed their understanding of truth was more valid than his. They could have also maintained that their sophisticated logic and carefully crafted oratory put Paul to shame.

**136** Paul also proclaimed the truth of the Son's resurrection from the dead; cf. 1 Cor 2:2; 15:1-8.

**137** Cf. Acts 16:22-24; 17:10, 13-14, 32.

**138** Cf. 1 Cor 2:3.

**139** Cf. Paul's illuminating comments recorded in 2 Cor 12:9-10.

**140** Paul's impressive speaking ability, his deep understanding of God's Word, and his extensive awareness of his contemporary cultural horizon were all on display when he delivered his speech in the presence of the Areopagus council at Athens; cf. Acts 17:22-31.

**141** Cf. 1 Cor 2:4.

**142** Cf. 1 Cor 2:5

The proposed, preceding scenario sheds light on Paul's criticism of his readers' inflated regard for secular, pagan forms of sagacity. Out of pastoral concern, the apostle warned them about the dangers of their fascination with worldly wisdom. He declared that it would lead them to self-sufficiency and self-congratulation, which were the exact opposite of what would bring them to Christian maturity.

In any case, Paul did not try to hide his personal limitations; rather, he used them to magnify God's power. The presence of so many converts in Corinth demonstrated that effectiveness in ministry did not reside in any preacher—not matter how gifted and talented that person might be—but in the message about the crucified and risen Messiah. Ultimately, then, ministers of the gospel did not have to be brilliant, eloquent, or sophisticated; instead, they simply needed to rely completely on the Spirit's presence and power to bring the lost to saving faith.

## 6. Stuttering and the Beauty of Christ

### 6.1. Christ's beauty made perfect in weakness

As we have seen in the lives of Moses and the Apostle Paul, God's power is made perfect in weakness. Similarly, the beauty of Christ is made perfect in our own weakness, whether it is stuttering or some other disability, or the like. The beauty of Christ is no doubt infinitely perfect in itself,<sup>143</sup> in its essence, but by *being made* perfect, we mean its expression by which we perceive its manifestation in our midst. Christ himself accomplished his divinely-ordained task of salvation (Moltmann 1993) by means of the counterintuitive crucifixion, the ultimate symbol of humiliation and suffering in the ancient Roman Empire (Rutledge 2017:72–105; Wright 2016:19–21). While the flogging and crucifixion of Jesus were horrific and grisly, void of any sense of the beautiful (Stott 2006:31–32), Jesus' response,<sup>144</sup> sacrifice and salvific purpose are infinitely beautiful.

While one dare not liken stuttering or any other disability to Jesus' crucifixion and his atoning work, we might in some limited sense share in his humiliation and affliction.<sup>145</sup> If we submit our lives to Christ, we will begin to see the Spirit's presence and power in our lives illuminating the beauty of Christ to others, even when we find ourselves utterly inadequate. Both Moses and Paul, and many others were acutely aware of their inadequacy and febleness, yet God hand-picked them as his instruments to accomplish his divine purposes. While this is folly to believers and unbelievers alike, it is genius on the part of God, whereby the person who stutters is

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Beeke 2011; Owen 2015.

<sup>144</sup> Christ's beauty is evident during his crucifixion when he, naked, in excruciating agony, and suffocating, turns to his mother and to John, and says to her, 'behold your son', and says to his friend, 'behold your mother' (John 19:25-25). Or when Jesus prays to his father about those who have crucified them in an ultimate expression of forgiveness says, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' (Luke 23:34). The beauty of Christ is expressed here by his words and actions in his ultimate position of weakness, not to mention all that he is achieving in his sacrificial and atoning work on the cross.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, 2 Cor 1:5, Phil 3:10, Col 1:24, 1 Pet 4:13.

emptied of his or her own brilliance. And even if he or she has such brilliance, they are unable to express it as they would like in everyday speech. Nevertheless, they are promised the comforting presence of Christ (2 Cor. 1:5) and the sustaining power from the Spirit to minister effectively, as they have nowhere else to look, but to the Spirit's wisdom and strength. It is despite stuttering that the stuttering theologian can proclaim the gospel that has the power to save lives eternally. Despite the means (stuttering speech and all that accompanies it) and the absurdness of the cruciform message, the Creator's eschatological power to break into this world through gospel proclamation is reinforced in strength and looks even more beautiful.

## 6.2. Feeling the inadequacy and suffering of others

Those who have suffered ill usually relate to those who suffer, perhaps more than someone who has never undergone similar suffering. God breaks into our world and experiences our life, our temptation, and our hardship climaxing ultimately in his agonising crucifixion. If anyone can relate to our suffering and humiliation, it is Jesus Christ (Moltmann 1993). Similarly, though certainly not comprehensibly, Christ calls on the theologian's speech to identify with those who feel inadequate or who have suffered in similar ways. God had concern for his people, the Hebrews, in Egypt, and so he hand-picked Moses as his instrument in leading his chosen people out of captivity and into the promised land. Christ has concern for the broken world, and for those who suffer, and thus calls upon those who have experienced humiliation, with the power of the Spirit, to comfort others through their speech and their writing, to point them to the beauty of the crucified and risen Messiah. McDermott, talking about stuttering, has said, 'No doubt your suffering this malady has caused you suffering. Let that knowledge of your own pain cause you to try to feel the pain of others and express to them your consolation. They will appreciate it' (2016:124). Similarly, Davies (2003:33–46) talks about how our own transformation and ontological existence is intensified as we begin to have compassion for another.

## 6.3. Stuttering inspires creativity and beauty

Depending on how the person who stutters responds to their stutter, it may stimulate tenacity and personal growth. Stuttering can be an extraordinary teacher.<sup>146</sup> As Baily has said, 'We know little about the great depths of the human spirit until we have endured suffering... Suffering<sup>147</sup> can become a doorway to profound wisdom' (Bailey 2009:70, 74). There are plenty of opportunities for

**146** Cf. Bailey 2009:70.

**147** One might argue that stuttering is a form of suffering, for the sake of this paper I take that approach

stuttering to be a catalyst for creativity and beauty. Stott tells us that ‘deprivation’ of any kind often forms the basis for ‘creativity’ (Stott 2006:368). Dr Tournier reminds us that ‘we are scarcely ever creative without suffering’ (cited in Stott 2006:369). And while it is not suffering or stuttering itself that makes us creative or tenacious, it is nevertheless how we respond to it. This is evident in the lives of those mentioned in McDermott’s (2016) book, *Famous Stutterers: Twelve Inspiring People Who Achieved Great Things while Struggling with an Impediment*.

Moses, as we have already seen, stuttered, and while he ‘was forced out of self-pity’, he ‘discovered that stuttering did not cripple him. He still stuttered, but he managed to lead a nation through perilous times’ (McDermott 2016:120). God used him to perform astonishing miraculous works, unprecedented in the history of the people of Israel and wrote the Pentateuch, including at least three beautiful songs.<sup>148</sup>

Paul the apostle did not stutter, although writing to the Corinthian Church he told his readers how he came not with lofty speech or plausible words of wisdom, but in weakness and trembling. Yet, his message was a demonstration of the Spirit and power of God.<sup>149</sup> Later, in 1 Corinthians 13,<sup>150</sup> Paul composes arguably one of the most beautiful poems on love, not to mention the creativity in all his other letters.<sup>151</sup> Whether our speech is deficient, or if we are not particularly articulate, learned or wise by human standards, we need not be hindered from doing great things (McDermott 2016:121). If we avail ourselves as Moses and Paul did with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will use and inspire us to demonstrate his power and beauty in creative ways.

#### 6.4. Stuttering as architecture for the beautiful

Architecture is fundamentally an envelope housing people and objects, accommodating human activity. By arranging form and space, it responds to specific conditions of function, context and purpose whilst communicating meaning (Ching 1996:ix). The American architect, Richard Meier, defined architecture as ‘vital and enduring because it contains us; it describes space, space we move through, exist in and use’ (Quintal 2016:online). Claudio Silvestrin (Elle Decor 2018:online), on the other hand, argues that architecture ought to complete nature, making nature more beautiful, giving it power.

Reflecting on the architecture of art museums, among others, I identify three options for basic design principles: (1) the art museum could be designed as a sculptured monument to the architect, the client’s name or the client’s marketing brand,<sup>152</sup> (2)

**148** Cf. Exod 15 :1-21, Deut 32 :1-43, Ps 90.

**149** Cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5.

**150** Cf. Liroy’s journal article (2018), ‘The Supreme Importance of Promoting Equity, Kindness, and Humility: A Descriptive and Comparative Analysis of Micah 6:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13’. *Conspectus* 25:56-91.

**151** Although I enunciate the beauty and creativity of Paul’s writings, one ought not to discount divine inspiration and the fact that Paul was a very learned man.

**152** The architects at COOP HIMMELB(L)AU, for example, believe that an art museum in a city ought not only be a place where art is housed and viewed, but that it should also contribute to the urban fabric. This is evident in their Akron Art Museum, Knight Building Akron, USA, 2004. The extension stands in stark contrast to the original structure which consisted of brick and limestone, but now has an additional three stories of steel and glazing, with three components (1) the Crystal, which functions as the entrance, (2) the Gallery box, and (3) the Roof Cloud which is suspended above the building. No doubt, a sculptured monument to the architect and their client (Coop Himmelb(l)au, n.d.:online).

the architecture responds to its urban and/or geographic context,<sup>153</sup> or (3) the building may be well designed to be purposely inconspicuous in order to enunciate the valuable artefacts housed therein. In the third option, the aesthetics of the architecture are de-emphasised to emphasise the focus on its valued contents. Such a building does not compete with its contents or draw attention to itself, at least from the interior, but rather becomes architecture for the beautiful.<sup>154</sup> It is the last principle I am most interested in for the concept of the theologian's stutter as architecture for the beautiful. John the Baptist shares a similar sentiment; he proclaimed, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30, ESV).

Any Christian who stutters ought not hide his or her personal vocal limitations, as we saw in Paul. Our speech need not be brilliant, eloquent or sophisticated, yet it may be employed to enunciate the incomparable excellencies of Christ. Our limitations<sup>155</sup> in speech, or whatever else, are to house the beauty and power of the divine. The beauty of Christ does not ultimately reside in our talent or giftedness, but in broken vessels where the spirit of the crucified and risen Messiah works.<sup>156</sup> While the Apostle Paul did indeed study and prepare his messages, he did not rely upon his own astuteness and intelligence to achieve his missionary goals. Instead, he looked to the Spirit's wisdom and strength, often feeling totally inadequate. As a result, Paul saw an amazing number of conversions to the Christian faith, not to mention missionary success and Spirit-inspired writing for the New Testament canon.

While there is the continual danger of the stuttering theologian's frustration and introspective obsession with the impediment, he or she ought to fix their gaze on the beatific vision of Christ,<sup>157</sup> for it is only there where the joy of life is found.<sup>158</sup> The theologian can only point to the beauty of Christ and describe it to his or her listeners or readers, if he or she has gazed upon it.

The speech of the stuttering theologian, and by 'speech' I mean all communication output, is to be unobtrusive architecture, designed to house the beauty of Christ, so to speak, and because the stutter houses the beauty and the power of the divine, the stutter itself becomes a beautiful thing.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper was written from the perspective of stuttering; however, the same may be considered for any infirmity, disability or dire situation in which the Christian or Christian theologian

**153** An example is Daniel Libeskind's extension to the Denver Art Museum, Denver, USA, 2006, which blends dramatically with the Rocky Mountains which sit alongside it, as well as its correlating urban fabric. The architect's goal was to represent part of the city's new cosmopolitan identity. Libeskind's trademark vertigo-inducing, sharply-angled form and spaces contribute to his marketing, and are a monument to be admired (Studio Libeskind, n.d.:online). Although not an art museum, a famous example is the residence designed in 1935 by Frank Lloyd Wright, called 'Fallingwater' in rural southwestern Pennsylvania. It is nestled among trees and has a series of cantilevers over falling waters (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, n.d.:online).

**154** Another design by Frank Lloyd Wright is the 'Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum', often referred to as 'The Guggenheim'. It is an art museum at 1071 Fifth Avenue on the corner of East 89th Street in the Upper East Side neighbourhood of Manhattan, New York City. The building is noticeable from the exterior; however, the interior accommodates a large spiral ramp which one ascends, viewing the artwork fixed on the wall, as one gently makes one's way to the top of the spiral. In this way Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Guggenheim' is inconspicuous, becoming architecture for the beautiful (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, n.d.).

**155** Or whatever limitations we might have, whether it is sickness, disease, disability, poverty or similar.

**156** Cf. 2 Cor 12:5-10.

**157** By 'beatific vision', I do not mean the eschatological notion found in Roman Catholicism.

**158** McDermott 2016:120

may find themselves. The paper could have been ‘cancer and the beauty of Christ’, ‘poverty and the beauty of Christ’ or ‘Asperger’s and the beauty of Christ’, or whatever it might be. Nevertheless, this article is the story of a specific theologian’s speech, taking cognisance of Moses’ speech impediment, and Paul and his willingness to put aside his intelligence and shrewdness for the sake of allowing the Holy Spirit’s wisdom and strength to work through him, thus being a vessel for the beauty of Christ evident in the Acts of the Apostles and his letters. Consequently, we discovered that stuttering itself may be a beautiful thing, housing the superlative beauty of Christ. The paper began with Robert Falconer’s testimony as someone who has stuttered since childhood, after which an overview of stuttering was presented. This led to serious biblical exegetical studies on relevant texts, namely, Exodus 4:10–17 and 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:5. Drawing from the previous sections, the last section of the paper offered a pastoral-devotional approach, in understanding stuttering in light of the beauty of Christ, with a special focus on the stuttering theologian’s speech.

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