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Cover image

Paul writing his epistles (1620)
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Irony as a Literary Stylistic Device in Amos's Choice of Metaphors: reading from the perspective of the Tigrigna Proto-Semitic Language

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Abstract

This article investigates irony as a literary stylistic device in the book and analyses the effect of irony on the likely complex metaphor texts read in the perspective of the Tigrigna Proto-Semitic language (see Appendix A). In the introduction, the state of scholarship on literary and rhetorical devices and theories of irony and metaphor have been reviewed. In the two following sections, irony is distinguished as a literary stylistic device in the book; and engaging the language and culture of Eritrea, selected ironic metaphors (4:1–3; 5:1–3; 5:18–20; 7:7–8; 8:1–3) are analysed and interpreted for the possible meanings in the integrated Tigrigna language and culture (TGN) versions. In Eritrea, in Tigrigna ethnic, figures of speech—irony and metaphor are part of their culture and we have chosen to read Amos through Eritrean eyes.

Keywords

Ironic metaphors; Irony; Figurative languages; Linguistics approach; Prophets' speech; Pro-Semitic languages

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² The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The language of Amos is dominated by figures of speech. Good's (1980) systematic focus on irony in the OT has caused many biblical scholars to work on irony in biblical literature. Recently, a few studies have been done on irony as a figure of speech in the book of Amos.

Irony, ቅኔ (qinie), in the Amharic language is classified into two ሰም (sem) and ወርቅ (werq) where ሰም (sem) reads the sentence literally and (werq, meaning 'gold') compares the meaning of the sentence to mining for gold. Conceptually, irony, ቅኔ (qinie), is understood in Tigrigna the same way as it is in Amharic. Metaphor, in Tigrigna culture, is a figure of speech by which speakers introduce any issue, to draw the attention of the audience as well as to unpack briefly the importance of the package. Moreover, irony, another figure of speech, is introduced when a speaker wants to say something specific, but communicates it in a colourful way of speaking, which we call ቡሕሉል (respectful words) ላዛ ዘለዎ ዘረባ kind words) in Tigrigna. Tigrigna tradition has been much influenced by the Old Testament lifestyle, as in marriage, death, religion, language and so on. The sister Semitic languages, Geez, Amharic and Tigre, could articulate something in common, out of unity in diversity, to minimise the gap in understanding the texts of the Scriptures. The research has identified and defined the well-known figurative languages, which may include metaphor, simile, personification, irony, metonymy, symbol and synecdoche as conceptual thoughts in order to clearly identify irony in the book of Amos. The aim of this study is, therefore, to examine the possibility of interpreting the biblical ironies and ironic metaphors found in the book of Amos in the context of Tigrigna language and culture (TGN) in an integrated reading of the two Tigrigna Bible versions.

2. Scholarship on Literary, Rhetorical Devices and Irony in the Book of Amos

2.1 Literary and Rhetorical Devices

Some examples of devices, structuring the book as literary, rhetorical strategies and poetic techniques, done by Mays (1969), Andersen and Freedman (1970), Stuart (1987), Hayes (1988), Smith (1989), Noble (1995), Hubbard, Bramer himself, and Limburg (Bramer 1999), Möller (2000) and others portray in the scholarship to understand the message of the book, have contributed a lot in building the small library of the book of Amos.

However, the function of figurative languages in the communication has not been investigated in the techniques and organisational patterns as interpretive strategy to understand the message of the book.

2.2 Defining Irony

Unlike other figures of speech, irony is not easily identified, and it is more difficult to comprehend its meaning in the Scriptures. A text with irony makes it more complex for the implied reader to understand the speaker's utterance, than it does for the intended audience, that could at least associate the appropriate irony of their time with its techniques of communication for better interpretation.

According to Duke, irony can be described as 'beautiful, brilliant, inviting, sometimes comic, sometimes cruel, [and] always enigmatic' (1985:8). Stable irony is intended or created deliberately (Booth 1974:5). Duke, considering Booth's stable irony perception, argues that irony is unintended (Duke 1985:19). According to Lee, 'situational irony is the presentation of events in which there are incompatibilities of which at least one person is unaware' (Lee 1988:32). Dramatic irony is the irony of theatre, but it could be abundantly present in any narrative too (Duke 1985:23). Amos (5:19) presents the judgmental oracle in a dramatic way, but the dramatic irony behaves as verbal irony (Duke 1985:23). Verbal irony might be accomplished in numerous ways. Duke defines irony as a literary device which has 'a double-levelled literary phenomenon in which two tiers of meaning stand in some opposition to each other and in which some degree of unawareness is expressed or implied' (1985:7). Colebrook proposes that 'irony—the possibility that what we say might be read for what it means rather than what we say—is the very possibility of meaning' (2000:24, 25).

Patricia S Han observes that verbal irony, in contrast to the approach of psycholinguistics, linguistics anthropology and literary critics, does not exclude a discursive attitude of irony or the use of language (2002:31). These approaches may be distinguished in the level of discourse, sentence and text (2002:31).

Sharp addresses the problem that 'the literature is so vast that reviewing it comprehensively would be impossible ... to cover theories of irony in the discipline of philosophy' (2009:11). According to Christian Burgers, Margot van Mulken and Peter Jan Schellens (2011:187), studies on how verbal irony has been understood in recent years have contributed little information, and no systematic identification of irony has yet been developed.

In this study, however, we focus on verbal irony, based on Duke's definition, as a method, in identifying irony as a literary stylistic device, and a literary interpretive strategy on selected complex texts, ironic metaphors, in the book of Amos

2.3 Review of Current Theological Perspectives of Irony in the Book of Amos

2.3.1 Shelly (1992) has made a great effort to focus systematically on irony in the book of Amos. Shelly combines the literary approach with the form-critical and traditio-historical methods to identify irony in Amos (1992:7). She is more interested in reading the text as a persuasive tool to prove that irony is part of rhetoric (1992:4). According to Shelly, the social and historical setting which depends upon the author and audience determines irony (1992:26). The ironic art of Amos includes 'the use of conventional speech forms, traditions and other literary conventions like rhetorical questions, metaphors and wordplay' (1992:154). Shelly suggests that 'irony in Amos is shaped by a literary analysis of the text which is sensitive to the rhetorical dimensions of prophetic speech ... as communicative discourse' (1992:62).

Sharp (2009) in her study of irony in the Hebrew Bible, sees the textual irony in rhetorical and theological hermeneutics (2009:9). On the rhetorical side, she believes that the spoken ironic is better understood than a 'naïvely realistic reading of their plots and characters and rhetorics'. Sharp, believing her definition is neither static nor substitutional, affirms that the appropriateness, significance, and meanings of irony depend on the reader's understanding of the texts (2009:25).

Domeris has recently published an article on 'Shades of irony in the anti-language of Amos' (2016:1).

The language of Amos could be described as 'a wonderful mixture of humour and threat, sarcasm and irony, hyperbole and prediction' (2016:1). According to Domeris anti-language 'is more than an alternative reality; it is language in conscious opposition to a dominant group' (2016:2). Domeris (2016:2), considering the development of the use of the notion of 'anti-language', 'anti-society', 'insider-outsider' and a notion of prophetic 'opposition group' by several scholars, uses 'anti-language' in his articles (1994, 1999) on Jeremiah to illustrate that Jeremiah, like Amos, 'in defence of his position as a member of the Yahweh-only party ... used irony, satire, sarcasm, humour and deliberate distortion to achieve his purpose' (1994:9–14).

The effect of anti-language and the dominance of irony are vital to understanding the book of Amos (Domeris 2016:7). Anti-language allows us to appreciate and see in the book of Amos a unified text and its irony as a means to an end (2016:7). The shades of irony in the book of Amos encourage us theologically to hope with the insiders, and share the promise to the outsiders as well (2016:7).

3. Understanding Metaphors in the Book of Amos

Amos was called to declare YHWH's indictments accompanied by judgment against Israel and the surrounding nations. In his style, he uses metaphor as a rhetorical device, which merely concerns the house of Israel. In contrast to metaphors used in the book of Jeremiah and other prophets, metaphors in Amos signify the explicit, implicit and complex nature of biblical metaphors which demonstrate a theological contribution to the book. The author identifies the following metaphors as ironical prefiguring in the book of Amos (4:1–3; 5:1–3; 5:18–20; 7:7–8; 8:1–3). Hermanson (2006:2) has done research evaluating how metaphors in the book of Amos are translated into the recent Zulu Bible translation based on theories concerning the possibility of the translation of metaphor from one language to another.

Metaphor, which was understood as a rhetorical and ornamental device, has embraced a wide area of different theories, approaches and aspects in recent years. The 'theory-substitution view' by Aristotle (384–322 BC), 'interactive theory of metaphor' by Richards (1936:93), 'a system of associated commonplaces' and 'an interaction theory' by Black (1962), 'Cognitive theory of metaphor' by Lakoff and Johnson (1985), and 'Perspectival Theory' by Kittay (1990) have led modern scholarship to focus on the effectiveness of the figure of speech in determining the interpretation of the text.

The function of irony in metaphoric texts is a negation, overstatement or understatement of the concept of the metaphor. Hence, the metaphor should be read opposite to its meaning norm either in a positive or negative aspect of its concept. By positive or negative aspect we mean the way irony exemplified itself in violating the metaphor. Mathematically, irony could be represented in an ironic metaphor statement as a sign of inequalities in front of the metaphor (\pm) where (+) indicates an overstatement or understatement and (–) indicates negation. However, the effect of irony in the interpretation still depends on the kind of metaphor on which it acts. Metaphors are expressed, generally, as the opposite of similes.

A metaphor unlike a simile, in its simplest meaning, engages ‘the substitution of one word or phrase (vehicle) instead of another (tenor)’ (Lee 1988:51). However, the substitution may be positively or negatively engaged in the literary art.

4. Irony as a Literary Stylistic Device in the Book of Amos

In our survey, we have discovered at least nine figures of speech; and irony has been used in the book very frequently. This shows that Amos’s discourses were much influenced by the stylistic device of irony. Beyond ironised figures of thought, ironic metaphor, ironic simile, ironic wordplay and irony use of rhetorical, irony has been used in its diverse characteristics as ‘irony of encouragement’ (4:4–5), ‘irony of mockery’ (4:4–5), ‘irony of benediction’ (4:4–5), ‘irony of ambiguity’ (4:6–11), ‘irony of doxology’ (4:13, 5:8–9, 9:5–6) and ‘dramatic or situational irony’ (5:18–20; 6:9–10; 8:4–6; 9:1). Stylistically, one can observe how much the expression of irony has dominated the oracles of Amos. For the sake of our main focus, we have listed only *ironic metaphors*.

We have engaged integrated approaches to analyse the interpretive meaning of each selected text, (4:1–3; 5:1–3; 5:18–20; 7:7–8 and 8:1–3), as *ironic metaphor*. To establish the order of interpreting the two intermingled figures, metaphor and irony, we have applied *metaphor first order* approach based on Popa’s (2010) methodology

4.1. ‘Cows of Bashan’ (Amos 4:1-3)

The passage has been a field of argument in linguistics’ approach in recent scholarship by Terence Kleven (1996), Emmanuel O Nwaoru (2009) and the latest study by Brian Irwin (2012).

In verse 1, ‘the Cows of Bashan’ which are indicted for oppressing the poor, crushing the needy and engaging their lords for drinking, have the restriction of human agents, and human victims. Hence, the verse in itself constitutes a semantic incongruity. The ‘Cows of Bashan’ are associated with the people of Israel in Samaria. In verse 2, the words אֲתָכֶם and עַלְיָכֶם describe the person to whom they are addressed as masculine. In verse 3 the verbs תִּצְאָנָה and הִשְׁלַכְתֶּנָּה stand for feminine. In the Tigrigna language, both versions describe the addressee as feminine. The addressees are called masculine and feminine interchangeably in the Hebrew Bible. These addressees will be carried away with hooks, and the last of them with fishing hooks, which by itself looks like another

fresh metaphor; there is no incongruity in the statement for it lacks a vehicle. Reading verses 2 and 3 in the light of verse 1, the sense of the context can be read better. Hence, Amos 4:1–3 is incongruous, since it involves two semantic fields (humans and animals), which is a particularity of a metaphor.

Nevertheless, what makes the text ironic? Is Amos concerned about the Cows of Bashan literally? The text adds a description of who these ‘Cows of Bashan’ are. Looking at the construction of the sentences, we can speculate who the cows are. Firstly, the cows are on the mountain of Samaria. This on its own could lead someone to contemplate literally that the ‘Cows of Bashan’ were taken and placed on the mountain of Samaria. Secondly, the next three clauses, ‘who oppress the poor, who crush the needy and who say to their lords “bring and let us drink,”’ demonstrate, however, that the cows, assuming a human nature, subjugate human beings, the poor and the needy and talk to their chiefs, behaviour which no one expects in animals. Hence, ‘what is said’ is not true, overestimated, pretended, and ‘what is meant’ should be examined to find the truth ironically.

In Tigrigna and sister languages Tigre, Amharic and Ge’ez, the text has been constructed differently, in that Tigrigna, Amharic and Ge’ez address the ‘Cows of Bashan’ directly. In translating the word ሃገሻ both Tigrigna versions and Tigre use ስምዓ (hear) in female gender plural. In Amharic ስም (hear) is used for female, male; and for both female and male genders as plural.

However, in Ge’ez, ስምዑ (hear) has been translated faithfully to the Masoretic Text (MT) in number and gender. The Tigrigna old version and Amharic translate the text in feminine gender, but address ‘the Cows of Bashan.’ The Tigre and Tigrigna new version, however, address the women of Samaria who behaved like ‘Cows of Bashan.’ The TGN new version adds a description of ከም ኣሓ ባሳን ዝሰባኡኦን (who fattened like Cows of Bashan) beyond the unwanted characteristics the cows demonstrate in the text. The TGN old version has changed the word ሃገሻ ስምዑ (hear), masculine and or collective female and male gender, into ስምዓ (hear) in female gender plural to make the text agree grammatically, and remains faithful to the MT in that the addressees are the Cows of Bashan unlike in the TGN new version.

From the integrated TGN versions and the culture of the Tigrigna people in Eritrea, the text reads that Amos is addressing his usual audience in female gender to demean their honour, and describing them as fattened cows to overemphasise their prosperity. In

Tigrigna, Semitic in origin, when someone either male or female addresses another male using the feminine form, it is an intolerable shame for that person. A Tigrigna speaker has no problem to clearly understand Luke 13:32 *τη αλωπεκι ταυτη* | ነዛ ወኻርያ ... ባልዋ 'Go and tell that fox' (Luke 13:32 NIV) where Christ demeans the king by calling him in the feminine gender. Tigrigna sister languages do this in the same manner.

Hence, the interpretive analysis of our study shows, that Amos's stylistic device of irony in the metaphorical complexity of the 'Cows of Bashan,' portrays an alternative addressee of Amos's domain: Israel, the people of Israel, house of Israel, house of Jacob, Isaac, Jacob, and house of Jeroboam—as representative of the kingdom. Amos uses the character of the animal imagery 'Cows of Bashan' to represent the injustice of the prosperous nation. The ironic metaphor, 'Cows of Bashan,' however, disparages the oppressors, addressing them with a female gender before the coming judgment of the Lord.

4.2 The Virgin Israel Ironic Metaphor (Amos 5:1-3)

Many scholarly works consider Amos chapter 5 as a formal lamentation. In Eritrea, the events in Amos 5:1, 16–17 are very typical of Hebrew traditions. All Tigrigna sister languages, Tigre, Ge'ez, Amharic and Tigrigna translate *תִּתְּנָה* as a common word *ድንግል* (virgin). In Tigrigna culture and language, the word *ድንግል* (virgin) designates a unique quality of a faithful girl, who is a symbol of purity and sacredness.

In the TGN culture, a man expects his bride to be *ሰብኣይ ዘይፈለገ* *ድንግል* (no man had ever known her sexually). In Tigrigna marriage culture *ድንግል* (virgin) shows the identity of a faithful girl morally and the nobility of a family and a community.

לְאִשׁוֹ תִּתְּנָה. is an indication of the unadulterated quality of the people of Israel metaphorically. However, calling the corrupted nation *תִּתְּנָה*. is an expression of negation, belittling the nation ironically. Hence, this enabled us to comprehend the text as an *ironic metaphor* that the adulterated Israel had fallen in judgment in her land. Amos's lamentation for 'Israel's virgin' tragedy, contrary to tradition, has also got an expression of *ironic metaphor*. In Tigrigna culture, *መልቀስ* (lamentation) is very typical of the Hebrew tradition up to the present.

4.3 The Day of Darkness and not Light Ironic Metaphor (5:18-20)

The day of the LORD has been treated differently by scholars in the last hundred years. There has been widespread disagreement

among scholars concerning the concept and origin of **הַיְהוָה יוֹם**. The concept of **הַיְהוָה יוֹם** which was considered as a departure text, has not been investigated fully in Amos 5:18–20. The problem revolves around three characteristics of the day: its origin, concept and phrase formula.

Both TGN versions agree in translating the **הַיְהוָה יוֹם** formula as **መዓልተ እግዚአብሔር** (the day of God). Another TGN version, deuterocanonical books in Tigrigna which is called **ሰማንያ አሃዱ** (eighty-one), translates the formula in the same way. The phrase ‘that day or it is for you a *day* of darkness not a *day* of light’ in the Tigrigna new version reading indicates clearly that the day of the LORD is different to other events. The TGN new version approves Amos’s claim that **መዓልተ እግዚአብሔር** (day of the Lord) is **መዓልተ ፍርዲ** (day of Judgment). The word **ወይለኹም** (woe to you) for **יוֹם** is specifically translated to announce judgment, not for lamentation, in Tigrigna Scriptures, instead. The word **ወዮ** (woe) and the phrase **ዋዩ ዋይ** (alas, alas) or (ho, ho) are differently used for judgment and lamentation respectively. The scholarly work of the TGN new version specifies that the reading of the old should be read with the concept of the ‘day of the Lord’ as a coin with two faces, **መዓልተ ጸልማት** (day of darkness) and **መዓልተ ብርሃን** (day of light). Hence, Tigrigna reads the day of the Lord as **ብርሃን** (light) and **ጸልማት** (darkness) from the narrative of Amos, considering that the two parties, Amos and his audience are in conflict about the expectation, not about the concept of the day of the Lord.

Literarily, Amos starts his oracle by condemning the perspective of the people on **הַיְהוָה יוֹם**. Regardless of the condemnation of the longing of the people, Amos, in his stylistic manner of presentation, in dramatic-simile narration, intensifies the complexity of the structure of the text ironically. Semantically, the text could be read as a metaphor. The day of the Lord is represented by darkness, by rhetorical drama that assumes inescapable calamity and by an exaggerated nature of darkness (Exod 10:21). Contextually, the conceptual day in Amos is a specific day of the Lord that will behave figuratively as rhetorical drama of calamity and the darkness nature of the season. Hence, the semantic mapping of metaphor, the exaggerated and the intensified presentation, irony, of the concept of YHWH make the utterance *ironic metaphor*. Therefore, the people were not deceived in their understanding of **הַיְהוָה יוֹם**, but were not qualified for that day to be light in the context of Amos.

4.4 The Plumb line Ironic Metaphor (7:7-9)

YHWH holding a plumb line in the third vision of Amos serves as a metaphor. In the TGN old version, the meaning of the phrase መለክዒ መንደቕ (measuring a wall) is as obscure as it is in the Hebrew Bible. The new TGN version, however, modifies this into መለክዒ መንደቕ ገመድ (a rope for measuring a wall). This modification could also mean two things, a rope that may be extended horizontally to keep the line of the wall straight or a vertical rope that is kept down by a metal object called በምቦ, 'bembo' a word adopted from the Italian language, meaning 'a plumb'.

Using በምቦ (a plumb) to measure a wall ኣብ ልኩዕ መንደቕ (on a plumbed wall) or ኣብቲ ብመለክዒ ተተኸኺሉ ዝተሠረሐ መንደቕ (on the wall that was built precise for plumbing) in the TGN old and TGN new versions, respectively, confuses Tigriña readers, in that the versions paint the picture of the Lord testing the wall by standing on another erected wall.

Another obscure phrase of the text, ንመለክዒ መንደቕ ኣብ ማእከል ህዝበይ እስራኤል ከንብሮ እየ, (I will put the plumb line in the midst of my people Israel), has been modified to በዚ ገይረ፣ ሕዝበይ መሥመሩ ከም ዝኃደገ መንደቕ ምኽኛም ከርኢ እየ (I will show using this that my people are like a wall that has gone out from its line) which TGN readers understand exactly, that when 'a wall has gone out of its line' the wall should be demolished. Hence, our study confirms that the wall represents the people of Israel (7:8) who were to be destroyed (7:9), but not completely.

The emphatic expression of the vision denotes the ironic effects of the metaphor conceptually, and could only be expressed as an *ironic metaphor*.

4.5. The Basket of Summer Fruit Ironic Metaphor (8:1-3)

In my native language, ዘንቢል (basket) has been used as a bag for shopping, carrying fruits, trading seeds and specifically carrying በለስ (figs), a summer fruit, in the townships of Eritrea. The Eritrean ኦም በለስ (fig tree) is not like the fig tree of the Hebrew Bible. The Eritrean በለስ is the *Prickly Pear Cactus*. The word በለስ (fig), however, has been translated into TGN versions wherever the fig appears in the Scriptures. Eritrean በለስ (fig) is carried in a very popular container, ዘንቢል 'zenbil' (basket). The basket is mapped to the people of Israel. The summer fruit could be mapped to the concept of 'the end.' The end process of the summer fruit in a basket corresponds to the end time of the people of YHWH. The

basket of summer fruit in Amos, therefore, should be read in the light of ‘a lot of corpses will be thrown everywhere’ (8:3).

The imagery describes ‘bad figs’ but the destruction is limited, ‘a lot of corpses will be thrown everywhere’ (8:3) unlike the destruction in visions one and two which include total destruction. The quantity and quality the container holds is ironic style in speech, unless the intended meaning of the author was revealed in terms of timeline and the scale of the destruction. The innocence or unawareness of Amos and his audience make the elements *ironic*. The emphatic expression of a basket of summer fruit, unless conceptually analysed, remains hidden from the reader’s awareness, and could be asserted as an *ironic metaphor*.

5. Conclusion

The investigation proves that irony, as a dominant figure of speech, is demonstrated as a literary stylistic device in each chapter of the book of Amos, and we have used irony as an interpretive strategy to unfold the complexity of texts in the book. We recommend that current studies on prophets give more attention to figurative languages as literary devices in the interpretive strategy. We also recommend that Biblical scholarship consider the biblical text in Tigrigna, a Semitic language, and the cultural expression of both the Eritrean and Israelite peoples.

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Beyond Shame and Honour: Matthew's Representation of the Dignity Code of Jesus

Bill Domeris

Abstract

The Gospel of Matthew, across the centuries, has provided the bedrock for the instruction of Christians, especially new converts. The Gospel offers a multifaceted portrait of Jesus, perfect for an understanding of the Reign of Heaven (Kingdom of God) and challenging enough to remind the readers that like the home of the scribe, one can constantly find new treasures to discover. In this article, I examine the values which the Matthean Jesus espouses. I argue that Matthew's Gospel highlights Jesus' personal interactions and his ethical teaching in a deliberate manner. Jesus crosses boundaries, engages in economic discussions and promotes a praxis of caring for the vulnerable. In these interactions, we see Jesus challenging the prevailing honour and shame code and offering, through his actions and teaching, a positive alternative in the form of what I have termed his dignity code. Where the honour code promoted the pursuit of self-interest and personal glory, Jesus' code personified humility and the dignity of others, especially those who were rendered vulnerable or were shamed by their society, including women, children and gentiles.

Keywords

Matthew, dignity, honour, shame, vulnerable.

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1. An Iconic Gospel

From its opening verses to its epic conclusion, the Gospel of Matthew is an iconic gospel. This, the first of the gospels, has provided, across the centuries, the bedrock for the instruction of Christians, especially new converts. It offers a multifaceted portrait of Jesus, perfect for an understanding of his role within the Kingdom of Heaven,² and challenging enough to remind its readers that, like the home of the scribe, one can constantly find new treasures to discover (Matt 13:52). I suggest that Matthew highlights Jesus' personal interactions and his ethical teaching in a deliberate manner. Jesus crosses boundaries, engages in economic discussions and promotes the praxis of caring for the vulnerable, especially widows and children.

While Jesus-scholarship has followed a variety of paths, there have been some novel developments in recent years (Powell 2009). So, the ministry of Jesus has been connected to a concern for inclusivity and social outreach (Abhilash 2014), social inclusion (Lourdu 2014), an economy of generosity (Nielsen 2013), teaching a form of downward mobility (Talbot 2008), the practice of reciprocity and redistribution (Vearncombe 2010), and confronting the violence of legalism (Tharukattil 2011). In different ways, scholars (Fiensy 2007; Horsley 2016; Oakman 2018) suggest that Jesus, by his very life-style, epitomised a way of living and acting out, which 'pushed back'³ against the Roman Empire's oppressive rule.⁴ Jesus challenged the Roman hegemony, not as a form of resistance but in order to achieve his objective of recalling Israel to her covenant with God (Culpepper 2018).⁵ Reading Matthew in its narrative and historical context, we suggest that echoes of this process may be discerned (Müller 2012), not least in Jesus' reaction to the social values he encountered and in his proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven (God's reign).

2. Shame and Honour as Mediterranean Values

Shame and Honour found place within the ancient Near East forming two of the principle values of the peoples who inhabited that region, like the peoples of Israel and Judah. The Hebrew Bible appeals time and again to the pursuit of honour and the avoidance of shame (e.g. Bechtal 1991; Marè 2014; Hwang 2017), as does the New Testament (e.g. Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998).

The majority of scholarly analyses of shame and honour in the Biblical text, have been largely determined by the existing modes of thinking of the so-called 'Mediterranean cultural anthropology' first proposed by Bruce Malina (1981). While much of Malina's work and that of the Context Group has been valuable, since the early 2000s,

2 Matthean scholarship has taken some interesting turns in recent decades, with a more open approach to many of the earlier questions (Van Aarde and Dreyer 2010), as scholars have puzzled anew about the place of the gentiles (Van Aarde 2007; Seasoltz 2011) and related issues.

3 On the push and pull of empire, see the various articles in Winn (2016).

4 See Anderson (1998) for a social archaeological spelling-out of the impact of Empire on the regions of Judaea and Galilee.

5 An idea which originated with Antonio Gramsci (see Bates 1975) and refers to the control exercised by nation states of empires through overt and more subtle forms of domination.

a few voices, in both Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies, have questioned some of the basic assumptions concerning the relevance of all Mediterranean cultural anthropological findings for the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament literature. At the same time, cultural anthropological reviews of shame and honour as Mediterranean values, have become more cautious (Busatta 2006). With reference to Biblical studies, I refer to works like Johanna Stiebert's shame and honour in the prophetic texts (2002)⁶ and Louise Joy Lawrence's examination of the values espoused by Matthew (2003).

6 Stiebert (2002), in part, builds her critique on my work on honour and shame in Proverbs (Domeris 1995)

7 Horrell (1996) has clarified the proper use of terminology, Giordano (2001) has noted the migration of honour/shame into the sociological domain, and Osiek has pointed out the importance of matrilocality in the New Testament (1997:333-334).

Today, thanks to these and other critical reflections, a more cautious approach is evident across several of the recent studies of the anthropology of shame and honour.⁷ The recognition of the sheer diversity of understandings and applications of values like honour or shame, across class and gender, place and time, even from one ancient author to another, has become essential (Horrell 1996; Lawrence 2003). In particular, the contribution of Zeba Crook (2009) has given proper place to the importance of the public court of reputation (PCR), namely the location of the authority which is appealed to in the granting of a bequest of honour. Reading such studies suggests that social values should only be transposed onto first-century social locations where there is solid epigraphical evidence, dating from that time, that makes clear that such constructed values applied. In applying shame and honour to Matthew's Gospel, I will restrict my comparisons to values already implicit or explicit in the text. Moreover, the focus of this article is not shame and honour *per se*, but the alternative which Jesus lived out in his dealings with ordinary people and is given expression in his memorable parables.

3. Shame and Honour in Matthew's Gospel

Two major studies of shame and honour have focused on the Gospel of Matthew, that of Jerome Neyrey (1998) and Louise Joy Lawrence (2003). The two studies are as different as might be imagined, with Neyrey standing firmly within the Malina tradition and Lawrence opposing it. Neyrey (1998) concentrates on the Matthean representation of Jesus, comparing this to a Greco-Roman encomium or praise story, designed to honour Jesus in his various interactions with the Jewish and Roman authorities.

He, then, refers to the teaching of Jesus under three headings: Honouring the dishonoured (Matt 5:3–12); Calling-off the honour game (Matt 5:21–48); and Vacating the playing-field (Matt 6:1–18). In other words, Jesus summoned his disciples to a life outside of the bounds of the shame and honour culture of the time, an idea which I will carry forward in this article.

Lawrence (2003:22–36) begins by addressing theoretical issues, like the use of models.⁸ Lawrence uses the term ‘ethnography’ to describe written sources like the Gospel of Matthew.⁹ In her thinking, honour and shame worked differently among the different societal levels of Jesus’ time, specifically elite versus the non-elite (2003:75–76). In the latter half of the book (2003:142–279) she addresses the actual Jesus-interactions, pointing out the inequality¹⁰ of some of the persons engaged in what she understands as honour-ripostes, like the Canaanite woman (2003:271), which I discuss below.

Neyrey (1998) and Lawrence (2003) agree on two critical ideas, firstly that honour and shame existed as key values in the areas of the ministry of Jesus, namely Galilee and the surrounding areas and secondly, that Jesus debated these values and the pursuit of honour. Unlike the gentiles who love ‘to lord’ it over their subjects, the disciples are invited to assume the position of servants (Matt 20:25–27). Jesus described his own mission as one who came to serve (*διακονέω*) (Matt 20:28) calling on his disciples to assume the status of a servant (*δοῦλος*) (Matt 20:26). In addition, in a parable about a banquet, Jesus offered a striking alternative to the order of the time (Matt 22:2–10). He criticised the Pharisees for seeking positions of honour among themselves (Matt 23:2–7) and by his teaching and deeds gave substance to quite a different set of values.

Neyrey (1998) and Lawrence (2003), believe that Jesus proposed a life outside of the honour-culture (see also Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998), or at least within a modified form of these values. More strongly, Talbott argues for a form of downward mobility (cf. Talbott 2008), which may be debatable, but he does raise the question of whether Jesus was actually proposing an alternative code of values. If so, and I believe that he was, we need to ask, what then would be the core elements of such a code? What would a logical alternative to shame and honour be? To answer this question we need to look at a contemporary study of shame and honour, which poses this self-same question.

4. Dignity in Place of Honour

Peter Brown (2016), a well-known sociologist, explores the place of honour in the modern United States, and specifically in those states which were impacted by the Scots-Irish. Brown takes note of the various ways in which the honour code manifests in modern society, and produces masses of empirical evidence.

Noting the widespread presence of shame and honour as social values, Brown even suggests that these may be in ‘the deepest

8 Interestingly, using the term ‘model’ for the application of the shame/honour values has been justly criticised by Horrell (1996:10-12), preferring the term ‘research frameworks’ in line with practice within the human sciences. Since I am one of those criticised, I accept the correction as valid.

9 Ethnography is more usually used in conjunction with empirical data resulting from anthropological or archaeological research, and less often of comparisons with other written texts.

10 Lawrence spells out the contrast here between her own reading of honour-challenges and Malina’s understanding, where such ripostes would have taken place between two men, from the same or similar levels of honour (2003:142-148).

recesses of our unconscious minds' (2016:180). Towards the end of his study, Brown responds to the question of what the logical alternative would be to the prevailing code of honour, by referring to societies where human dignity is manifest (2016:184) as a possible alternative.

Brown then adds his own description of what he terms 'the dignity code' (Brown 2016:184). Human dignity is, of course, widely recognised, but it appears that Brown's dignity code is based on his research. Brown writes of his dignity code/culture: 'Social worth is assumed by default. People in a dignity culture are more likely to grant respect to others simply by virtue of their being human' (2016:184). Where shame and honour demanded constant defence and maintenance, a code of dignity simply affirmed the worth of all human beings regardless of their social status. Where the honour code demands constant defence and maintenance on the part of the individual, a dignity code assumes a certain intrinsic value for each individual (Brown 2016:184). More simply, 'Dignity is *assumed*, whereas honor is *earned*' (Brown 2016:184).

So how does this translate into biblical values? In a singular article on Human Dignity in the Bible, Vogt (2010) notes that while the term dignity is not found in the Bible, the sense of human dignity, lost and found, is a constantly recurring idea. He views dignity as God's original intention for humankind, as described in the Garden of Eden, and expressed in the first couple's unique relationship with God (Vogt 2010:422). The path back into that relationship and the full experience of dignity for oneself and in one's community is first spelled out in the decalogue and reinforced by the prophets (Vogt 2010:422). The social vision of the Hebrew Bible, as outlined by Pleins (2001), points to the ultimate restoration of the Reign of God, which in the gospels was heralded by Jesus (Goldingay 2003). I would add 'and to the restoration of human dignity' within the context of God's reign.

One of the Greek synonyms for dignity is the Greek term for worth (*ἀξίος*) used often in the New Testament (see Foerster 1961:379–380). It is found both in the gospels (e.g. Matt 10:10 and Luke 10:7 [worker worthy of wage]) and in the epistles (e.g. Rom 16:2 [worthy of the saints] and Phil 1:27 [worthy of the Gospel]). Jesus' dignity code, I believe, would have been expressed in the Greek form as *ἀξίος* or in English as 'human worth'. Simply put, Jesus affirmed the common worthiness (dignity) of human individuals, beyond, and in spite of, the status conferred upon them by the levels of the honour code of the time.

I assume, that this affirmation would have been evident to the original readers of Matthew's gospel and that these readers would

have functioned as the PCR. Although in the context of the Gospel, the unseen presence of God fulfills that role. The following examples offer some evidence for these assumptions, starting with women in need.

5. The Dignity of Women in Need

As some of the most vulnerable of the population of the ancient world, widows and their children (fatherless rather than orphans) were widely deemed to be worthy of protection, and that not just in ancient Israel as Fensham (1962) has shown. Within the pages of the Hebrew Bible, widows are represented as a special category of people and thus deserving of additional protection, along with orphans and resident-aliens (Baker 2009:189–195; Domeris 2007:163–166). In his diatribe against the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus showcased the plight of widows (Matt 23:14). Generally, for Matthew, the broader category of women in need, rather than of widows¹¹ comes to the fore, although some of these women may well have been widows.

In Matthew 9, we have the familiar account of the healing of a presumed impure woman. Matthew has a different sequence to that that found in both Mark and Luke, in that the woman touched Jesus, which immediately led to his addressing her. The discussion about ‘someone touched me’ and power going out from Jesus (Mark 5:30–32; Luke 8:45–46) is missing. Jesus begins his dialogue with the woman, with the words, ‘Take heart’ (Matt 9:22) and addresses her as ‘My daughter’ (Mark 5:34 and Luke 8:48 have simply ‘daughter’). The addition of the pronoun, works to emphasise the dignity of the woman as does the commendation of her faith (found in all three gospels), which precedes the healing (Matt 9:22) rather than following it (Mark 5:29 and Luke 8:44). The woman, in Matthew, is also spared the sharing of her personal trials (Mark 5:33 and Luke 8:47). In this way, Matthew creates a deep sense of affirmation, which is more diffused in the parallel accounts.

Throughout, the dignity of the woman is preserved and her fear and embarrassment are absent (cf. Mark 5:33 and Luke 8:47).

In Matthew 15, a Canaanite woman called on Jesus to intervene on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. Interestingly enough, the girl is described as ‘badly’ possessed (v.22, Gk. *κακῶς*; the NASV has ‘cruelly demon-possessed’).

We take note that she addressed Jesus as ‘Lord, Son of David’ perhaps in connection with his Messiahship (v.22b), ahead of

¹¹ In Luke’s gospel there are several references to widows (e.g. Luke 4:25; 18:5), explaining, in part, why Luke is often cited as the gospel with a special concern for the marginalised.

Peter's confession in the next chapter (Matt 16:16). Jesus initially was silent (v.23a), while his disciples urged him to drive her away— she was being a nuisance and drawing unwarranted attention to them (v.23b). Only after the disparaging suggestions of the disciples, did Jesus address the woman by arguing that his primary mission was to the house of Israel (v.24). Instead of turning away, she approached Jesus, bowing down before him (v.25) with the supplication, 'Lord, help me'. Again, Jesus responded negatively, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and to throw it to the dogs' (v.26). We note, however, that the apparent rebuttal becomes instead a platform on which the woman builds her counter-argument, 'Yes Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from the master's table' (v.27, cf. Gullotha 2014). Finally, Jesus was persuaded and commended the faith of the woman, 'O woman, your faith is great' (v.28 cf. Lee 2015)—a rare occurrence in the gospels (cf. Pattarumadathil 2013) and agrees to the woman's request. The pericope ends with the announcement that her daughter was healed from that same hour (v.28c).

The whole event raises some challenging questions. Was Jesus insensitive to the request of the woman, simply because she was a Canaanite and so a foreigner (see Gullotha 2014)? Or was Jesus creating a space for the woman to reveal the depth and tenacity of her faith (see Lee 2015 and Pattarumadathil 2013)? Perhaps, we might envision the dialogue as an honour/shame interaction (riposte) as does Lawrence (2003:271). There is merit in all these suggestions, but I believe that it goes deeper than that. In the context of Matthew's literary structure, and reading the text as narrative, I suggest that the Gospel intentionally created space for this three-part dialogue. In response to the increasing tempo of the three requests of the woman, an opportunity is created for Jesus' climatic declaration about her faith, so affirming her dignity in the eyes of the reader and in the context of God's reign (cf. Lee 2015) and displays what Craig Blomberg (2005) aptly terms the 'positively contagious holiness' of Jesus.

6. The Dignity of Gentiles

The Hebrew Bible implicitly and explicitly recognises the presence of righteous Gentiles, like Job, so we should not be surprised that such is true also of the ministry of Jesus. In two healings in Matthew, Jesus commended the faith of the person asking for the healing (Pattarumadathil, 2013), both from outside of Judaism (Kellenberger 2014). In the second miracle¹² recorded in Matthew (Matt 8:5–13), Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion. First, however, as with the Canaanite woman (see above), he commended the faith of the man (v.10) 'I tell you the truth. With

¹² The first miracle is the healing of a leper in the same chapter (Matt 8:2-4). In Mark, it is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law.

no one in Israel have I found so great a faith'. He then healed the servant from a distance (v.13). The healings found in this chapter, and their order in Matthew, I suggest, point to the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry in the spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew chapter 8 continues the theme of ministry to foreigners, by including the healing of two Gadarene demoniacs (Matt 8:28–34), which largely follows the Markan narrative. Later there is the healing of the daughter of the Phoenician woman, dealt with above. Such interactions with Gentiles would have been frowned upon in his time, as several NT passages indicate.¹³ In each of these interactions, Jesus comes across as granting dignity, but not necessarily honour, to the person. He recognised their human needs and responded to them as human beings deserving of the bequest of human dignity. I suggest that all this was in accord with Jesus' vision of the Reign of God, and his creation of a new extended covenant community (see Van Aarde 2007), where ordinary people, old and young, might find their God-given dignity and wholeness.

13 Examples include Acts 10 and Gal 2:11-13.

7. The Dignity of Children

The Gospel of Matthew emphasises the dignity of children in several different ways. For example, Jesus commends those who offer, in his name, a drink of cold water to 'one of these little ones' (Matt 10:42). Hospitality is a consistent refrain in the New Testament, as various studies have shown (Atterbury 2005; Osiek 1997). What sets Matthew's gospel apart is his representation of Jesus' teaching on the dignity of children, as a focus, in Matthew 18, on protection from abuse.

In his response to the shame and honour culture of his time, Jesus, according to both Matthew and Mark chose to challenge his disciples by placing a child in the middle of the group (Matt 18:2; Mark 9:36–37).¹⁴ In Mark's gospel, the disciples had argued about the question of status along the road, and Jesus asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?'

14 We note that Mark includes the detail that Jesus placed his arm around the child, probably as a symbol of his protection (Mark 9:36).

Only reluctantly, did they provide the answer (Mark 9:33–34), namely that they were debating their respective status. In response, Jesus used a child *παιδίον* to teach a lesson in humility (Mark 9:36–37). Here in Matthew 18, the question is more generic, as the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' (v.1). The Greek (v.1) uses the term *μείζων*, because the issue is about status. From Jesus' response (vv.3–4), we see that he interpreted their question as resulting from an honour-competition among the disciples. In other words,

who among the disciples was the most honourable? Like so many of their contemporaries, the disciples were playing the game of shame and honour, and wanted Jesus to join them—but he refused. Instead, Jesus cautioned his disciples that they needed to change radically and to become like children so as to enter God’s kingdom (Matt 18:3). The Greek verb used here is the normal word for repent and turn around (στρέφω). The second part of the instruction is to become like a child (παιδίον) (v.3b). Only, by choosing an alternative set of values, can the disciples achieve status in God’s kingdom. In that kingdom, values like honour and status are turned upside down, and children rather than adults are the measures of status. While hyperbole certainly plays a part here, we do well not to ignore the literal sense (Cruise 2018).

Jesus added ‘The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child’ (v.4). The Greek text uses the form ‘humbles himself’ or ταπεινῶ, which carries both a negative sense of being humiliated and a positive sense of humble submission. If we limit this instruction to modern ideas around humility, we lose much of the biblical meaning. To follow the Jesus-code demanded a complete break with the existing value codes, like shame and honour (v.3a) and a commitment to a different lifestyle—an alternative set of values. The disciples were called upon to recognise that the prevailing code of shame and honour, and similar cultural values, carried a sense of judgement on women, gentiles and children. Instead of becoming part and parcel of such judgement, the disciples were invited to embrace Jesus’ notion of the dignity of all. The true path to honour, in the eyes of God, meant honouring those not considered honourable.

The narrative continues with Jesus saying, ‘Whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me’ (v.5). The word used here is again παιδίον, which connects us to the understanding of children in the context of a home and so is linked to ideas of hospitality and the protection of the vulnerable. Indeed, much of the remainder of the chapter deals with children and their protection against abuse. In verse 6, Jesus describes a threat to children, and the Greek now uses the word for little children (toddlers), namely μικρός.

Such little ones, vulnerable as they are, may have a faith in Jesus and may be caused to lose it. Jesus valued children and their faith at the highest level. The Greek word is σκανδαλίζω, which is variously translated as cause to stumble or to offend (cf. John 6:61; 1 Cor 1:23). In the present context, given the focus on children, the probable reference is to child abuse. How then does abuse cause a child to stumble? We might consider this in several different ways, but for me, one key idea is that of children’s ability to relate to

those who show them love. An abused child may fear to be touched, even by a well-meaning adult. The child has lost his or her ability to be loved.

Following on Matthew's account mentioned above, Jesus stated that, 'If anyone causes one of these little ones (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων) to lose their faith (σκανδαλίση) it would be better [than meeting the justice of God] if they were tied to a millstone and drowned in the sea' (Matt 18:6), which for Jewish people meant they would be denied eternal life, since they lacked a proper burial. In verse 7, Jesus pronounces a woe on the people (τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ) who become a cause of the 'stumbling' or 'offence' of children. Implicit in this teaching is Jesus' judgement on child-abusers and paedophiles. This is amplified in the references to the causes of children stumbling (v.7) and to 'hand' and 'foot' (vv.8–9). When tempted to abuse a child, rather cut off your hand. When tempted to approach a child, rather cut off your foot. When tempted to look lustfully at a child, pluck out your eye. Radical words for a sin which still plagues the church. Verse 10 reminds us that in the kingdom of God, the angelic representatives of children occupy the front rows—they see the face of 'My Father' —the One who does not abuse his children, but accords them the dignity that they deserve.

The narrative continues its focus on children. Luke presents three parables of the lost objects (coin, sheep and son), but Matthew uses the lost sheep (Matt 18:6–14) to give greater substance to the teaching on children. The 'lost sheep' is a child and God's pastoral concern is focused in that direction. God not only punishes the abuser, but he also actively seeks out the lost child—the one who has been scandalized (σκανδαλίση) (v.6). While the substance of the parable agrees with its Lukan version (Luke 15:4–6), Matthew's version includes the words 'It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that *one of these little ones* should perish' (Matt 18:14, my emphasis). Once again, the word for child is μικρός—the little ones (cf. v.6) and those most vulnerable—the complete opposite of the word used in the disciples' question (Matt 18:1).

In the following chapter, Jesus welcomed and blessed children (παιδιά), castigating the male disciples who had refused the mothers access to him (Matt 19:13–15).

The notion of blessing children may refer to the idea of protecting children from those who intend them evil, not least through the beliefs of 'an evil eye'. Essentially, the people of Jesus' time feared those who might 'look' at their child, especially the newborn, in a certain way and so cause them harm. Asking Jesus to bless the

children implies the idea of creating a blanket of protection about the children, akin to the protection brought about by holy rings and other sacred objects, known from archaeological finds.

Finally, in Matthew's account of Jesus in the temple, he adds a unique insight (Matt 21:15) as Jesus is joined not only by the lame and blind, but also by children. The presence of these children in the holy temple signified the climax to Jesus' recognition of their God-given dignity. Where religious honour found place primarily for educated Jewish males, Jesus brings the presence of children to the foreground—they and not the religious élite find their true place in the holy sanctuary.

8. The Dignity of Workers

David Baker in his careful study of the Pentateuch, spends considerable time discussing the application of the Jewish law to fairness (righteousness or justice) in the marketplace (2009:299–303) and in care of workers (2009:296–299). The latter theme is also to be found in the prophets (Pleins 2001), notably Isaiah 58:1–10. Here in Matthew's gospel, such concern is also part and parcel of Matthew's presentation of the dignity code of Jesus. Unique to Matthew is a wonderful parable about the Lord of the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–15). The story is deceptively simple, and one may easily overlook the great truth found here—namely, the sense of affirmation of the dignity of the individual workers.¹⁵

15 There is no lack of suggested interpretations of the parable, as evident in the important study by Eubank (2013).

16 A title frequently applied to God in the LXX and both God and Jesus in the New Testament, especially in the post-resurrection narratives (John 20:28 and 21:7) and throughout the letters of Paul

The chapter begins by connecting the parable with the kingdom of God (v.1). Jesus described the lord (κύριος)¹⁶ of the vineyard going out to find 'day-labourers' to assist with the work—presumably the harvesting of the grapes. Making his way into the marketplace early in the morning (about 6 a.m.) the landowner found a group of workers and after negotiating terms and wages (one denarius—the usual day's wages), he took the labourers to work in the vineyard (v.2). At 9 a.m., he went back to the marketplace and hired more workers, but without negotiating terms, and again, three hours later.

The pattern was repeated at 3 p.m. (v.3). An hour before sunset (about 5 p.m.) and the usual end of day, the landowner made a final visit to the marketplace and meeting some labourers, who had been standing there the whole day, for lack of work, he employed them also (vv.6–7).

After the working day ended, the lord called his overseer to pay the workers their wages, starting with the last group (v.8). Each group, in turn received one denarius (v.9), but it is only when the 6 a.m. group received their wages that a protest was raised about

the length of time and heat of day which they had worked (vv.10–12). The lord reminded the workers of their initial agreement and of his right to be generous with his own money (vv.13–15). At its simplest level, the parable is about a generous farmer who paid all the workers that day the same wage regardless of the number of hours worked.

Various scholarly opinions have been advanced as to the meaning of this parable (Eubank 2013; Mkole 2014; Nielsen 2013; Vearncombe 2010) and are of merit, like Oakman’s anthropological understanding (2018) of the notion of limited good. Rudolf Schnackenburg (2002:193) neatly sums up what still appears to be the consensus, namely that the parable is more than an emphasis on a living wage. He writes,

Concluding with a question, the story directs one’s gaze to Jesus, who in his message and behaviour, conveys to human beings an appreciation of the unexpected, incomprehensible goodness of God (2002:192).

In taking seriously the generosity of God, I suggest this parable is about Jesus’ understanding about the dignity of ordinary workers. Such workers are to be considered worthy (*ἀξίος*) and the parable is illustrative of the idea that ‘the labourer is worthy of his/her wages’ (Matt 10:10). The parable remains one of the clearest statements in Matthew on the individual worth of all people, and it is noteworthy that it is only found in Matthew.

9. The Dignity of Outcasts

In relation to people who stood outside the pale, Matthew takes note that Jesus affirmed people who were considered to be ritually unclean (Matt 9:20–22). In particular, Matthew records that Jesus even touched lepers (Matt 8:3)—what greater affirmation of dignity could there be. The first miracle found in Matthew’s gospel is that of Jesus healing a leper (Matt 8:2–4), and later Jesus attended a banquet hosted by Simon, the leper (Matt 26:6). Ironically, Simon is unable to find compassion for a woman made unclean by her life-style.

Finally, Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount asserted God’s concern for those who are broken and crushed by the reality of their lives. Reading contextually the first four beatitudes, we find that Jesus gives dignity to those who are poor, and broken in spirit (Matt 5:3);¹⁷ those who mourn, like the relatives of the people massacred in Sepphoris¹⁸ (Matt 5:4); those who have been oppressed/

17 See Luz 2007:185-189, who in contrast to other commentaries on Matthew takes poverty and other tribulations in the beatitudes literally and not just spiritually.

18 A city very close to Nazareth, which was destroyed by the Romans in 6 AD and many of its inhabitants were crucified. This was just one example of Roman violence in the time of Jesus (see further Horsley 1987).

19 Using Ps 37:11 as the basis of Matthew 5:5; see further Domeris 2016:131-149.

20 The Greek term *δικαιοσύνη* corresponds to the Hebrew term *צדקה* (righteousness or justice) in the Hebrew Bible. Interestingly, the King James version of Matthew 5:6 (1611) opted for righteousness, whereas the Catholic Douai Rheims (1609) chose justice.

humiliated (the so-called meek) and have lost their land¹⁹ (Matt 5:5; see Evans 2012:106) and those who hunger and thirst for justice²⁰ in a world where that value has been denied. Ulrich Luz (2007:189) offers an appropriate summation, when he writes:

A part of the salvation promised to the poor, the hungry, and those who mourn is already a reality in Jesus' acceptance of the dispossessed, in his common meals with them, and in the joy over God's love experienced in the present. Jesus' beatitudes are not empty promises of something that will happen in the future; they are 'a language act that makes the coming kingdom of God a present event.'

In reading the beatitudes in the context of first-century Palestine, one realises the extent to which Jesus offered dignity to the poor, oppressed, and suffering. In recognising their plight, Jesus offered to ordinary people a sense of God's confirmation both of their dignity in the eyes of God and of the essential justice of their grievances.

10. Beyond Boundaries

The dignity offered by God has no boundaries. Craig Blomberg draws attention to the multiple ways that Jesus as a host or principal guest, was seen to eat with people of all ranks, including tax-collectors, women of dubious reputation, and foreigners (2005). Jesus in Matthew's gospel, revelled in the comments of his opponents, taking upon himself their insulting descriptions (Matt 11:18–19) but not letting this interfere with his granting of dignity to the marginalised of his society. He openly welcomed the idea that he 'was the friend of tax-collectors and sinners' (Matt 11:19). In the account of the temple cleansing, Matthew adds an interesting detail, namely that the blind and the lame come to Jesus in the temple, and he heals them (Matt 21:14).

In Matthew 21:32, Jesus informed the priests and elders, gathered to accuse him in the courts of the Temple, that the tax-collectors and prostitutes chose to believe the message of John the Baptist, but they did not. So indeed, this is a world where the first are last and the last are first (Matt 19:30, 20:16). I have suggested that all this was in accord with Jesus' vision of the Reign of God, and his creation of a new community, where ordinary people might find their God-given dignity and wholeness.

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An Evaluation of Speaking in Tongues as Angelic Language from the Judaeian and Early Christian Perspectives

Eben de Jager

Abstract

In contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic circles glossolalia is often referred to as the tongues of angels, with 1 Corinthians 13:1 being quoted. Yet writings on the tongues of angels available in the first century and the Judaeian context from which Paul wrote do not support such a narrative. In addition, the Corinthian context and the writings of the Church Fathers also paint a picture not aligned with the contemporary view. An analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 shows it to be a weak support for establishing the concept of contemporary ‘angelic language’. Other influences may have given rise to the idea of glossolalia as the tongues of angels, but the Bible does not appear to support such a view.

Keywords

Tongues of angels, angeloglossy, xenolalia, glossolalia, hebraeophone.

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¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

There are many different views on the gift of tongues, or glossolalia, in Christian circles today. Cartledge (2000:136–138) lists twelve possibilities of what the linguistic nature of glossolalia might be, based on his study of various scholars' work. Similarly, Gulley (1998:135–136) also lists 12 possibilities, though his variations do not exactly match those identified by Cartledge. That having been said, broadly speaking with one exception,² all these possibilities can be easily categorised into three major groups namely akoulalia,³ xenolalia⁴ and ecstatic speech.⁵ The exception mentioned, which would be listed as either ecstatic or xenolalic speech,⁶ holds that the gift of tongues is a heavenly language, often referred to as the language of angels (Banks and Moon 1966:279; Cartledge 2000:149; Dunn 1975:244; Hodge 1988:266; Tolmie 2011:5; Williams 1996:222) or as Fee (1987:630) puts it 'the dialect (s) of heaven'.

The book *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* by Christopher Forbes (1995) brought convincing arguments against the commonly-held view that there are strong comparisons between divine languages found in Greco-Roman society, which manifested in ecstatic speech, and Christian glossolalia. It presented the biblical version as a distinct and unrelated phenomenon which identifies the spiritual gift as the supernatural ability to speak in unlearned human languages. The current study does not concern itself with ecstatic speech as found, for example, with the Sibylline Oracles of ancient cultures, but limits itself to angelic speech and/or divine language which stems from Judaeian and Early Christian sources.

Dunn (1975:244) declares that 'Paul thought of glossolalia as speaking the language(s) of heaven' and considers '[p]rayer in the Spirit' to also refer to glossolalia and therefore mentions Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 1:20 as possible allusions to it (Dunn 1975:239, 245–246; Williams 1996:219). 1 Corinthians 13:1, however, is the primary verse referenced in support of the idea of tongues as angelic language (Hasel 1991:122), with verses such as Romans 8:26 (Williams 1996:219), 1 Corinthians 14:2, 14 and 2 Corinthians 12:3–4 also being used to buttress this view. This view considers tongues to be a devotional or prayer language used by the practitioner to communicate with God and, as such, is often used in a private setting, although it does not exclude its use in a corporate worship setting (Busenitz 2014:69–83; Nel 2017:3; Smith 2010:133).

2 Gulley (1998:135-136) mentions languages from supposed previous lives which could fall into the second or third categories or in a category of its own because not enough information is provided on the nature of these languages to determine for certain where it belongs.

3 Akoulalia is a miracle of hearing that which is spoken in an unknown or unintelligible language in one's own language. Cartledge (2000:138) describes it as: 'the real miracle in Acts 2 was not one of speaking but of hearing, as the hearers were given the ability to understand a language or unintelligible speech that was otherwise incomprehensible'.

4 Xenolalia refers to the unlearned ability to speak in foreign languages; existing languages already known and spoken by people or people groups somewhere on earth. This view seems to be described by Luke in Acts 2.

5 Ecstatic speech is a term used to describe unintelligible speech which must be interpreted to be understood. It is not a language spoken by any people group on earth.

6 Heavenly/angelic speech, when considered a genuine language spoken by angelic beings and being the native language of heaven, would technically constitute xenolalia.

The purpose of this essay is to evaluate the contemporary view of the gift of tongues as the language of angels from a Judaeian and Early Christian context by considering various aspects that might have contributed to the use of the term in the first century AD, the time when 1 Corinthians was written, and influences impacting contemporary understanding of languages of angels. These aspects need to be scrutinised to determine their validity and likely influence on the use of the term tongues of angels. The aspects to be evaluated are 1) the first-century concept of ‘tongues of angels’, 2) tongues of angels in the context of contemporary Corinthian society, 3) the anti-Nicene understanding of angelic linguistic ability as well as their description of the nature of the gift of tongues,⁷ 4) the Middle Ages’ possible contribution to the awareness of a secret languages spoken by angels, which might have influenced the contemporary view, 5) the text and context of the pivotal verse, 1 Corinthians 13:1, which is invariably used to establish the idea of the tongues of angels and 6) the contemporary Pentecostal view of tongues as the language of angels. These aspects will be discussed in order after briefly considering angels as understood in Judaeian and Early Christian culture.

⁷ The Anti-Nicene Fathers lived and wrote at a time when speaking in tongues was a contemporary and/or recent manifestation and therefore their understanding of tongues in general, and references to languages of angels specifically, can contribute greatly to this study.

2. Angels in Judaeian culture

There are many biblical and extra-biblical references to angels which informed their concept of the nature and function of angels. These range from references to the Angel of the Lord (Exod 3:2, Judg 13 and so on) to angels in general (Gen 19:1,15; Gen 28:12, Dan 6:22 and so on). There is a certain ambiguity on the nature of angels in ancient Judaeian society in part due to the terms such as *elihim*, *elim*, and ‘children of the most High’⁸ as found in Psalm 82 (Evans 2007:260). In the literature of the Qumran community the plural of *el*, *elim*, refers to angels while *el* in Semitic languages refers to God, who is the father of the gods (Evans 2007:18). Psalm 82 speaks of a council of the Gods which was problematic to the staunchly monotheistic tradition of Israel and *Elohim* was therefore interpreted by many rabbis as referring to the people of Israel (Evans 2007:18). In similar councils, such as detailed in Job 1 and 2, the attending beings are called ‘sons of God’, a term synonymous with ‘sons of the most High’, and are also mentioned in Job 38:7, where the term cannot refer to humans, since the context suggests the time as being before humans were created.

⁸ According to Evans (2007:18) ‘Children of the most High’ is considered a synonym for ‘sons of God’.

In Psalm 82, as in Job 1 and 2, and Ezekiel 1 and 10, the angels appear in the very presence of God. Relating to this scenario, Cook (2000:235) quotes Macarius (Apocritus), a Hellenic philosopher, as saying:

If you say that angels stand before God, who are not subject to feeling and death, and immortal in their nature, whom we ourselves speak of as gods, because they are close to the divinity, why do we dispute about a name? ... The difference therefore is not great, whether a man calls them gods or angels, since their divine nature bears witness to them.

Be that as it may, Murphy-O'Connor (2009:154–155) identifies two functions that angels perform when he says 'they served as mediators in the giving of the Law (Gal 3:19) and they observe what is going on in the world (1 Cor 4:9)'. This idea seems to be supported by Philo who says, 'the eyes and ears of the Great King, they watch and hear all' (Som. 1.140) referencing the angels as beings who report to God what occurs on earth.

The Bible records many encounters between humans and angels; for example, in Judges 13 where an angel reveals to Manoah and his wife that they will have a son, in Daniel 9 where Gabriel is sent to assist Daniel with the interpretation of the prophecy revealed to him in Daniel 8 (Dan 9:20–23) and more detail is provided on the first seventy weeks (Dan 9:24–27). The New Testament also records such incidents; for example, an angel revealing to Zacharias and Mary the birth of their respective sons (Luke 1:13, 30–31).

We can safely assume, then, that a primary function of the angels is communication with humans and that this function is mediatory and/or revelatory in nature.

3. The Tongues of Angels in First-Century Judaeon culture

Two views on the languages of angels predominated in Judaeon culture.⁹ The one was that the angels spoke Hebrew, a view Poirier (2010:1) refers to as *hebraeophone*. The alternative Poirier (2010:1) calls *angeloglossy*, a term he uses 'to denote the phenomenon of humans speaking in esoteric angelic languages'. Though it is not clear which of these views was held first, the reference to angels speaking Hebrew comes from *The Book of Jubilees*, which is the oldest source amongst these views. We therefore consider it first.

The idea that a specific language, foundational to a religion, is somehow sacred, is common. Poirier (2010:9) notes that '[t]he special status of the sacred language was often represented by attributing that language to the angels or gods, and it was widely held that the most ancient human tongue was also necessarily divine'.

⁹ An alternative view espoused by some was that the heathen nations, supposed to be 70 or 72, each spoke the language of their representative angel (Poirier 2010:10).

Second Temple Judaism is no exception, and Judaeen culture, attributing Creation to God, naturally led many Jews to consider Hebrew as the original language spoken. According to *The Book of Jubilees*, a document dated to the second century BC, Abraham supernaturally receives the ability to both speak and understand Hebrew (Charles 1902:96; Schodde 1888:43),¹⁰ the only language in existence and spoken from Creation to the time of the biblical narrative of the tower of Babel, when ‘it had ceased from the mouths of all the children of men’. Though Hebrew is not specified, *The Book of Jubilees* refers to the animals having lost their linguistic ability when Adam and Eve were cast from the garden.¹¹ Hebrew does seem implied since Eve conversed with the snake in chapter 3, verses 14–16 (Schodde 1888) and verses 17–19 (Charles 1902; Poirier 2010:13).

A Christian source that shares the view that Hebrew constitutes the language of angels is the *Vision of Paul* (Schaff 2004:IX, 290–291), where verse 30 reads:

And I said to the angel: Sir, what is Alleluia? And the angel answered and said to me: You ask questions about everything. And he said to me, Alleluia is said in **the Hebrew language of God and angels**, for the meaning of Alleluia is this: tecel cat. marith macha.³⁹²¹ And I said, Sir, what is tecel cat. marith macha? And the angel answered and said unto me: Tecel cat. Marith macha is: Let us all bless him together. I asked the angel and said, Sir, do all who say Alleluia bless the Lord? And the angel answered and said to me: It is so, and again, therefore, if any one sing Alleluia and those who are present do not sing at the same time, they commit sin because they do not sing along with him. And I said: My lord, does he also sin if he be hesitating or very old? The angel answered and said unto me: Not so, but he who is able and does not join in the singing, know such as a despiser of the Word, and it would be proud and unworthy that he should not bless the Lord God his maker (*emphasis added*).¹²

The reference to the language of God and the angels shows that the understanding was that God himself spoke Hebrew as his vernacular language, which would make it the language of Creation, and it would follow that the angels as created beings would speak it also. Poirier (2010:24) points out that although the Syriac version of the *Vision of Paul* specifies that ‘alleluia’ is a Hebrew term, it does not contain the phrase identifying Hebrew as the language of God and the angels.

¹⁰ In Schodde’s version it is verses 27–28, but in Charles’ (1902:96) it is verses 25–26, which adds the words ‘from the day of the overthrow (of Babel)’ to verse 25.

¹¹ ‘And on that day was closed the mouth of all the animals and of the beasts and of the birds and of whatever walks and of whatever moves, so that they could not speak; for they all had spoken with each other one lip and one tongue.’ Chapter 3:24 according to Schodde and chapter 3:28 in Charles’s version.

¹² ‘Tecel cat. Marith macha’ are words from another seemingly angelic language which, according to the quoted text, are translated as ‘Let us all bless him together’.

There are thus both Judaeen and Christian sources showing a body of people understanding Hebrew to have been the language of angels (and God). Within the Christian tradition, the lack of Hebrew seems to indicate that a specific ideology, probably driven by nationalism, was the driving force behind this view (Poirier 2010:26).¹³

On the other hand, *angeloglossy*, or esoteric languages of angels, was not foreign to Judaeen culture (Fee 1987:630). Various scholars have noted the references to angelic languages being mentioned in works such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* and (Burton 2011:212–214). Poirier (2010:47–108) adds to these some rabbinical evidence such as *Hymn 11* by Ephrem Syrus and *The Book of the Resurrection* among others, but for our purposes we consider a selection of these works mentioned by both Burton and Poirier, since they contain the clearer references and can be considered representative of the variations encountered in this category.

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* records both before and after chapter 15 many instances of Abraham conversing with God and an angel. In chapter 8–10 God is speaking to Abraham, and in chapter 10 an angel starts speaking to Abraham on God's instruction. The last verses of chapter 15 contains a reference to heavenly beings speaking in a language not known to Abraham:

1. And it came to pass when the sun was setting, and behold a smoke like that of a furnace, and the angels who had the divided portions of the sacrifice ascended 2. from the top of the furnace of smoke. And the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of 3. the turtledove, (both of) which were as of neither slaughtered nor divided. And 4. he carried me up to the edge of the fiery flames. And we ascended as if (carried) 5. by many winds to the heaven that is fixed on the expanses. And I saw on the air 6. to whose height we had ascended a strong light which can not be described. And behold, in this light a fiery Gehenna was enkindled, and a great crowd in the 7. likeness of men. They all were changing in aspect and shape, running and changing form and prostrating themselves and **crying words I did not know**. (*Apocalypse of Abraham*, Chapter 15), (*emphasis added*).

The language these heavenly beings employed was unknown to Abraham and indicates a language peculiar to them. These beings are not called angels *per se*, but their description as 'in the likeness of men' combined with changing shape and form are indicative of their other-worldly origin.

¹³ Poirier (2010:27) does, however, note that '[t]he relative lack of references to Hebrew-speaking angels in Christian sources does not mean that the church automatically rejected the claim that Hebrew was the first language.'

From the context it seems clear that the words they uttered were not addressed to Abraham; thus his understanding was not required. The words spoken to Abraham both before and after were instructions and explanations for the sake of his well-being and understanding of what was being revealed to him.

14 Probably written in Greek between 100 BCE. and 175 CE in Egypt (Poirier 2010:77-78)

The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*¹⁴ chapter 8 recounts Zephaniah taking a trip on a boat out of Hades. It reads:

1. They helped me and set me on that boat. 2. Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels gave praise before me. 3. I, myself, put on an angelic garment. I saw all of those angels praying. 4. I, myself, prayed together with them. 5. **I knew their language, which they spoke with me.** 6. Now, moreover, my sons, this is the trial because it is necessary that the good and the evil be weighed in a balance. (*emphasis added*)

When Zephaniah states, ‘I knew their language, which they spoke with me’, it indicates the language as not being his native tongue, but theirs. Unlike in *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, here the language, though peculiar to the angels, is not just understood but also utilised by him to join in the angelic activity. If indeed this is an example of *angeloglossy*, the context is noteworthy. The setting is one of intercessory prayer, maybe even hymnody, with intercessory prayer being a regular feature of angelic activity in apocryphal books (Poirier 2010:78–80). Engagement in the angelic activity of intercessory prayer seems to set the stage for the same activity to also occur in an angelic language.

Another document which relates to *angeloglossy* in the Judaeen context, though not with such explicit mentions as those mentioned thus far, is *The Ascension of Isaiah*.¹⁵ The extract considered is from chapter 9:19–26:

15 Arguably a compiled work where chapters 1-5 are dated as a first-century CE work and 6-11 to the second century CE (Poirier 2010:82).

19. And I said to him what I had asked him in the third heaven, 20. ‘[Show me how everything] which is done in that world is known here.’ 21. And while I was still speaking to him, behold one of the angels who were standing by, more glorious than that angel who had brought me up from the world, showed me (some) books, {but not like the books of this world}; and he opened them, and **the books had writing in them, but not like the books of this world.** And they were given to me, and I read them, and behold the deeds of the children of Israel were written there, their deeds which you know, my son Josab. 23. And I said, ‘Truly, nothing which is done in this world is hidden in the seventh heaven.’ 24.

And I saw many robes placed there, and many thrones and many crowns, 25. and I said to the angel who led me, ‘Whose (are) these robes and thrones and crowns?’ 26. And he said to me, ‘As for these robes, there are many from that world who will receive (them) through believing in the words of that one who will be named as I have told you, and they will keep them, and believe in them, and believe in his cross; [for them (are) these] placed (here).’ (*emphasis added*)

The central issue in this passage is not the conversation with the angel, but the content written in the books. The expression ‘not like the books of this world’ indicates some kind of heavenly or angelic script used to record the deeds of men. Culianu (1983:105) interprets this as meaning that the books used a ‘celestial alphabet’, indicating an angelic language used to record the deeds of men. Culianu recognises that some thought the celestial language to have been Hebrew, as noted earlier in this essay, but unequivocally argues that Hebrew is not what is in view here, but rather the interpretation of an angelic language.

Even more subtle references to possible esoteric angelic language can be detected in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Poirier (2010:85–86) points out how Isaiah could have been faced by ‘language barriers’ as there is possible evidence of different languages, or ‘voices’ spoken by angels, even in some of the same levels of the 7-level heaven depicted in the book. These barriers are overcome, as he eventually joins them in praise, since Isaiah sees the righteous as well as an angelic host approach God and engaging in worship. As he joins them in worship, it is recorded that his ‘praise was like theirs’ (*Ascension of Isaiah* 9:28).

It is, however, the *Testament of Job*¹⁶ which tends to be mentioned most often in this regard (Burton 2011:211; Fee 1987:630). According to this work, the three daughters of Job, Hemera, Kasia, and Amaltheia, receive sashes from Job on his deathbed. These endowed them with special abilities. Chapter 11:21–29 states:

(48) Then Job’s daughter Hemera got up and wrapped the sash around her waist as her father had instructed her. She then received a new heart, and now no longer concerned herself about earthly things. **She chanted words in an angelic language and sent on high a hymn to God that was like that of the angels.** As she sang these hymns, she allowed ‘spirit’ to be inscribed on her garment.

(49) Then Kasia wrapped the sash around herself and received a new heart and no longer concerned herself about earthly things.

16 Whether the Testament of Job originated in Second Temple Judaism or Christianity greatly influences the dating of the document and by implication also its relevance in the context of 1 Corinthians 13:1. The dating issue will be addressed in the main text shortly.

Her mouth learned the language of the heavenly rulers and she praised the creation of the heavenly realm. If anyone should now want to know about the creation of heaven, it can be found in the ‘Hymns of Kassia.’ (50) Then the third daughter, Amaltheia’s Horn, wrapped a sash around her, and when her heart was changed and she withdrew from earthly matters, **her mouth began to speak in the language of those on high. The language she spoke was that of the cherubim,** as she praised the master of virtues by exhibiting their glory. The one who wants to discover a trace of the father’s glory will find it recorded in the ‘Prayers of Amaltheia’s Horn.’ (*emphasis added*)

From the context it is fair to deduce that literal angelic languages are in view here. In the light of Hemera’s singing of ‘angelic hymns in the voice [tongue] of angels’ and Amaltheia’s ‘in the language of those on high’ and ‘in the dialect of the Cherubim, it is reasonable to consider the use of the term ‘rulers’ (archons) in relation to Kasia as a reference ‘to supra-worldly powers which, as a rule, exercise lordship inimical to God’ (Balz and Schneider 1990:167)

The *Testimony of Job*; 52, adds to our understanding, when it states:

(52) After three days, while Job had the appearance of being sick on his couch—though he was without pain and suffering; those things could not touch him because of the sign of the sash that was girded around him—he saw those who were coming for his soul. Immediately he got up, took his lyre, and gave it to his daughter Hemera; he also gave a censer to Kassia and a drum to Ameltheia’s Horn, so that they might all bless those who had come for his soul. **They took the instruments and blessed and glorified God in their special tongue.** Then the one who rode in the great chariot came and greeted Job, as the three daughters and Job looked on, although no one else could see him. He took Job’s soul and embraced it and flew up and mounted the chariot and set off toward the east. His body, however, wrapped for burial, was carried away to the tomb, with his three daughters leading the way, their sashes tied around their breasts, singing hymns to God. (*emphasis added*)

We find the three daughters engaging in worship using a ‘special tongue’ or dialect, which contextually refers to the language of the hierarchies of heavenly beings.

First- and second-century Judaeon culture provides two possible interpretations of angelic language.

It could either refer to Hebrew, believed to be the original language, or it could be some esoteric angelic language which may or may not be understood and spoken by humans depending on whether they were endowed with the ability to speak the heavenly language.

4. Tongues of Angels in the Corinthian Context

Roman society in general placed a high premium on oratory skills and people gifted in this department were highly esteemed in the community. Corinth, being a significant port city of ancient Roman times invariably also valued this talent. Burton (2011:50–56) convincingly shows the importance of eloquence in speech as a vehicle for social upward mobility, and points out that the eloquent were at times viewed as inspired. Accepting his argument, the possibility exists that the language of angels does not literally refer to supposed heavenly languages spoken by angels, but serves as a metaphoric expression of excellence of speech. In this regard Blomberg (1994:259) states that tongues of angels ‘probably refers to the Corinthians’ estimation of the gift’. The egotistical motivation of rising in the estimation of men might well have been the motivation for Paul addressing the issue of boasting in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians (Fee 1987:630; Hawthorne 1993:174) and for addressing the challenge the practice of tongues posed, especially considering its use without outward love as the primary focus.

Hawthorne (1993:175) also highlights the over-realised eschatology of the Corinthian church, which might have caused them to interpret the gift of tongues as a manifestation which proved they ‘shared the spiritual existence of angels’. Fee (1987:631) concurs, arguing that the Corinthian community believed they had already entered ‘into some expression of angelic existence’¹⁷ which was evidenced by them speaking in the languages of angels. If this was indeed the case, the manifestation of the gift of tongues would be highly valued among them, and excessively so, but for self-advancement and not service, as the gifts are supposed to be utilised.

This could have prompted Paul to return to and expand on the theme of boasting and other problems in that congregation especially when it comes to tongues (Turner 1998:235). Eloquence in tongues would not equate to being spiritual in the Christian context, at least not if it was practised without ‘charity’, which exemplifies the outward focus of the spiritual gifts (Fee 1987:631).

17 This spirituality could have influenced their views on sexuality and the denial of a future bodily existence (Fee 1987:631).

In chapter 13:1 Paul aims to point out that the oratory skills the Corinthians craved were of no use unless and until used with the focus on edifying others, for the ‘common good’ (1 Cor 12:7), rather than for egotistical self-promotion which was the way operated by the pagan society in which the Corinthian church found themselves.

Here Paul further employs a symbol the Corinthians would be familiar with when he references the uselessness of tongues without love. He compares it with the sound of brass or cymbal, for in Corinth, ‘known for its highly treasured bronze-ware, one use of which was as “resonance enhancers” in the theatre’ (Hawthorne 1993:172). The people would be well familiar with the sound and therefore would vividly understand Paul’s intent (Grosheide 1980:304; Hodge 1988:266). They would also likely connect it to pagan worship practices common at that time (Fee 1987:631–632).

The Corinthian context brings to view eloquence of speech and the accompanying social ascendance, rather than a distinct language. The egotistical nature of seeking eloquence in speech for self-promotion fits well with Paul’s rhetoric in his letter as a whole, where he addresses the issue of boasting. It fits 1 Corinthians 12–14 in the context of gifts¹⁸ which have the common good of the congregation as focus, and justifies especially 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 and the emphasis on charity.

5. The Early Church Fathers on the Gift of Tongues and its possible relation to Language of Angels

Many of the Early Church Fathers wrote about the ‘gift of tongues’. Those who did, seem to have consensus on the nature of the gift of tongues.¹⁹ The following table lists some of the Early Church Fathers, the relevant document in which they refer to the gift of tongues and a short description of the nature of the gift of tongues according to each Church Father listed, as provided by Gumerlock (2004:124–133):

Evidently the consistent interpretation of the gift of tongues according to the Church Fathers is that the gift constitutes the ability to speak the multitude of languages spoken on earth²⁰ (see Table 1). Their writings also suggest that the purpose was to evangelise and educate the heathen nations in the Christian faith.²¹

One Church Father not listed above deserves some specific attention.

18 Consider the rhetorical nature of 1 Corinthians 12:30 which in Greek always implies a negating answer, and 1 Corinthians 14:5 which indicates the superiority of prophesying over the gift of tongues.

19 Some scholars consider Tertullian to have had a divergent view of tongues from that of the other Church Fathers; believing tongues to be ecstatic speech (Thiselton 2000:981-982). Due consideration should be given to the fact that Tertullian in *Against Marcion* Book V 8:7-12 does not discuss tongues *per se*, but rather the role of women in the church. Tertullian’s contribution to the discussion on tongues also seems over-emphasised compared to other Church Fathers who discuss tongues specifically.

20 Some, like Currie (1965:290) and Thiselton (1979:29) argue against such consensus by claiming Irenaeus and Celsus make mention of babbling or lalling in this context, but as Turner (1985:20-21) points out, their arguments ‘are not about glössais lalein at all: they are about the production of incoherent prophetic speech (incoherent, that is, not because the individual words are unintelligible, but because together they make no sense—a common criticism of unsolicited oracles in the ancient world)’.

21 Some scholars oppose the view that tongues were given for the sake of evangelistic endeavours. For arguments on this issue, see Edwards (1885:319) and Thiselton (2000: 976-977). The Church Fathers who wrote about tongues believed the gift of tongues and evangelism went hand in hand (Gumerlock 2004:124-138).

Hilary of Poitiers	On the Trinity	'the tongues of the Gentiles
Eusebius of Emesa	-	'the languages of the world'
Cyril of Jerusalem	Catechetical Lectures	'every tongue of those of Gentile extraction'
Gaudentius	Sermons	'the tongues of the various nations'
John Chrysostom	Homilies on 1 Corinthians	'all at once speak diverse languages'
Rufinus of Aquileia	Commentary on the Apostles' Creed	'a variety of different languages ... and no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension'
Pelagius	Letter to Demetrius	'the tongues of all nations', 'to speak in every language, and thus announce beforehand in the language of every nation'
Augustine	Sermons on the Liturgical Season	'to speak with the different languages of all nations which they didn't know, and hadn't learned'
Leo the Great	Sermon 75	'the languages peculiar to each nation became common property in the mouth of the church'
Jacob of Serugh	Homily 17 on the Sunday of Pentecost	'the speech of the nations and their tongues'
Cassiodorus	Commentary on Acts	'the languages of various nations'
Gregory the Great	Homilies on the Gospels	'the knowledge of all languages'
Gregory the Great	Moralia on Job	'speaking in the language of every nation'
Gregory the Great	Dialogues	'the power of speaking all languages'

Table 1: The Church Fathers on the gift of tongues

Filastrius (1889:63) connects the gift of tongues with the Old Testament narrative on the Tower of Babel, and also connects tongues and the linguistic abilities of angels. In the *Book of Diverse Heresies* (Filastrius 1889:63) states:

Adtamen omnem scientiam linguarum, quam ante duo milia annorum et septingentos annos offendentes amiserant homines, sub beatis apostolis rursus post ascensionem suam dominus per sanctum spiritum sine quodam labore credentibus conferebat, sicut scriptum est in Actibus apostolorum. Angelicae enim virtutis est linguas scire omnium hominum: per fidem autem Christi sine labore linguarum omnium credentibus subministratur scientia, sicut legimus, docente diuino spiritu apostolos atque gentes itidem credentes tunc temporis in Christum dominum saluae torem sine labore linguarum omnium donatam scientiam praedicasse, ut sub Petro et Paulo et aliis factum est, eum docerent gentes uenisse spiritum dei a deo: et linguis multis eos potuisse eloqui, ut audientes homines mirarentur de gentibus, quod tantarum linguarum et ipsi per fidem Christi scientiam haberent sine doctrina concessam.

Which translates to:

The knowledge of languages which offending men lost twenty-seven hundred years earlier the Lord conferred again through the Holy Spirit at the time of the blessed apostles after his ascension without any effort upon those who believed, as it is written in the Acts of the Apostles. For it is the power of angels to know the languages of all men; but through faith in Christ without any effort the knowledge of them all was passed on to believers as we read, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit the Apostles and the believers would be able to preach Christ the Lord and Saviour as the spirit of God from God effortlessly having been given such knowledge, as happened with Peter and Paul and others such that they could speak many languages, such that listeners among the Gentiles would marvel that they would have been given the knowledge of so many languages by faith in Christ without having been taught.²² [*emphasis added*]

22 Translation by Dr Girard J Etkorn.

The ability to speak all languages, being able to converse with all people groups seems to be the central focus of the Early Church Fathers when it comes to the gift of tongues. Filastrius refers to this ability as a power the angels possess, which indicates that all languages, rather than a distinct language, constitute the concept of ‘angelic language’.

6. Tongues of Angels in the Middle Ages

While the Church Fathers take us well into the fifth century AD with their references to tongues, history is not silent on the languages of angels in the era following the Church Fathers. During the Middle Ages mention of the language of angels is also found, though outside the Christian framework. Arguably the most notable are references to ‘angelic languages’ in the context of Enochian magic (Prinke and Follprecht 2015:120–121).

John Dee (1527–1608), a major figure in esoterism during the second part of the fourteenth century, viewed three ‘books’ as the primary sources through which the mysteries of God could be known. These metaphorical ‘books’ were ‘the human soul, revealed Scripture, and the “Book of Nature”’ (Asprem 2012:12). In his search for understanding, Dee studied optics, Kabbalistic hermeneutics, emblematics, mathematics, and astrology. Finding all of these contributing, yet not providing complete satisfaction in his pursuits, he turned to another source. Asprem (2012:14-15) explains:

When the corrupted text of the Book of Nature refused to reveal its meaning, Dee would turn to the source of all wisdom and understanding, by enrolling in a ‘celestial school’ run by angelic tutors. Just as God had sent his good angels to illuminate the patriarchs and prophets of old, including Enoch, Moses, Jacob, Esdras, Daniel, and Tobit, Dee was hoping to partake in the uncorrupted, perfect knowledge that could only come from a divine source.

In this pursuit, he employed, amongst others, Edward Kelley for his skills as medium. Kelley was able to engage with a ‘colloquium of angels’ who revealed to him ‘the lost language of Adam, knowledge of the angelic hierarchies, and secrets regarding the imminent apocalypse’ (Asprem 2012:11). He mediated the ‘angels’ through crystal-gazing, and related the content of the conversations to Dee, who was in attendance and made notes during the revelations.

During these detailed conversations, the knowledge now known as the Enochian system of magic was shared (Prinke and Follprecht 2015:120). According to the angels, the language of Adam was lost with the Fall, not at Babel as with *hebraeophone*.²³ This language was distinct in speech as well as writing. It was shared with Dee and Kelley in such a way that it enabled them to compile a dictionary which allowed for free translation from the ‘angelic language’ and script, to English.²⁴ The written alphabet of the angelic language is referred to as ‘the Adamic or “Enochian” alphabet’ (Asprem 2012:33)

23 According to the knowledge shared by the ‘angels’, Adam spoke the original language, knew the uncorrupted Kabbalah revealed to him by the angel Raziel, all of which was lost with the Fall (Asprem 2012:16). The restoration of Adamic language was part and parcel of restoring prelapsian science to humanity.

24 For more detail, see the The Whole Enochian Dictionary downloadable from <http://www.gclvx.org/The%20Whole%20Enochian%20Dictionary.pdf>

The greater purposes of the angelic conversations were to ‘restore human knowledge to the state from which it had fallen over the course of human history’ (Findell 2007:7). As part of this restoration, deciphering ‘the Adamic language, [was] one of the more famous features of the angel conversations’ (Asprem 2012:16).

Angelic language in the Enochian context undoubtedly promotes the idea of a language distinct in speech and script. It equates it to the primordial language spoken by Adam, and views it as an essential part of restoring knowledge to humanity. This literal language can be translated by using a dictionary the angels enabled Kelley and Dee to compile.

7. Context of 1 Corinthians 13:1

As noted earlier, the foundational text referenced to establish the concept of speaking in tongues as angelic language is 1 Corinthians 13:1 (Hasel 1991:122; Poirier 2010:47). Considering the verse itself, it is imperative to recognise that though the plural *ταῖς γλώσσαις* is specified as far as man is concerned, it is inferred of the angelic version as well. We have ‘languages of angels’ in view, not merely a singular language peculiar to the heavenly beings.

Some scholars regard 1 Corinthians 13:1 as referring to literal languages of angels (Dunn 1975:244; Fee 1987:630; Hodge 1988:266) while others regard it as a metaphor for spiritual expression or the estimation of the gift of tongues (Blomberg 1994:259; Martin 1984:43).

When considering the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 13:1, which would be verses 12:31–13:3, we find more telling indicators that ‘languages of angels’ does not refer to the heavenly. Firstly 12:31a is overwhelmingly translated as an imperative; ‘But zealously strive after the better gifts’. It is, however, linguistically viable and would fit the context of chapter 12 (even the greater context of 1 Corinthians) and the core argument of chapter 13:1–3 better, if the translation is understood as being in the indicative. The verse would then read ‘but you zealously strive after the better gifts’, highlighting the Corinthian vanity, boasting and self-serving, ‘and yet I show to you a more excellent way’, which smoothly leads the reader from the chapter 12 foundational understanding of the gifts in general, as in service of the ‘common good’ (1 Corinthians 12:7), to the way of love laid out in chapter 13, which itself sets the stage for Paul’s main focus, which is addressing the misuse of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church in chapter 14.

Verses 1–3 of chapter 13 follow a formula where three constituent elements are used to illustrate a point:

1) a hypothesis, or conditional clause as some prefer to call it (Hasel 1991:123), is presented²⁵

2) the hypothesis is taken to the point of hyperbole,

3) the uselessness of the gift without charity/love is indicated,

This formula, and the repetition of the formula in verses 1–3, are used to drive home the point Paul intends to make (Bozung 2013:7). The formula is an effective literary tool to show the ineffectiveness of gifts without love. The repetition of the formula reinforces the universality of the principle as it is applied to various gifts representative of all the gifts (see Table 2).

²⁵ The hypothetical nature of the statements in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 have been noted by scholars such as Battle (2007:3), Grosheide (1980:305) and Fee (1987:629), with Fee referring to it as ‘a series of conditional sentences’.

Hypothesis	Hyperbole	Uselessness without love
Though I speak with the tongues of men	and of angels,	and have not charity, I have become <i>as</i> sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.
And though I have prophecies,	and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to move mountains,	and do not have charity, I am nothing.
And though I give out all my goods to feed <i>the poor</i> ,	and though I deliver my body to be burned	and have not charity, I am profited nothing.

Table 2: The formula used in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1. The hypotheses in all three verses are indicated by the conditional clause ‘though’ (KJV/NKJV) or ‘if’ (ASV, ESV, ISV), followed by the first person singular, not to specify Paul as the author, but rather as ‘a more general reference of what is true of others or of everybody’ (Grosheide 1980:303). Paul thus intends to have the reader understand him/herself as the ‘I’ and so consider the way the gifts are practised. Battle (2007:3) highlights the hypothetical nature of these verses by pointing out that ‘Paul never “fathomed all mysteries and all knowledge”, nor “moved mountains”, nor “gave all his possessions to the poor”, nor “surrendered his body to the flames”’.

26 It is significant that only the gift of prophecy has no hyperbole associated with it. This could be a precursor to the way in which the importance of prophecy is highlighted when compared to tongues in chapter 14 in general and in verse 5 in particular. It could also be that there is no such a thing as hyperbole when it comes to prophecy as true divine proclamation cannot be taken to excess.

2. Verse 1 starts with the general and reasonable ‘speak in the tongues of men’ and then takes it to the hyperbole ‘and [the languages] of angels’, not to establish the existence of such (a) distinct language(s), but as a literary tool to emphasise the argument he is about to make. In verse 2 the hyperbole is indicated by ‘all mysteries’, ‘all knowledge’ and ‘all faith’, the last of which is presented even more graphically by specifying ‘so as to move mountains’.²⁶ In verse 3 the hyperbole is firstly indicated by giving ‘all my goods’ and in the last instance by giving ‘my body to be burned’, an act truly outside the scope of voluntary action.

3. Paul indicates the meaninglessness and senselessness of any and all of these actions and abilities unless and until they are motivated by charity/love, which has serving of the ‘common good’ as goal.

The formula used in these verses points to the languages of angels, not as a factual construct, but rather, as fictitious hyperbole to emphasise charity/love as an essential element for the efficacy of the spiritual gifts. Verse 1 clearly implies a plural form; ‘languages of angels’. That, in combination with the undeniable hypothesis and hyperbole formula, would render an Enochian style literal distinct language untenable. As Keener (2005:108) puts it ‘More likely, angelic speech merely reinforces the hyperbole of one able to speak “all” tongues’. Fitzmyer (2008:492) agrees when he states ‘Paul is simply indulging in rhetorical hyperbole, and using a bit of irony, as he joins contrary terms to express the totality of those who use speech.’

Paul’s use of the literary tools of hypothesis and hyperbole invalidates the use of 1 Corinthians 13:1 as a foundation for establishing the concept of an esoteric language of angels. The reading of angelic language as a fictional construct suits both the immediate context of verses 1–3, the greater context of the preceding and following chapters, and the issues addressed in the book as a whole.

8. The Contemporary Pentecostal View of Tongues as the Language of Angels

Pentecostals regard the gift of tongues as supernatural, which it surely is as a spiritual gift. The type of tongues they practise is glossolalia, a language not intelligible to other humans unless interpreted by one so gifted.

Williams (1996:222) states, however, that ‘speaking in tongues, while fully intelligible to God, is language beyond human capacity to speak or understand’ and is at first glance supported by 1 Corinthians 14:2. As most Pentecostals do, he argues strongly against the view that the utterances are mere ‘nonsensical speech or incoherent babbling’, on the contrary, they are considered ‘the ultimate in intelligible expression’ (Williams 1996:222).

This seems far removed from Acts 2:6, 8 and 11 which describe the languages of Pentecost as human languages of contemporary society in New Testament times. In contemporary Pentecostalism a distinction is made between tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians which was not the case during the early 1900s (Nel 2017:3). Nel (2017:3) highlights the contemporary phenomenon with the Corinthian teaching, saying: ‘Modern Pentecostals rather identify their experience of speaking in languages with the Corinthian phenomenon and call it heavenly languages, ecstatic languages, angelic languages, or prayer languages’. (Nel 2017:3).

The change in view from early Pentecostalism to the contemporary interpretation was due to the fact that the early expectation that tongues would enable missionaries to converse with foreign nations, tribes and peoples was not realised, resulting in a re-interpretation of tongues as a devotional prayer language (Busenitz 2014:69–83; McGee 2007:1; Nel 2017:2).

To Pentecostals, the ‘various kinds of languages’ (γέννη γλωσσῶν) in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is reflective of categories of tongues, as is ‘tongues of humans and angels’ (ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων) in 1 Corinthians 13:1 (Menzies 2016:128; Nel 2017:6). They consider tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians as two different manifestations, though both are considered gifts of the Holy Spirit. The former is understood as being *xenolalia* and the latter *glossolalia*, the devotional prayer language or the ‘language of angels’ which is neither human language nor understandable without the gift of interpretation of tongues. Cartledge (2000:150) supports the idea of a prayer language saying ‘Glossolalia also functions as a personal and private gift edifying the spirit of the person using it in private devotion.’

Battle (2007:2) also describes in this context a language which must be interpreted:

Paul speaks of ‘the tongues of men and of angels,’ thus apparently allowing for ‘angelic’ languages as a possible experience for tongue speakers.

The gift may require another spiritual gift to interpret the message, perhaps indicating that it was not given in a human language. It is described as speaking ‘not to men but to God,’ and ‘uttering mysteries.’

Battle (2007:3) continues to explain that the ‘tongues of angels’, in his opinion, does not imply that an actual heavenly language of angels is referred to. He acknowledges the earlier-mentioned hypothetical and hyperbolic statements in 1 Corinthians 13. He says ‘Speaking in the tongues of angels’ would be the hyperbole, the extreme extent of tongue speaking—like the other examples, an extreme he never actually reached.’

Turner (1985:19) strongly disagrees, arguing that since the content of the angelic speech is mysteries, which he describes as ‘eschatological secrets known only in heaven’, it follows that the ‘language of heaven’ (angelic language) is used.

Pentecostals are aware of the challenges their view faces. Nel (2017:6) acknowledges that Paul is using ‘hyperbolic and superlative’ language in 1 Corinthians 13:1 with the aim of highlighting ‘love’s priority above all else’ and therefore that establishing the existence of angelic language on a hypothetical and hyperbolic statement is problematic.

9. A Critical Evaluation of the Contextual and Literary Study of Tongues as the Language of Angels

The first-century witness to the tongues of angels shows two primary views: *hebraeophone*, which claims Hebrew as the language of angels, and *angeloglossy*, which advocates for an esoteric angelic language.

If indeed the *Book of Jubilees* is correct in its narrative that Hebrew was the language of Creation spoken by God, it would also be the language of angels. Abraham, who, according to this view, has divinely received the Hebrew tongue anew after the cessation of its use with the Babel event, taught his sons this language, and it became the language of the Israelite nation. Thus, the whole nation of Israel spoke the ‘language of angels’, the tongue which Hebrew scholars knew and used until the time of Paul (and thereafter).

Though Paul wrote the letters to the Corinthians in Greek, the reference to ‘tongues of angels’ would then refer to Hebrew.

This would cause 1 Corinthians 13:1 essentially to read: ‘though I speak with the tongues of men and Hebrew, and have not charity,

I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal’, which destroys the hyperbolic nature of conditional clause Paul employed in the verse and also its link with the use of the formula in verses 2 and 3.

Many cultures of the ancient world claimed cultural superiority because of speaking the primordial language. Rubin (1998:308) says, ‘whoever holds onto this unique divine language is in consequence the “favourite son”, closest and most intimate to God, and therefore superior’. He soon after continues the argument saying ‘[t]he question of the “language of creation” or the “primordial language” serves therefore as a cultural yardstick of different cultural identities’. In all likelihood, this was the case with the nations of Israel’s view of Hebrew as the primordial language also.

It is highly unlikely that Paul had Hebrew in mind as the language of angels, since such a view is nowhere reflected in his writings and does not fit the literary formula which he employs in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

When the esoteric angelic language option is considered, we find in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* a mention of angelic expression which was not understood, but in both the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* and the *Ascension of Isaiah* the language spoken seems to have been the language of the heavenly beings which the human involved had the ability to understand and even speak. In the *Testament of Job* there are indications that different heavenly beings spoke different languages. Here it must be noted that the term ‘διάλεκτος’ (dialect) is used in the *Testament of Job*, and does not, as some assume, only denote a regional difference in speech based on the same underlying language, but when used in Acts 2, as an example, serves to point to distinct languages (Balz and Shneider 1990:307).²⁸

Martin (1984:43) explains that tongues of angels is ‘a Jewish phrase to denote a type of prayer-speech eminently suited to praising God’. His reference to prayer-speech in a Judaeian context is interesting, as he believes, on the one hand, that tongues of angels were indeed part of personal expression during worship and, on the other, that it existed and was practised in the Judaeian-Christian context in the first century AD.

28 Balz and Shneider (1990:307), in discussing the term ‘διάλεκτος’ states ‘[t]he Galileans actually speak in various languages and are understood by those who are present in their own dialects; the event is thus not a miracle of hearing associated with glossolalia’.

However, evidence is lacking. Williams (1996:396), commenting on Martin, claims the term tongues of angels ‘is another way of referring to spiritual utterance as being from heaven, even if it is not literally the speech of angels’. Williams thus views the term ‘tongues of angels’ not as necessarily referring to *angeloglossy*, but rather as inspired speech. Even when *angeloglossy* is not just assumed, but accepted as a given, the link between tongues of angels and glossolalia still needs to be established.

There are a few noteworthy arguments against the *Testament of Job* having had a major influence on the writing of Paul, if it had any influence at all. Firstly, many scholars have shown that the dating of the *Testament of Job* likely excludes it from being a document that could have existed or been in wide circulation at the time of Paul’s writing the first epistle to the Corinthians (Burton 2011:212). Forbes (1995:71–72), for example, argues that the *Testament of Job* (as well as the book *Acts of Paul*) used 1 Corinthians 13:1 as a source, which logically would imply that he is convinced that both these works were authored after 1 Corinthians. Secondly, if the *Testament of Job* is proved to have preceded Paul’s writing, it must also be shown that Paul knew about its existence, and even then, that his reference to the languages of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1 was influenced by it. Thirdly, the understanding of ‘angelic language’ as a distinct tongue in its own right does not seem to match the description of the *Testament of Job* which refers to an ‘angelic dialect’ with a ‘hymnic style of the angels’ (*T. Job* 48:3). The expression seems to convey a similarity to the language that Job’s daughters spoke, rather than a singular, distinct, unrelated language. The *Testament of Job* consistently used the term *διάλεκτος* while Paul uses the term *γλῶσσα*. Hasel (1991:122) points out that there is ‘no genuine parallel on terminological grounds’ to link the references in the *Testament of Job* with Paul’s reference to languages of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1.

The fact that there was an awareness of the angelic speech, or even *angeloglossy*, in first-century Judaeon culture, by no means proves that it was understood to be glossolalia. On this issue Forbes (1995:62) states: ‘The Jewish parallels for the concept of angelic languages are interesting but not finally convincing ... and the theory puts altogether too much weight on one flimsy exegetical peg.’²⁹

²⁹ The exegetical peg here referred to is 1 Corinthians 13:1.

As a matter of fact, the reports from the Early Church Fathers seem a much more reliable source on the nature of the tongues of angels, since the Church Fathers lived at a time much closer to the biblical manifestation, either during or soon after it was still prevalent. They did not have the Pentecostal manifestation as the glasses through which the Bible narrative and apostolic tradition are seen today. Several Pentecostal scholars recognise the problem their prior experience poses to their hermeneutic process. Among them are Fee (1976:122), who says ‘in general the Pentecostal’s experience has preceded their hermeneutics. In a sense, the Pentecostal tends to exegete his or her experience’ and Cargal (1993:163–187), who concurs with Fee stating that ‘[o]ther Pentecostal scholars have recognized that indeed experience of the charismata informs Pentecostal interpretation from the outset’, and, ‘[w]e cannot simply assert that the modern phenomena identified by the labels of the New Testament charismata are in fact the same as the phenomena in the first century church’. The witness of the Early Church Fathers serves as an unadulterated account on tongues from much closer in time, culture and tradition to the apostles.

Filastrius (*Book of Diverse Heresies* 104.5–6) understood the angels to be capable of conversing in all languages. In his understanding, the ability to converse in all languages was the gift the apostles received on the day of Pentecost. If Paul did have the gift of tongues in mind when referring to the languages of angels, he would have likely been referring to a multitude of languages. After all, the reference in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is not singular, but plural, thus languages of angels refers to the ability to speak all languages, rather than a (singular) language of angels.

One having the gift of tongues, or speaking the languages of angels, would then be like the angels, having the ability to speak all known languages, and as such will find no people group with whom he/she would not be able to converse. This idea is exactly what Rufinus of Aquileia (Welliver 1961:184) conveys when Gumerlock (2004:127) quotes him as writing: ‘They [the apostles] were thus enabled to speak a variety of different languages, with the result that they found no nation strange to them, and no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension’.

There are other motivations for mentioning the languages of angels which are more viable in my estimation than outside influence such as the abovementioned apocryphal books, which Cox (2000:10) notes would likely be regarded by Paul as ‘Jewish fables’, which he explicitly warns against (Titus 1:14).

The Early Church Fathers may not directly reference the languages of angels, but analysing their work seems to indicate that they understood the gift of tongues to be the ability to speak all languages spoken by man, which would constitute the plural form 'languages of angels' encountered in 1 Corinthians 13:1. No biblical indication points to a distinct language spoken by angelic beings.

The accounts of angelic languages from the Middle Ages could not have influenced the writing of Paul, but could have impacted the understanding of his writings by later generations. Dee's work shows that his concept of angels was informed by the Bible and the apocryphal book called the *Book of Enoch* (Tyson 2005:1–2), rather than other secular sources or other religions. Dee recorded in *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti* many biblical accounts of encounters with angels.³⁰ Though the angels introduced themselves as those who 'had instructed the patriarch Enoch in the angelic language and the wisdom of God' (Tyson 2005:1), the 'angels' they conversed with do, however, seem to have been of the fallen kind, biblically speaking, as Dee records of Kelley at a particular point that 'he took our Teachers to be deceivers, and wicked, and no good Creatures of God' (Prinke and Follprecht 2015:123).³¹

Of significance here is the Enochian version of 'angelic language' or *lingua adamica*, which brings us again to the idea of a primordial/heavenly language given to the first man, Adam. This time it is not Hebrew, but a distinct language and script which are also considered the language of the angels.

Findell (2007:10–11), like Laycock (1994:29–35), noted similarities between Dee's records of the linguistics of the 'angelic language' and contemporary glossolalia. Findell states: 'the phonology and phonotactics of the angelic utterances present few difficulties to an English speaker. This behaviour conforms to what we would expect from an English-speaking glossolalist.' With this, a possible link between 'angelic language' in the context of Enochian magic and contemporary glossolalia has already been established. If proved legitimate, it poses a problem since any literal language of angels, such as found here, where the Enochian Dictionary could be developed, would render the need for interpretation of tongues as a gift unnecessary. As soon as a dictionary on that particular version of literal angelic language is created, anyone would then be able to translate the heavenly messages without the gift of interpretation by simply using the dictionary. The role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of tongues would then be rendered unnecessary.

30 Dee (1985:7) stated: 'And, seing, I have red in thy bokes, & records, how Enoch enjoyed thy favour and conversation, with Myses thow wast familier: And allso that to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Josue, Gedeon, Esdras, Daniel, Tobias, and sundry other, thy good angels were sent, by thy disposition, to instruct them, informe them, help them, yea in wordly and domesticall affaire, yea and sometimes to satisfy theyr desyres, dowtes & questions of thy Secrets'.

31 Asprin (2012:7) notes that 'the "angelic" system of Enochiana was interestingly incorporated into Anton LaVey's Satanic Bible'.

The similarity of the Enochian ‘angelic language’ and the phonology and phonotactics of contemporary glossolalia is also not proof in and of itself that there is a direct relationship between the two, much less that glossolalia should be considered as constituting the biblical languages of angels. Williams (1996:396) similarly reflects on 1 Corinthians 13:1 stating that he has ‘some difficulty in equating angelic languages with speaking in tongues since it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who gives the utterance and therefore presumably would speak more than the language of angels’.

With the translation of the Enochian ‘angelic language’ to English it follows that, at least initially, the awareness of the phenomenon would be greater among English-speaking people groups such as are found in England, Scotland, Ireland and America. Among these groups many of the contemporary manifestations of glossolalia have emerged such as the Quakers in the United States, the Irvingites of Scotland, the Latter-day Saints and the Pentecostals (the Azusa Street Revival) in the United States. With all these groups references to ‘the languages of angels’ can be found. As we saw with the lack of evidence for linking Judaeo tradition with the writings of Paul on the tongues of angels, no evidence exists, to date, for linking the Enochian magic of Dee with the contemporary practice of tongues or references to angelic speech in Christian groups who practise(d) glossolalia.

Finally, considering the text and context of 1 Corinthians 13:1, Tolmie (2011:5) recognises the hyperbolic nature of the reference to angelic tongues when he states: ‘The effect of the reference to the tongues of angels is thus hyperbolic, helping to underline the notion of how extremely important the gift of love is’. He does, however, consider the reference to tongues of angels as presupposing that angels have a distinct language. It seems strange that the verse is used as foundational to the establishment of a distinct language spoken by angels due to its hypothetic and hyperbolic nature. When this structure of hypothesis → hyperbole → lack of charity → resulting futility, is recognised, then the concept of tongues of angels can be seen for what it is, hyperbole, utilised to emphasise the supremacy of love, and not evidence of the existence of angelic languages as a gift to man. As Hodge (1988:266) puts it, ‘Paul means to say, that the gift of tongues in its highest conceivable extent without love is nothing’.

Barnes (2012:195), recognising this formula, concludes: ‘In each of the couplets in 13:2–3 the second half of the couplet describes the very pinnacle of the first. Thus, the greatest language of men is actually the language of angels.’

It then seems evident that Paul's intent is not to establish the basis for the existence of heavenly languages, but rather to make use of the combination of hypothesis and hyperbole to show the excellence of gifts functioning with a motivation of loving service to the faith community.

Tolmie (2011:5) also recognises the function of hyperbole when he states:

From a rhetorical perspective, the reference to angels in verse 1 again functions hyperbolically and is constructed in a climactic fashion: 'If I speak in the tongues of humans and (even) of angels ...'. The effect of the reference to the tongues of angels is thus hyperbolic, helping to underline the notion of how extremely important the gift of love is.

Battle (2007:21–23), agreeing with the aspect of hyperbole in verses 1–3, points out that Paul never claimed to possess or express the hyperbolic state of the gifts mentioned; he did not 'understand all mysteries', possess 'all knowledge', have 'all faith, so as to move mountains', gave out 'all [his] goods to feed the poor' or delivered his 'body to be burned'.³² It would logically follow that he also, though having the ability to speak the languages of men, did not possess the ability to speak the languages of angels. Recognising that he did possess the gift of tongues according to 1 Corinthians 14:18, the gift of tongues can then also not equal the languages of angels since it is the hyperbolic version of the formula, which he did not possess in any and all of the cases mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

Hypotheses and hyperboles, as literary tools, are not vested in, nor do they aim to establish factuality as Hasel (1991:123) notes in relation to the tongues of angels. He declares '[t]he nature of the conditional clause with the hypothetical nature of Paul's sentence in 1 Corinthians 13:1 makes it clear that the key to Paul's understanding of "speaking in tongues" is not found in the text'.

Similarly, Grosheide (1980:305) also mentions in relation to 'delivering my body to be burned' that 'history does not record any major persecution at the time Paul wrote these words' and 'there is no record of anyone being burned at the stake at this early time.' Fee (1987:634) and Hodge (1988:268) agrees that martyrdom is not in view here, but rather, as the latter states, 'a sacrifice made for the good of others'.³³ This would especially reinforce, in the mind of the readers of that day, the fact that Paul is making use of the hypothetical and hyperbolic combination as a tool to emphasise the vital role of charity/love.

32 Some manuscripts render verse 3 differently and prefer *καυχῆσθαι* (boast) instead of *καυθήσομαι* (burned) (Fee 1987:633–635; Hodge 1988:259). For more detail on the relevant textual criticism see Andreas Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (HNT 9/I; Tübingen: JCB Mohr 2000), 285–286.

33 Blomberg (1994:259) mentions that the NIV 'surrender my body that I may boast' could be a closer reading to the original and may then point to giving up one's body as 'the ancient practice of selling oneself into slavery to raise funds for distribution to the poor'. Fee (1987:634–635) explains how Paul's use of the term 'boast' should not be viewed in the pejorative sense, but makes more sense in the context of boasting about his weakness and suffering as per 2 Cor 11:23–29 and 12:10.

Paul does not claim to possess the ability to converse in angelic speech (though he does acknowledge speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:18) and uses it as the hyperbole to one of the hypotheses he presents to signify the crucial importance of love as the element that gives value to the practice of the charismata.

In the light of the witness of the Early Church Fathers, the languages of angels could encompass all languages spoken on earth, with 'no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension' (Rufinius of Aquileia as quoted by Gumerlock 2004:127). The ability to converse in all languages, as opposed to one or even several languages as can reasonably be expected from a person, is evidence of divine giftedness.

10. Conclusion

Though Judaeen tradition does suggest an awareness of angelic language in New Testament times, it is impossible at this time to determine what influence, if any, it had on Paul's reference to the languages of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1. The most commonly referenced work in this regard, the *Testament of Job*, could very well have an origin too late for it to have had any influence whatsoever, which renders the influence of Judaeen tradition on angelic language to no more than mere speculation.

The Church Fathers, the closest extra-biblical witnesses of tongues, all agreed that the gift of tongues was the ability to speak all languages known to humankind, an ability they also ascribed to the angels. Considering their view, it would seem likely that the languages of angels would not refer to a distinct heavenly language or languages, but rather to the ability to communicate verbally with anyone and everyone encountered, like the angels are able to.

If the Judaeen tradition is believed to establish an awareness of angelic language during the New Testament era, then the establishment of the concept of a unique angelic language as found in Enochian magic, which had an English translation as soon as it was established, could have influenced Europe (its place of origin), England and America (the two countries where English was most commonly spoken). This could have influenced the later understanding of ecstatic speech, as spoken at the Azusa Street Mission, as an angelic language and have precipitated the comparison between the characteristics of the Enochian manifestation and contemporary glossolalic speech.

As with the Judaeian tradition, the influence of Enochian magic on the understanding of the concept of biblical tongues of angels remains mere speculation for now.

The context and structure of 1 Corinthians 13:1 point to a non-literal understanding of the languages of angels. As a hyperbolic expression it neither establishes the existence of a distinct language of angels, nor does it point to the gift of tongues as being a language of angels. Paul's lack of possession or practice of any of the hyperbolic expressions found in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 opposes the view that the gift of tongues is in fact angelic language. It is also problematic in terms of the Church Fathers' understanding of tongues as the ability to speak all languages known to humanity.

Equating the gift of tongues to angelic language cannot be justified by the Bible, nor by the historical context of the New Testament era.

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Is John's Λόγος Christology a Polemical Response to Philo of Alexandria's Logos Philosophy? (Part 1)

Robert Peltier and Dan Lioy

Abstract

This journal article is the first in a two-part series that examines the Prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18) as a Christological statement for the purpose of repudiating Philo of Alexandria's philosophical logos. The current essay explores the use of the word Λόγος² in the fourth Gospel, John's likely rationale for using a prologue motif to open the gospel, and an exegesis of the Prologue producing ten specific statements that encompass John's Λόγος Christology. In Part II, we exegete Philo of Alexandria's writings for the purpose of determining his logos philosophy that may then be compared and contrasted with John's Christological Λόγος. We conclude that John used the prologue for two important reasons. First, he used a prologue for the commonly expected purpose of summarizing the entire gospel, introducing Christological themes and first-person testimony about the divinity and mission of Christ on earth, that would be more thoroughly explored in the remainder of the Gospel. However, John also adopted the Greek prologue motif as a literary device to introduce the eternal *Logos* of the Christian world while simultaneously redefining the commonly-known logos of the Greek world as the Christian *Logos*. John accomplished this feat by specifically refuting Philo of Alexandria's philosophical logos with his presentation of his seemingly simple yet theologically robust Christological *Logos*.

Keywords

Christology, Gospel of John, Hellenism, Logos, Philo of Alexandria, Philosophy, Prologue, Exegesis

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2 Λόγος = Logos (Word). The capitalized English word equivalent will be used to represent usage representing Jesus Christ. Other uses will use lowercase logos.

1. Introduction

The origin of John's *Logos* Christology is generally discussed by scholars as (1) originating from or relying on a literary or oral tradition (often described as a hymn tradition), or (2) being a later addition by redactors of the gospel of John using written and/or oral Jewish or Hellenistic sources, or (3) having Jewish origins from within the emerging Christology, often cited as a replacement of the Jewish Sophia traditions or the Memra (The Word of the Lord) translation from the Jewish Targums written in Aramaic, or (4) growing out of Judeo-Hellenistic philosophical thought that found its way into the fourth Gospel, principally through the works of Philo of Alexandria and his use of a mystical logos as a pseudo-divine intermediary between transcendent God and humanity. The body of literature that addresses the first three options is immense and its evaluation is not part of this work. The fourth option will be addressed by this work using the apostle John's Prologue to his gospel (John 1:1–18). An exegesis of the Prologue will develop ten important observations about John's *Logos* Christology. An exegesis of Philo of Alexandria's complete body of writings as the exemplar of Hellenistic Judaism writings is also examined with particular emphasis on his logos philosophy. A comparison of the two will reveal any intersections between the two belief systems.

1.1. John's Use of Prologue

John's central theme of the fourth gospel is the incarnation of the Word, and the Prologue (1:1–18) is a description of Jesus Christ as the 'Ultimate Fact of the universe' (Dobrin 2005:209). John's Prologue is profound because of its highly developed yet succinctly stated Christology. The Prologue reveals that the Word of God is not an attribute of God but rather the Word is a preexistent, co-equal member of the Godhead responsible for the creation of all things. The Prologue '... remains one of the most complicated doctrinal statements in the Bible' (Borchert 1996:100). The Prologue also serves as a theological summary in a few verses of what the apostle John will carefully reveal in the remainder of the fourth gospel (Harris 2004:173) as well as a 'masterful statement with a poetic sound' (Borchert 1996:101).

A remarkable literary feature of John's Prologue is that it introduces eternal concepts that would have been familiar to ancient Hellenist philosophers, pagans, (and if Bultmann [1971] is correct, Gnostics) Jews, and Greeks, until the reader reaches verse 14 and 'the Word became flesh' and 'We have seen His glory.'

John wrote the Prologue to describe the coming of the Son of God in an engaging manner that would encourage readers to read the entire Gospel (Beasley-Murray 2002:5). The inclusive use of 'we' and 'us' in the text at verses 14 and 16, respectively, demonstrates John's recognition of a community sense of witness in the testimony of the Gospel, particularly in the strong Christological assertions of the Prologue. In his treatise, *The Cosmic Role of the Logos*, de Beer (2014:21) notes that in the majority of cases [in the New Testament] the word 'logos' represents a 'spoken word, story, or message' (Louw 1996:399) with the exception John 1:1, where the *Logos* is identified as divine, preexistent, and the defining force of all creation. The Jesus of history is suddenly and unexpectedly revealed as God-man incarnate, the defining force of all creation (Carson 1991:23).

John also adopted the Greek prologue as a literary device to introduce the eternal *Logos* of the Christian world in a familiar manner while simultaneously redefining the familiar logos of the Greek world as the Christian *Logos*. The similarities to the Greek prologue appear clear yet its use was purposeful. The use of prologue in Greek writings would have been readily apparent to the Hellenized readers of John's gospel. Also, the close connection between the themes introduced in the Prologue and expanded upon later in the Gospel is clearly on display when the entire Gospel is considered. John introduces a creation story that predates the Greek logos and introduces the divine *Logos* who was the creative force for all things. Greek readers, steeped in Platonic dualism, would have surely identified with the *Logos* until reaching verse 14 when the divine *Logos* cloaks himself in the form of humanity. By that point in the story, the Greek reader would want to learn more about the eternal *Logos*. After all, the Gospel of John, at its core, is an ancient evangelistic writing.

In a practical sense, the Prologue to the fourth Gospel functions as a means to foreshadow major themes of the Gospel (Carson 1991:110). The attention of the reader having been captured by the Prologue the reader is encouraged to explore the reasons for the incarnation of Christ and the subsequent rejection of the Son of God by fellow Jews. John's Prologue is also a summary of the principal themes of his *Logos* Christology that will be revealed in the remainder of the Gospel narrative, such as the eternal nature of Christ, the Word of God, and the eternal struggle of light against darkness (Brown 1997:374–376). Finally, Liou (2005:65) points to the 'liturgical quality' of the Prologue in that it summons believers to enter into a worship experience of the God of truth and light that arrived incarnate with an invitation to 'believe in His name' in order to 'become children of God' (v. 12).

2. Religious Milieu of the Gospel

John wrote to Jews, including diaspora Jews, Palestinian Jews, and Jews deeply influenced by Hellenism, as well as Gentiles steeped in Greek culture. John wished persons from each group to embrace the gospel message. John assumes that readers have an elementary knowledge of Jesus (the background material present in Luke, for example, is missing from John) perhaps through a familiarity with the Synoptics, from earlier teaching, or by word of mouth. The intended recipients of the gospel reflect the disparate historical backgrounds of the diverse groups.

2.1 Hellenism is the Norm

The Hellenization of the known world was moving forward in the first century. It is well accepted within the scholarly community that the Gospel of John, particularly within the Prologue, has hints of Greek dualism (e.g. light vs. dark) that reflect John's intimate knowledge of Hellenism. The social context of the first century made continuing contact with Hellenism inevitable. Greek acculturation had been underway for 200 years in the Galilee. John lived and worked in a region ruled by Herod Antipas who was actively Hellenizing the region as a continuation of the work of his father, Herod the Great. The archeological remains in the region (e.g. Sepphoris, Caesarea Maritima), trade and commerce, and coinage attest to the impact of Hellenism on Jewish society at this time.

2.2 Friction Between Christians and Jews

In Palestine, friction between Jews and Christians was increasing late in the first century. It is important to observe that the rising conflicts between Christians and Jews did not originate with anti-Semites but were clashes that took place within the Jewish community. The often-thought pejorative use of the term 'the Jews' in the Gospel of John is best viewed as an internal conflict that does not involve the emerging Christian church. The term 'the Jews' in context is a metaphor for the Jewish leaders of the period, principally the temple officials and the Pharisees, who represent entrenched Jewish religious legalism that rejected Jesus and Jewish converts. The conflict with 'the Jews' was principally intra-Jewish, that is, Jesus and his followers (themselves Jews) were opposed by Jewish religious leaders. Even the Romans viewed these episodes as merely internal Jewish squabbles and not worth getting involved in. John's gospel does not describe the conflict between Christians and Jews, but it does describe conflicts between Jews within the Jewish community about Jewish religious issues, principally application of the Oral Law.

Enmity between Christians and Jews grew to the point that Jewish-Christians were expelled from the synagogue (John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2, not found in the Synoptics). John describes these Jewish-Christians as *ἄποσυνάγωγος* ('put out'), which is similar language to 'spurn your name as evil' found in Luke 6:22. Being 'put out' began with 'social ostracism and verbal abuse' by the remainder of Jewish society culminating with the predicted killing of expelled believers (v. 16:2, cf. Matt. 23:34, Luke 21:16) by those thinking they were doing service to God (Lincoln 2005:83).

However, this is not to say there was not strong animosity between splinter Christian sects and mainstream Judaism. The Council of Jamnia (ca 85–90 CE) under the leadership of Rabbi Gamaliel II is believed to have reorganized institutional Judaism and added the curse of the heretics (*Birkat ha-Minim*, 'benediction concerning heretics'), referring directly to Christianity. This view seems reasonable given there are no further references to decrees by Jewish leaders expelling Christians from the synagogue found in contemporaneous Jewish writings.

The split between Judaism and Christianity was complete and Jewish Christians were expelled from synagogues, likely beginning during the middle to late first century. The expulsions remain an important milestone for the emerging Christian church: the rift between Christian and Jew was permanent (Lincoln 2005:87). John's Christology, as presented in the Prologue, was perfected during this period of dissension. The historical setting of the first century in the eyes of Jewish Christians was one of rejection from the synagogue followed by persecution by Roman authorities. This was the level of societal discord within the Jewish community present when John wrote the fourth Gospel.

3. Exegesis of John 1:1-18

The first step in our comparative analysis of John's Christological *Logos* with Philo of Alexandria's philosophical logos is an exegesis of the Prologue. A detailed exegesis of the Prologue is presented in this section, including the writer's translation of the passage. The product of the exegesis is used to produce the essentials of John's Christological *Logos* found in the Prologue. The Greek text used is NA28 (Aland 2012:292–293). The exegetical process generally follows Fee (2002).

3.1 Organization of the Exegetical Analysis

Scholars have proposed a wide range of organizational options for the Prologue. McHugh (2009:78–79), for example, catalogues over a dozen variants. The organization of this exegesis of the Prologue reflects the scholarly consensus as:

John 1:1–5: The Eternal Word of God

John 1:6–8: The Witness of John

John 1:9–13: The Light Enters the World

John 1:14–18: The Word Became Flesh

Within the exegesis of each pericope, the author's smooth translation appears at the beginning of each section. A literal translation with alternative translation word choices is placed within brackets within each clause/sentence and within the exegetical discussion. Italics are used to denote the translation.

3.2 John 1:1-5: The Eternal Word of God

3.2.1 Passage Text and Final Translation

1:1 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 1:2. This Word was in the beginning with God. 1:3 All things through Him came to be, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of humanity 1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Grammar and Key Words

1:1a. Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,

In [the] beginning was the Word,

The Prologue begins with three clauses, each repeating the common subject, λόγος and using the same substantive verb ἦν to describe the eternal nature of the Word with respect to time, the essence of his being, and his divinity (Westcott 1908:2).

The first verse begins with the prepositional phrase Ἐν ἀρχῇ revealing to readers the object of interest. However, the expected statement that God was present before creation does not appear. Instead, the Word, the subject of the clause, has been present for all eternity. The phrase also echoes the creation story in nature and context from Genesis 1:1, which John surely intended. The word ἀρχῇ refers to the beginning of history when there was naught. In the first verse, ἀρχῇ may be considered in a historical sense but also in a cosmological sense.

Λόγος, the Word, is used in context as a noun for Jesus Christ and is only found in verses 1 and 14. Thus, the phrase speaks to Jesus Christ himself as existing before creation (although his preexistence is not unambiguously stated) and with a timeless undefinable origin before creation. Jesus was not only the creator of all things but was also present at the beginning of history, before creation.

1:1b. καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

and the Word was with [or in the presence of] God, and the Word was [or was fully] God.

The preposition πρὸς with an accusative object is normally translated as *with* (Louw 1996:791), but it also has the connotation of possessing common characteristics. The phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν (*with God*) may then be interpreted as *in God's presence* or perhaps having a *personal relationship with God*. In context, Jesus was in God's presence at the moment of creation. Also note that God is placed first in the final clause, θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος signifying John's emphasis has moved to God as opposed to the Word. The subject (Word) has a preceding article and the predicate (God) does not, thus the phrase must be translated as *the Word was God*, not 'God was the Word.' The verse states the equivalence of the Word and God, neither has a superior or inferior position but both share divine characteristics thereby completely expressing the deity of Jesus Christ, the Word.

1:2. οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

This Word was in the beginning with God.

Οὗτος is a near demonstrative pronoun typically translated *this one* (Louw 1996:816). In context, the pronoun is referring to the Word. The seemingly redundant clause serves the valuable purpose of summing up and emphasizing the three important propositions presented in the first verse: the Word existed before creation, the Word was with God at the time of creation, and, the Word is God. The equivalence of deity of the first two persons of the Trinity (a concept that will remain undeveloped for centuries) is thus established.

1:3a. πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,

All things through Him came [exist] to be,

The plural, neuter adjective πάντα is usually translated as *all, every* (Louw 1996:596) but in this pronominal form, *all things* or *everything* is expected.

The sum of a collection of things is in view, emphasizing the great number of different created things rather than a group of parts that define a whole. *All things* is emphasized because it is at the beginning of the clause—not a single thing came into being that wasn't made by the Word. The second word in this clause is *διὰ* and with a genitive object is a genitive of means, which points to the causative agent (Louw 1996:796). Thus, *though/by Him* all things were made. Viewed distributively, the Word created all things, one by one.

1:3b. *καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν.*

and without [apart from] Him [the Word] not even one [thing] came into being that has come into being.

Χωρὶς (with a genitive object) is a negative marker, such as *without, not with, no relationship to, or apart from*' (Louw 1996:791). *Οὐδέ ἓν* is an idiomatic statement *not even one* (Louw 1996:665). The aorist middle indicative verb *ἐγένετο* (*became, came into being*) may be contrasted with its cognate perfect active indicative verb *γέγονεν* (*come into being*) is a grammatical means of emphasizing creation itself as *becoming* from the Word, as opposed to *being* (v. 1) when speaking of the Word himself. The contrasting verbs reveal that although creation by the Word occurred at a point in time in the past (*ἐγένετο*) its significance continues to unfold (*γέγονεν*).

1:4a. *ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν,*

In Him [the Word] was life,

The verb *ἦν* is not spatial or temporal but rather the source of life. The noun *ζωή* refers to both spiritual and physical life (Morris 1995:72, Beasley-Murray 2002:11).

1:4b. *καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων*

and the life [the Word] was the light of [for] humanity [men].

Jesus Christ (the Word) brought light to all people. In this metaphor, light symbolizes the Word bringing illumination or knowledge about divine truth to every human being. This knowledge includes the ability to discern God's will and our personal sinful nature.

1:5a. *καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει,*

And the light shines in the darkness,

The present, active, indicative verb *φαίνει* (*shines*) has the sense of producing light, such as heavenly bodies or fires (Louw 2006:172). The shining light is a reference to Jesus Christ (Beasley-Murray 2002:31) rather than an impersonalized light (Morris 1995:31).

Beasley-Murray (2002:121) notes that even pagan Greeks would agree with John's description of creation. John now introduces the duality of light and darkness that becomes a central theme of the remainder of his gospel. However, it is at this point that John makes it clear that he is not describing a Greek dualistic creation standing in equal opposites because light soon overcomes darkness. The present tense verb (shines) suggests the shining occurred and continues to shine to today. The noun σκοτία (*darkness*) is likened to the realm of spiritual darkness where sin and evil abide (Louw 2006:755).

1:5b. καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

and [yet] the darkness did not overcome [recognize, comprehend] it.

The aorist, active, indicative verb κατέλαβεν has a very wide semantic range, such as *to grasp* or *to understand*, or *to comprehend* (Louw 2006:382, 473). In the present usage, the sense is either the darkness was unable (actually, impossible) to overcome or conquer the light (Morris 1995) or people were unable or unwilling to comprehend or understand the light, that is, the truth of Jesus Christ (Beasley-Murray 2002), (KJV, NASB). Fallen humanity will consciously reject the light in favour of darkness. Louw (2006:382) suggests that John may have used a wordplay with οὐ κατέλαβεν and a dual meaning of *not comprehend* and *not overcome*. John often uses such wordplays in his Gospel and this interpretation best fits the context. The indicative aorist tense summarizes events from the time of creation, to the time Jesus was alive on the earth, and through the completion of the Church Age (Beasley-Murray 2002:11). At no time does darkness either defeat or comprehend the person and work of Jesus Christ.

3.3 John 1:6-8: The Witness of John the Baptizer

3.3.1 Passage Final Translation

There was a man having been sent from God, whose name was John. This one came as a witness so that he might testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. That one was not the light but he came so that he might testify about the light.

3.3.2 Analysis of the Grammar and Key Words

1:6. Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης.

There was a man having been sent [commissioned] from God, whose name (was) John.)

John the Baptizer, as the forerunner and witness of Jesus Christ, now makes an unexpected appearance in the Prologue.

The verb *ἐγένετο* is the aorist middle indicative of *γίνομαι* meaning *to be* or *to become* (Louw 2006:810). The aorist verb in this clause describes a completed action thus introducing and inserting John the Baptizer into the storyline, so the best interpretation is *There was*. The perfect passive participle *ἀπεσταλμένος* refers to the sender instead of the person sent and as a completed action so *having been sent* is a proper translation. Louw (2006:190) describes the sending action as having a specific reason, as noted above. Finally, the preposition *παρὰ* with a genitive object reflects the agent of the action, God. John the Baptizer, the last of the Old Testament prophets, was sent by God to bring a message of repentance to the Jews, and to be the first prophet to proclaim the arrival of the Word.

1:7a. οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός,

This one [John] came as a witness [for the purpose of] testimony so that [in order that] he might testify about the light,

Verse 7 begins with the preposition *εἰς* with an accusative object showing intent with perhaps an expected result (Louw 2006:783). The best translation is *for the purpose of* or *for*. The preposition *περὶ* with a genitive object (*φωτός*) describes the content of the object, *about* or *concerning*. The subjective verb *μαρτυρήσῃ* may imply uncertainty, although most scholars interpret the verb as *to testify*. The purpose of John the Baptizer is to give personal testimony or to speak of the actions of the Word based on personal knowledge (Louw 2006:417). Note the double reference to the testimony *μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ* (*testimony in order to testify*) as emphasis, thus indicating the importance of the testimony of John the Baptizer about the light.

1:7b. ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ.

so that all might believe through him.

The conjunction *ἵνα* is a marker for a final purpose clause, typically translated as *in order to*, *for the purpose of*, *so that* (Louw 2006:784). The aorist active subjunctive verb *πιστεύσωσιν* communicates uncertainty, so it is best translated as *might believe*. Humanity is expected to place its trust in Jesus Christ, the object of belief in this phrase, based on John's witness. The object of the clause is Christ, although some suggest the object is the truth about Jesus, the message of John the Baptizer, or the light. However, unlike the apostle Paul who often packed prepositions with great theological meaning, the apostle John seems to use Jesus as the object of faith rather than as the agent of faith.

In addition, the subject of verse 7 and verse 8 is John the Baptizer, so interpreting the pronoun as Christ is an unnatural interpretation. The best interpretation is John the Baptizer is making an introduction of Jesus Christ to the Jews, and thus to humanity.

1:8. οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.

That one [John] was not the light but (he came) so that [in order that] he might testify about [concerning] the light.

The far demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος refers to *that one*, a reference to an 'entity' that is outside of the current discussion (Louw 2006:816). The word ἀλλ' (in crasis form) is a marker of a pending, more emphatic contrast (Louw 2006:791), *but* or *instead* are commonly used. The word ἵνα is a marker of purpose typically translated as *in order to* or merely *to*. The verb *to come* is implicit. As in verse 7, the aorist active subjunctive μαρτυρέω is best interpreted as *he might testify*. This is the purpose of the coming of John the Baptizer. The preposition περὶ with a genitive object is properly translated as *about* or *concerning*. John the Baptizer was not the light but rather he came so that he might testify about his personal knowledge about the light (Jesus Christ).

The negative unequivocal truth *John was not the light* serves to emphasize the positive statement in verse 7 that John came to testify about the light. But John the Baptizer isn't the light. John's negative statement was made to reinforce the importance of the coming ministry of the incarnate Christ. John the Baptizer was the first and foremost witness of the arrival of the Messiah.

3.4 John 1:9-13: The Light Enters the World

3.4.1 Passage Text and Final Translation

9. The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10. He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him. 11. He came to His own, but His own people did not accept Him. 12. But as many as accepted Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to the ones believing in His name, 13. who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, or of the will of a man, but of God.

3.4.2 Analysis of the Grammar and Key Words

1:9. Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

The true [authentic] light, who (gives) light [enlightenment] to humanity [everyone], was coming into the world.

The adjective ἀληθινόν refers to something that is *true* or *genuine* (Louw 2006:674). Beasley-Murray (2002:12) translates the word as *authentic*. The present, active, indicative verb φωτίζει suggests *giving light to, enlightening, or illuminating*. Thus, the true light illuminates humanity, that is, the Word has been revealed in sufficient detail for humanity to understand the message of the Word. Also, the present middle/passive participle ἐρχόμενον may be translated as *coming*. The noun κόσμον normally refers to the earth, the place where humanity lives, or all the inhabitants of the earth. Not only was the light sufficient to enlighten humanity, the light was coming into the world where humanity resides.

The grammatical challenge with this verse is identifying the subject of the verb ἦν (was) that begins the final clause (Morris 1995:83). The subject of ἦν is the true light which requires combining the verbs ἦν and the present middle/passive participle ἐρχόμενον (*coming*), thus *the true light was coming*. This interpretive option is consistent with the context of the Prologue, that is, the Word will illuminate humanity and the Word is coming. It is also preferred as it produces a more literal translation that is focused on the actions of the light (the Word). The light shines on all of humanity in order to provide necessary spiritual understanding for the purposes of salvation (Rom 1:20).

What remains is John's concept of how the Light illuminates humanity (ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον). One view is the true Light has shone on every person since creation and continues today. This view is consistent with the generally-accepted view of General Revelation. Internal illumination of all humanity by the Light leaves all persons without excuse before Christ. Another view is Jesus is the Light for humanity, although it is clear from the text that many will reject Jesus. The Light may also illuminate externally, that is, an objective illumination of the world by the coming of the Word. Once again, John likely has dual meanings in mind for φωτίζει: the Light internally illumines humanity in terms of General Revelation but also the mere presence of the Light spiritually illuminates all humanity, not just the Jews.

10a. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν,

He was in the world,

The subject is denoted by the pronoun *He* because the object is masculine (τῷ κόσμῳ). The pronoun refers to *the Light* that was coming in the previous verse. The Word *was* and the Light *was coming* give the arrival a progressive sense, a building of tension for the reader that will peak with verse 14 when the Word arrives incarnate.

This is a reference to the Word as preexistent as well as his presence in the world prior to and after his physical birth. The noun *κόσμῳ* is usually a reference to the earth, the home of humanity, although in context it is very likely a reference to the Jews or Israel in particular.

1:10b. *καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,*

and the world was created [came into being (existence)] through Him,

In the second clause, the aorist middle indicative verb *ἐγένετο* may be translated as *to come into being* or *come into existence* (Beasley-Murray 2002:12). The preposition *δι'* with a genitive object is best translated as *through*. The context of the noun *κόσμος* in the second clause is slightly different from its usage in the first clause. Here the term points to all the created things on the earth, which includes humanity. This reference may also be to John's progressive use of *κόσμος*, suggesting an expansive use of the term to include the entire universe of created things (cf. Col 1:16–17). The context of verse 10 is best viewed as the coming of the Word, the promised Deliverer, as the prophet John the Baptizer declared.

1:10c. *καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω.*

[yet] the world [all of humanity] did not recognize [acknowledge] Him.

The third clause once again begins with the conjunction *καὶ* (and yet) with the context of 'surprise' and 'unexpectedness' much like the beginning of verse 5 (Louw 2006:811). The aorist active indicative verb *ἔγνω* preceded by *οὐκ* may be interpreted as not recognizing or not acknowledging. This a reference to those who do not acknowledge or believe the Word (Jesus Christ). Given John's intended audience, his two references to *κόσμος* in this verse may be intended to be interpreted by the Jews as applying to themselves as well as the Gentiles, although in a more general manner. The reference to Israel may also be a synecdoche for all of humanity.

1:11a *εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν,*

He came to [his] own (people),

The neuter adjective *ἴδια* can be translated one's own [things] although in context it is better translated as his own (NASB) or the exclusive property of someone (Louw 2006:557).

John has been building anticipation for readers in his description of the Word with a series of carefully chosen verbs: the Word was before time began (v. 1a, 2), was in the presence of God (v. 1b), was the source of life (v. 4a), was the light for humanity (v. 4b), was coming into the world (v. 9), and was in the world (v. 10a). The climax is the Word came to His people. The aorist active indicative verb ἦλθεν means, in context, He came. The clause is thus translated as He came to His own [people].

Various options have been suggested for the implicit subject of the clause. Hendriksen (1953:80) and Morris (1995:86) suggest the land of Israel. Louw (2006:112) suggests the phrase means His own people. A more expansive view, particularly because the previous verse referenced the entire world, is the subject of the clause is the entire world. The world is the creation and the property of the Word (Beasley-Murray 2002:95–96). Therefore, Jesus came not just to the Jews but to all people, which is consistent with the context of verses 10–11. This view has much to recommend it, given that John’s gospel was very likely written to Gentiles as well as diaspora Jews, although both views have merit. There is a possibility that John was again intentionally ambiguous given his eclectic audience.

1:11b. καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.

but [and] [His] own [people] did not accept [receive, welcome] Him.

The verse continues with οἱ ἴδιοι, a masculine plural adjectival phrase meaning His own with an implicit subject people, as discussed above. The aorist active indicative verb παρέλαβον has the meaning to accept or to welcome as a guest (Louw 2006:452) plus a negation. Thus, the clause may be literally interpreted as His own people [the Jews] did not accept Him.

1:12a ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν,

But as many as [All who] received [accepted] Him,

The plural pronoun ὅσοι means *as many as* or *all who* in a comparison of quantities sense (Louw 2006:594). Once again, the aorist active indicative ἔλαβον has the meaning of *to accept* or *to receive* although in a positive sense, thus, *But as many as received Him*. The KJV and NASB render these verbs as *(not) received-receive* in verses 11–12. *Accept* has a more contextually correct connotation, because it requires action on the part of the recipient. *Receive* appears to be too passive for the context of verses 11–12. So, the clause may be rendered as *But as many as received Him . . .*

1:12b. ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι,

He gave them (the) right [authority, privilege] to be [become] (the) children of God,

The aorist active indicative ἔδωκεν with αὐτοῖς is simply *He gave to them*. The aorist middle infinitive γενέσθαι describes the ability to *acquire* or *experience a state* (Louw 2006:153). The concept is being given the ability or authority, derived from a rightful source, to change one's state or condition of being. This may also be a reference to God's authorization to become his children.

The aorist middle infinitive γενέσθαι may be rendered *to become* this new state. The phrase τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι describes the result of the change of being, that is, those who believe have the authority or have been offered the privilege of becoming a child of God.

The noun τέκνα, never singular, is often a reference to biological children or close personal relationships (Louw 2006:109). We do not become God's biological children, but God changes our status before him from estrangement into a close personal relationship, certainly a brand new existence. New believers are children of God who immediately embark on a life-long journey of progressively becoming more like the Father. Finally, the aorist tenses of ἔλαβον (*received*) and ἔδωκεν (*gave*) suggest the two events occur simultaneously. When one receives Jesus as Lord one immediately becomes a child of God with all the benefits and responsibilities thereof.

1:12c. τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,

to the ones believing in His name,

The final clause of this verse adds a condition or restriction to the right or authority of humanity to become children of God. The present active participle πιστεύουσιν means *believing* with the concept of complete trust and reliance (Louw 2006:375). The ones believing in his name, that is, the ones who place their complete trust in the person and work of Jesus are the ones who have been given the authority or ability to become children of God.

1:13a. οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων

who [the (ones)] were born, not of bloods [blood],

Verse 13 describes the subsequent spiritual rebirth that follows belief in his name. What follows are three different situations that demonstrate that spiritual rebirth is not linked in any way to natural or worldly influences. First, becoming a child of God does not occur from natural reproductive processes.

The genitive plural noun *αἱμάτων* is literally translated as *bloods*. A literal translation is *The ones not from bloods*. The plural may be based on the ancient belief that the natural process of procreation requires the mixing of the blood of the parents. Being born into the family of God is not based on the blood or ethnic origin of the parents. John is likely making the case that Jewish heritage and thus covenantal inclusiveness does not constitute spiritual rebirth.

1:13b οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς

nor of [the] will of the flesh,

The second means by which a person is able to become a child of God is through natural procreation. The aorist middle indicative verb *θελήματος* is a reference to human will or desire. Louw (2006:291) describes *σαρκὸς θέλημα* (literally, *desire of the flesh*) as an idiom describing sexual or physical desire. The noun *σαρκὸς* is a reference to human desire or human nature. This is not a statement of illicit desire, but is a reference to what is a natural sexual desire that results in human reproduction.

1:13c οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

nor of (the) will of a man but of [to be given birth from] God.

The third factor that does not influence spiritual rebirth is the will or desire of a particular person. The noun *θελήματος*, as in the prior clause, is a reference to a human will or desire, in this case, a reference to the singular noun *ἀνδρὸς*. The phrase *θελήματος ἀνδρὸς* is like that of a husband's desire for children. The aorist passive indicative verb *ἐγεννήθησαν* is literally to give birth. In context, the passive means to be given birth. The act of spiritual regeneration or rebirth originates only from God (*ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν*) and not from the desires of a person or persons. God himself (*ἐκ θεοῦ*) is the source of the rebirth, which is a metaphor for a new spiritual life.

Taken as a whole, the verse emphasizes with a series of three negatives that all natural factors in the birth process, which are under the control of individuals, are excluded from a spiritual birth, which is a work of God alone. Humanity has been given the power to become children of God, but spiritual rebirth is solely a work of God. Spiritual rebirth stands opposed to the Jewish view that mere physical birth as a Jew makes one a child of God.

3.5 John 1:14-18: The Word Became Flesh

3.5.1 Passage Text and Final Translation

14. *The Word became flesh and took up residence among us, and we saw His glory, glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* 15. *John testified concerning Him and has proclaimed saying, ‘This was the One of whom I said, ‘The One coming after me is greater than me, because He existed before me.’* 16. *Indeed, we have all received grace after grace from His fullness,* 17. *for the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* 18. *No one has ever seen God; the One and Only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known.*

3.5.2 Analysis of the Grammar and Key Words

1:14a. Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ,

And the Word became [came into being, born] flesh [man] and took up residence [lived, dwelt] among us, and we saw [observed, beheld] His glory,

The grammatical construction of this sentence is awkward. It begins with the main clause that describes the incarnation of the Word into flesh, then it adds a spatial or temporal dimension, and ends with testimony that confirms the divinity of the Word incarnate. This is not a statement that Jesus ceased to be what he was before, that is, 100% divine. In context, the noun *σὰρξ* means the Word *became* (*ἐγένετο*, from verse 10b, *came into being, made, born*) flesh and blood, 100% a human being. Note that Jesus became *man* and not ‘a man’ (Westcott 1908:10). Jesus was human, but not like any particular human being. The Word has taken the world as a new home since verse 1 states the Word’s home is with the Father.

Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο also links back to verse 3 in which πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο. All things came to be through the work of the Word and through the Word, the Word became flesh. The literal concept behind ἐσκήνωσεν is to ‘pitch one’s tent’ much in the same way that God took up residence in the Tabernacle in the time of Moses. The Jews met God in the Tent of the Meeting and today humanity may meet Jesus Christ, divine, yet clothed in humanity. The concept of *dwelt* may be ingressive (*began to dwell*) or complexive (*dwelt completely*). Both views may correctly describe Jesus’ incarnation. The divine Word clothed in humanity lived among humanity, although temporarily.

The aorist middle indicative verb *ἑθεασάμεθα* (*we saw, we beheld*) refers to those who personally beheld the glory of Jesus Christ or perhaps more narrowly as the apostolic witnesses. Those who saw or beheld his glory were followers who personally came into contact with Jesus, witnessed the miracles he performed, and his death and resurrection (Beasley-Murray 2005:13–14).

However, the apostle John (and the Synoptics) relate episodes when many people beheld Jesus' ministry, his miracles, and even his resurrection, yet without experiencing a heart change. These people saw and heard but did not understand. Thus, those who beheld his glory were not only personal witnesses of Jesus' ministry but also those who experienced the life-changing grace and spiritual rebirth that comes with being a child of God.

John's reference to his glory (*τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*) also brings to mind the God's visible presence as he took his place in the Tent of the Meeting. This glory is a visible glory described as brilliance or radiance. The following clause further unpacks John's understanding of *τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*.

1:14b. *δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.*

glory as the (of) [unique] only one and only (begotten, one) from [of] (the) Father, full [complete] of grace and truth.

The second half of verse 14 begins with the word glory, and it is immediately followed with the comparative *ὡς* (*as*) thereby offering a comparison of God's glory with that of the Father's only Son. The adjective *μονογενοῦς* can be translated as *only begotten* (only KJV, NASB) or as *the one and only* (e.g. NIV, NET) son. The definition must also communicate the uniqueness of the Son, that is, the only one of its kind. There has never been, nor will there ever be another Son of God.

The clause *πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας* describes the one and only Son of the Father as being *πλήρης* (*full or complete*) with the qualities of *χάριτος* (*grace*: mercy, compassion, love) and *ἀληθείας* (*truth*). The clause modifies the *only begotten* (*one*), not *glory*, as believed by a minority of commentators (i.e. the *glory* was full of grace and truth). God's *χάριτος* (*grace*) is the showing of kindness or graciousness to another (Louw 2006:748). God's *ἀληθείας* (*truth*) is a statement of the Word also having God's intrinsic property of absolute truth or truth revelation. The Word has the identical eternal and divine properties of grace and truth exhibited by the Father.

The following preposition *παρὰ* with a genitive object means *of* or *from* (as v. 6) the Father. If the preposition is translated as *from* then the implied word *coming* must be supplied and *coming from the Father* could modify either *only begotten* or *glory*. Beasley-Murray (2006:14–15) suggests the phrase as modifying the *only begotten* Son. The better view is that it's the Son's glory that is in view.

The Son's glory isn't derived from the Father because he is the Father's One and Only but because the Son's divinity is equivalent to the Father. The Son is equally deserving of the inscription grace and truth.

1:15 Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων· οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον· ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

John testified concerning [about] Him and has proclaimed saying, 'This was the One of whom I said [speak], The One coming after me is greater than [surpassed, in front of] me, because He existed before me.'

The perfect active indicative verb *κέκραγεν* means *proclaims* or *shouts out* (Louw 2006:398). In this verse, the perfect tense is properly interpreted as a present tense. The verbs *κέκραγεν* (*proclaims*) and *μαρτυρεῖ* (present active indicative, *testifies*) form a hendiadys that describes John the Baptizer's continuing ministry. A hendiadys is usually two nouns (or verbs) conjoined with an 'and' that may be rewritten as a single descriptive phrase. In this verse, the two verbs may be expressed as *loudly testifies* so the verse (unexpectedly) can be termed a hendiadys. The effect is to strongly express the present reality of John the Baptizer's proclamation of his prophetic message.

The phrase *οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον* may be literally translated as *this One was who/whom I say/tell* or better, *this One was [He of] whom I speak/said*. The aorist active indicative verb *εἶπον* (*saying*) is an indicator of a quoted statement that follows. The article *ὁ* is usually translated a definite article, but when standing alone *he* is required. The present passive participle *ἐρχόμενος* (*He comes*) has as its subject the pronoun *ὁ*. The prepositions *ἔμπροσθέν* (*in front or before* [Louw 2006:716]) and *ὀπίσω* (*after* [Louw 2006:469]) describe physical or special positions, in front of and following, respectively. The perfect active indicative verb *γέγονεν* describes *to come into existence* (Louw 2006:157). Literally, this phrase may now be rendered as *He [who] follows me comes, in front of me came into existence, because first me was*.

The phrase *because first me was* is a ὅτι expegetical clause because it provides further clarification or explanation of what was just said (Wallace 1995:459). The adjective πρῶτός signifies the first at a point in time.

The majority view is this is a reference to a superior position (Morris 1995:96, Beasley-Murray 2002:15), which is certainly true in a divine as well as an ontological sense. This view is also consistent with the Jewish belief that the wisdom of age placed someone superior to another of lesser age. However, the Prologue, thus far, reveals that the Word was divine, the creator, and preexistent. The better view is the Word has a superior position because of His preexistence.

The Word also comes before him in importance (*has a higher rank than I* [NASB], *greater than I* [NET]) because the Word was the author of all creation. In other words, the One coming after me is greater than me because he was preexistent. By making this statement, John intentionally links the glory, grace, and truth demonstrated by God to the same characteristics found in the Word. Then in verse 16, John expands the presence of the divine grace and truth present in the Word (*His fullness*) as gifts to all those who have received him and become children of God (v. 12).

1:16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος.

Because we have all received grace after grace from His fullness,

The apostle John is now speaking, not John the Baptizer. The noun πληρώματος describes the completeness (*fullness* by KJV, NASB, NET) of the Word and refers back to *full of grace and truth* in verse 14. God is the source of grace and truth. The aorist plural ἐλάβομεν preceded by ἡμεῖς πάντες may be translated as *we all have received*. The preposition ἀντὶ with a genitive object signifies *upon* or *after* so that the phrase χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος may be rendered *grace upon grace*. The NET bible interprets this phrase as *one gracious gift after another*. This phrase functions as an explanation of the first half of the verse. The Word is the source of an unending stream of grace to those that who are the children of God. This grace given is a reflection of the inexhaustible supply of God's grace (Louw 2006:748) and that grace is freely given (Louw 2006:568).

1:17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.

for the law was given [granted, imparted] through Moses, grace and truth came through [was imparted] through Jesus Christ.

The word ὅτι (*because, for*) begins an exegetical clause, verse 16. The verse explains the source of the grace upon grace that is received by believers. A comparison is offered with the grace the Law provides through Moses and the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. The aorist passive indicative verb ἐδόθη is best translated as *was given* or *was granted*. The Law was given by God *through Moses*. The aorist middle indicative verb ἐγένετο means *came through, was imparted* or *happened*.

The concept is something of value was transferred (Louw 2006:565). The preposition διὰ with a genitive object means *through*. Because the Law was given by Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Note the three contrasting relationships between the Law given through Moses and grace and truth through Jesus Christ. First is a comparison of the Law with grace and truth. The Law came through God's *loving kindness and truth* (Exodus 34:6) but now grace and truth have been personally delivered to humanity by the Son of God. Second is a comparison of Moses with Jesus Christ. Moses, a human being, delivered the Law that was provided by God. The ultimate expression of God's love was delivered by grace and truth: Jesus Christ incarnate. Finally, grace and truth were *given by* Jesus Christ instead of imparted through Moses. Moses was the vessel through which God delivered the Law to the Jews. Jesus Christ himself imparted grace and truth to all those who accepted him. Taken together, the grace and truth imparted by Jesus Christ are superior in all ways to the Law given by God through Moses to the Jews. Christ was operating through his personal character and love for humanity. Moses, a servant of God, gave the Law in obedience to God's command.

1.18a Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε.

No one has ever seen God;

The perfect active indicative verb ἑώρακεν means 'has seen'. The adverb πώποτε means *ever* (Louw 2006:620) or perhaps *at any time* (NASB). Thus the phrase may be judged as: *No one has ever seen God*. There is not universal agreement with the interpretation *has seen* as a reference to physical sight. Morris (1995:100) points out that although some have been given partial visions of God, no one has seen or can comprehend God. Therefore, God can only be *seen* through Jesus Christ.

1.18b μονογενῆς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

(the) only (one), Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made (Him) known.

The adjective *μονογενής*, as in verse 14, describes *one that is unique or one of a kind*. The NET Bible translates *μονογενής θεός* as *the only one, himself God*. A better translation is *the one and only God*. The phrase *μονογενής θεός* is implicitly a statement that Jesus Christ is God, according to Beasley-Murray (2004:15–16). A better view is the statement is implicitly about the equivalence of Jesus Christ and God, or in mathematical terms, Jesus Christ = God while still having the closest possible relationship with each other.

This verse also form an *inclusio* with verse 1 to conclude the Prologue. In verse 1 we learn that the Word = God, in a mathematical sense. If verse 18 states Jesus Christ = God, then John has told us that the Word = Jesus Christ.

The noun *κόλπο* means *bosom* and describes one who is close to the Father's heart or one *who is in closest fellowship with the Father* (NET). An intimate relationship with the Father is in view.

The demonstrative pronoun *ἐκεῖνος* is emphatic and literally means *He (Himself) made him known*. The aorist middle indicative verb *ἐξηγήσατο* means to 'make something fully known by careful explanation or by clear revelation' (Louw 2006:339). The second definition is more to the point. God has made *His invisible attributes . . . eternal power and divine nature* known to humanity by clear and convincing revelation (Rom 1:20). This clause reads thus: *the one and only God, who is in the bosom of God, that One [Jesus Christ] has made Him known*.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The Greek vocabulary found in the Prologue is deceptively simple yet, as shown, the Christological theology of the Prologue is quite complex with its many layers and profound in its revealing of the relationship of Jesus Christ and God. The following are ten essential emphases of John's *Logos* Christology found in the Prologue derived from the exegesis.

1. Jesus Christ is preexistent and eternal (John 1:1a, 2). The *Λόγος* (Word, Jesus Christ) was present before creation. The *Logos* preceded creation and was present with God when the universe was created. Even before the creation of the heavens and the earth (cf. Gen 1:1), Jesus Christ was present, in a historical and a cosmological sense. Jesus Christ shares eternity with God.

2. Jesus Christ is divine (1:1b, 2, 3a). The fully divine Jesus Christ exists as a separate person in this revealing of the first two persons of the Trinity (a concept that will be developed later in church history, but used here for descriptive clarity).

Jesus Christ enjoys a unique position in creation because of his close, very personal relationship with the Father, distinctive of the Trinity. The *Logos* is in the presence of God. The *Logos*, however, is a distinct person yet has the fully divine nature and attributes of God, yet he is God. Because Jesus Christ shares God's divine nature, he is not a created being.

3. Jesus Christ is the creator of all things (1:3). Every single thing that has ever been created was created by the *Logos*.

The *Logos* was the sole agent of creation and that consummate act of creation continues today. Jesus Christ is the creator of all physical life and the creator of all inanimate objects, including the basic elements from which all of creation emanates—Jesus Christ created all things *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).

4. Jesus Christ is the source of humanity's spiritual enlightenment (1:4–5, 9). A spiritual, divine light has been present in every human being from creation. The light shone throughout the Old Testament beginning with the *Proto-Evangelium* (Gen 3:15), the Passover Lamb, the serpent lifted up in Numbers 21:8 (cf. John 3:14, 15), and, the sacrificial shedding of blood found in the Levitical laws. The light shone in the New Testament with the birth of Jesus, his crucifixion, his resurrection and ascension, and his exaltation in heaven. The light shone in his free offer of salvation.

The light continues to shine today in a dark and evil world, and will continue to shine into the future. This spiritual light provides sufficient wisdom to each person to discern the existence of God (General Revelation), apprehend one's sinful nature, and the ability to recognize divine truth (internal moral compass). Implicit in this statement is that the *Logos* is the source of salvation for humanity. These and other divine attributes were revealed to sinful humanity by Jesus Christ.

5. John the Baptizer called for repentance, heralded the coming of the Messiah (1:6–8, 15). John the Baptizer, the exemplar of his never-ending light that shines upon humanity, came to proclaim the coming of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. John the Baptizer came to bring testimony and a call to repentance to the Jews. John the Baptizer introduced Messiah Jesus Christ to all humanity. John was a man, commissioned by God, and God's agent who testified of the coming Light to humanity.

Jesus Christ *was* from eternity past, is the *Logos*, is himself God, is the true spiritual Light to humanity, and is the object of our faith. The apostle John quotes John the Baptizer as saying Jesus Christ is greater than himself in all aspects (v. 15). John the Baptizer was chronologically older in human days, but Jesus Christ was his senior based on his divinity, eternity, and glory.

6. A majority of fallen humanity rejects spiritual enlightenment (1:5, 10–11). Fallen humanity will continue to reject the true Light and intentionally embrace the darkness. Yet the Light, the object of our faith, continues to shine. The Jews and the world (lit. a large portion of humanity) did not acknowledge him (v. 10b) or show hospitality (v. 11b).

Those people who have voluntarily accepted spiritual darkness and suppressed the spiritual light present in all people (cf. 1:4b) are implicitly liable for God's righteous judgment. Rejection of the Light tacitly includes an active resistance or a hostility towards the spiritual light.

7. A minority of fallen humanity embraces spiritual enlightenment, become children of God (1:12–13). The great majority of Jews who heard Jesus speak rejected Messiah Jesus, but a few individuals, not limited to Jewish descent or nationality, did accept Jesus' salvific message (lit. *believed in His name*) and were adopted into the Kingdom of God and, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity, became children of God. The will of an individual may not establish this spiritual relationship. At the moment a person *receives Him*, that person also became a child of God, that is, one is *begotten* of God. The context supports the conclusion that more than intellectual knowledge or assent to the historical Jesus Christ is required (cf. v. 5).

8. Salvation is not the product of human work (1:12–13). This is a clear rejection of the Jewish view of their special relationship with God that ensured their communal righteousness based on keeping the Mosaic Law. Works righteousness does not produce salvation. In the same way, merely being biologically born into a particular ethnicity or belief system does not qualify a person to become a child of God.

9. Jesus Christ arrived incarnate in the world (1:14). In an act of supreme love, the *λόγος* took on the mantle of humanity while preserving his divine nature. Jesus is 100% human and 100% divine, '... concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ ...' (The Confession of Chalcedon).

The *Logos* lived among humanity taking on human nature yet remained without sin. During his earthly ministry, the apostle John and others personally observed, studied, composed, and reflected on his glory. John wished to fully comprehend the presence of the Son of God, the miracles he performed, and his death and resurrection. Jesus' glory was derived from his own being, not by virtue of his relationship with the Father. The *fullness* (cf. vv. 16–17) of God may be described as his grace and truth and because Jesus Christ reflects the Father, those attributes also describe the Messiah.

10. Jesus Christ is the source of grace and truth (16–18). The apostle John and others that believe in his name, will, from his fullness, continue to receive grace from Christ's infinite supply of grace, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is through the Father that grace and truth flowed through Jesus Christ to humanity, and therefore the actions of the Son bring glory to the Father.

While the Law came *through* Moses who never saw God, the grace that has been extended to humanity came *from* Jesus Christ, and is superior to that originating from Moses and the Law. Jesus Christ *see[s]* the Father in some unexplained manner. However, we may *see* God, through spiritual eyes by believing in his name and becoming a child of God. Thus, faith in Jesus Christ, who has an intimate relationship with the Father, is the only means by which the Father may be properly comprehended by humanity.

In Part II, an exegesis of the writings of Philo of Alexandria identifies and quantifies the key attributes of his logos philosophy, based upon Philo's contextual use of the term in his writings. Possible intersections of John's Λόγος Christology developed in Section 4 may then be compared and contrasted with Philo's logos philosophy. At that point important conclusions may be made concerning the purposes of John's Prologue.

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Is John's Λόγος Christology a Polemical Response to Philo of Alexandria's Logos Philosophy? (Part 2)

Robert Peltier and Dan Lioy

Abstract

This journal article is the second in a two-part series that examines the Prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18) as a Christological statement for the purpose of repudiating Philo of Alexandria's philosophical logos. In Part Two, we exegete Philo of Alexandria's writings for the purpose of determining his logos philosophy, which is then compared and contrasted with John's Christological Logos. Philo's logos is shown to be a metaphysical construct built upon the syncretization of the philosophical Greek logos with an allegorical interpretation of the Pentateuch. John's Christological Logos theology is shown to have no commonality with the Philonic logos. Further, the Logos described in the Prologue cannot be viewed, as some scholars have suggested, as merely the next logical step in the development of Philo's mythological logos writings. Thus, John's description of the Christological Logos may be viewed as a carefully constructed polemical statement opposing the Philonic logos.

Keywords

Christology, Gospel of John, Hellenism, Logos, Philo of Alexandria, Philosophy, Prologue, Exegesis

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1. Introduction

In Part One of this article, an exegesis of the Prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18) was used to prepare ten important statements about John's Logos Christology. In Part Two, we will explore Philo of Alexandria's use of a logos motif within Hellenistic Judaistic thought. A comparison of these two belief systems will reveal whether John's description of the *Logos* is merely an extension of the Greek logos or if the Prologue is a polemical statement against Philo's philosophical logos.

1.1 Did John's Logos Evolve from Greek Thought?

A portion of scholarly literature views the *Logos*, in a philosophical sense, as the next logical step in its development from the paganism of eclectic Jewish Hellenism that ultimately found its way into the fourth Gospel (Thyssen 2006:133). More specifically, Thyssen views Philo's mystical philosophy as merely an evolutionary step in what was to become John's Christological view of the *Logos*. Danielou (2014:169) views the Prologue of John's gospel as originating with the Philo of Alexandria's Judeo-Hellenistic view of the Word of God presented in abbreviated form. Perhaps a more extreme view is that John's *Logos* and the Philonic logos were birthed from quasi- or incipient-Gnostic Jewish thought (Goodenough 1945:145), although the external evidence for this view is scant. Another interesting hypothesis is that the Gospel of John was of Alexandrian origin thereby strongly linking John's *Logos* with Philo's mystical logos (Gunther 1979:582). Other scholars take Gunther's view one step further when describing John's writing as virtually embracing Philo's understanding of Hellenistic Judaism (Schnackenburg 1968:125). In sum, the scholarly view of the impact of Hellenism on the writing of John's Prologue is a spectrum, ranging from a strong literary dependence, to a general influence, and merely implicit influences that arise from living within a Hellenistic Judaism culture (Gunther 1979:584).

1.2 The Origin of the Greek Logos

At the time of John's writing, the term *Logos* was infused with abundant philosophical meaning that had evolved over centuries. The philosophical or mystical logos did not originate with Philo but reflected Platonic beginnings, perhaps as early as the late 6th century BCE with Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus (Nash 2003:70). This philosophy was subsequently more fully developed by Plato and later adopted by the Stoics, who added further details.

Although there is a dearth of surviving writings by Heraclitus on the topic of the logos, the logos does seem to play a fundamental role in his philosophy. Heraclitus writes about the importance of living in accordance with the logos, which he describes as the unity of all things or the wisdom that directs all things. There is a cause behind every effect seen in nature and the logos is responsible.

Plato's view of the logos seems to advance Heraclitus in many ways. The Platonic logos is described as the rational intelligence that unifies all creation. But how does the logos interact with creation? Apparently, not all of humanity is equally imbued with wisdom, and the degree of wisdom acquired is for each person self-determined. In Plato's *Republic*, for example, Plato explores the difference between a common person who seeks beautiful things and the philosopher who desires to know beauty itself. In other words, a common person recognizes that there is greater than human wisdom that was the proximate cause of creation. The philosopher wants to personally know and attain that wisdom. Plato also views this cognitive disparity as the difference between opinion and knowledge of absolute truth (Book V, 476d–480a). Philo's identification with philosophers of all stripe explains the conclusions he reached in his exegesis. Inclusiveness was required in order to gain acceptance of his view of the preeminence of the Pentateuch above all other philosophies, particularly Greek philosophy.

The logos played an important role in Hellenistic philosophical thought in the first century. Kleinknecht (1964:77) describes the logos as representing the 'Greek understanding of the world' and the nature of all creation. In Greek philosophy and largely reflected in Platonic thought, the logos refers to the rational, underlying intelligence of the universe. The logos is the creative and governing mind of God that is in control of the universe or the 'rational power set in man' (Kleinknecht (1964:82). However, the logos was divine but not a god. Greek philosophers developed this understanding through observation of the world around them. Philo, on the other hand, appears to inherit his view of logos largely from the Stoics, the first to systemize logos thought as the primary source of reality (Beasley-Murray 2002:liv), the cosmic or divine reason that is found throughout all creation, and the rationale for 'the ordering of physical reality' (Runia 2001:142). In ancient thought, every phenomenon had an underlying cause or agent.

For example, Plato speaks of the divine craftsman with respect to the creation of the world's soul (reminiscent of Proverbs 8). The Stoics believed the universe was a living reality much like a living creature and logically a superior being is in control of reality.

The Stoic's quest for the single, underlying principle or elementary particles of the universe are much like modern physicists searching for the elusive Grand Unified Theory of the universe. Philo's writings record his attempt to advance his philosophical understanding of the *logos* rationalized through ancient Jewish beliefs as reflected in the Mosaic Law (which Philo reveals as the *logos*). Philo's primary means for rationalizing Platonic thought with the Pentateuch was by defining the forms and function of the *logos*.

1.3 John's Purpose for Using the Term 'Logos'

There are scholars who theorize that John selected the *logos* literary motif because the Greek *logos*, reflected by Philo, was a widely-known and accepted philosophical concept in the Roman world (Bernard 1948:xciv, Dodd:1968:54–55). The term *logos* plays a fundamental role in Hellenistic, particularly Philonic, thought although its usage is profoundly different from John (Dodd 1968:73). For the Greeks, the *logos* was a conceptual cosmic principle, a cosmic soul, that helped the early Greek philosophers solve metaphysical and epistemological difficulties (Boice 1999:35). John's *Logos* was immanent and eternal, existent before creation and the agent of creation (Dodd 1968:263). Redefining the *logos* well-known by the first-century Roman world was an excellent means to encapsulate a description of the divine origin and purpose of the God-man Jesus Christ (Du Toit 1968:11). The *logos* motif is a common word familiar to those acquainted with Greek philosophy and Johannine Christology, such as the early Christian apologist Justin Martyr's defence of the *Logos* (Rokeah 2001:22). John's use of the Greek *logos* motif was a 'stroke of genius' because of its Platonic roots and therefore held 'currency' for his readers (Boice 1986:300). Recognizing this, John leveraged the word's wide semantic range in the first century for Hellenist and Hebrew cultures to his advantage (Parker 1988:31).

2. Philo of Alexandria

In this section, a short biography of Philo of Alexandria is presented so that the Alexandrian version of Hellenistic Judaism may be appreciated before his writings are investigated, particularly his hermeneutical approach to scripture interpretation.

This section also examines Philo's eclectic beliefs about the nature and character of the Greek *logos* through the lens of a thoroughly Hellenized Jew.

2.1 A Short Biography of Philo of Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria was an enigmatic first-century Jewish intellectual whose work is generally characterized as a rationalization of diaspora Judaism within the dominant Hellenistic culture that existed in Alexandria, Egypt in the first century. Philo lived and wrote at a pivotal time in history as a contemporary of Jesus (although separated geographically) and as the Gospel was taking root in Palestine and other parts of the Roman Empire. His writings are the exemplar when the Hellenist view of the Jewish Bible, particularly the Pentateuch, is desired. The Septuagint, the Bible of the Seventy, and the Wisdom of Solomon (part of the Alexandrian Bible tradition) are additional examples of Alexandrian Jewish thought. A survey of recent Philonic scholarship reveals the disparate views of Philo as a mystic removed from the world, politician and envoy to Caesar, and as 'philosopher preacher' (Danielou (2014:xv)). Philo was a man of his time, wrestling with the tension of a transcendent creator, self-sufficient, and abstract ruler of the created order with an immanent God who reveals himself and draws humanity close. Philo attempts to unite these disparate views of God in his conception of the divine *logos* (Lewy 2004:11), although from within his Hellenistic Greek milieu. Regardless of which view is taken of Philo the man, there is no doubt that Philo was an important first-century figure standing at the crossroads of Jewish faith intersecting Greek culture.

Philo's works are best read in the context of a people seeking to live within the Greek culture while retaining their traditional religious beliefs. He was a contemporary of the rise of Synagogue Judaism coupled with Hellenistic 'biblical embellishment' that reflect this era (Sandmel 1979:131). In other words, Philo's work interprets Alexandrian Judaism in light of Hellenism in contrast with the writers of the New Testament who interpreted the Old Testament in light of Palestinian Judaism. Philo's works record his struggle to construct this framework thus making his writings emblematic of Alexandrian Jewish thought during the first century. Philo was a spokesman for like-minded members of the Jewish diaspora who wished to spread to the world a new religion best described as Jewish religious thought syncretized with Hellenistic philosophy (Beasley-Murray 2002:lv).

Little is known about the life of Philo, and what is known is widely published. In sum, Philo was born into a wealthy family that allowed him time to pursue his philosophical interests.

He was stirred from his contemplative life and authorial interests with his election as head of a delegation that travelled to Rome to plead for the plight of Alexandrian Jews before emperor Gaius Caligula (39–40 CE) in response to the pogrom Prefect Flaccus instituted in 38 CE (*Spec. Leg.* 3:1–6, also see *Flacc.* and *Leg.*).² Alexander, Philo's brother, was a wealthy customs agent for Rome who once loaned money to Herod Agrippa I. Marcus Julius Alexander, the younger of Alexander's two sons, married Bernice, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30). Philo's other nephew was Tiberius Julius Alexander who rejected his Jewish heritage and entered the Roman civil service. Tiberius would later become procurator of the province of Judea (46–48 CE) and prefect of Egypt (66–70 CE), during which time he brutally put down a Jewish rebellion in Alexandria. Tiberius was politically astute, supporting Vespasian in his quest for power. Tiberius Julius Alexander's reward was the position of second in command of the Roman army during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Philo of Alexandria, unlike the remainder of his dysfunctional family, continued to embrace and serve as an apologist for his Jewish beliefs, but from a thoroughly Hellenized point of view.

² The complete titles of each of these standard abbreviated references are included as Appendix 1

2.2 Philo's Interpretive Construct

Philo may be commended for his desire to interpret scripture yet his interpretive framework (generally, allegory) and his hermeneutic presupposition (Neoplatonic thought syncretized with the Pentateuch's statements about God and his actions) are unique in the first century. Philo leans heavily on an allegorical hermeneutic of Jewish Scripture popular with first-century writers. When his allegorical interpretation of Jewish Scripture contradicts Greek thought, Philo usually allows his Greek presuppositions to trump Jewish dogma.

An examination of his writings yields several important observations. First, Philo employs an allegorical hermeneutic to interpret Scripture in light of his Hellenistic culture (Danielou 2014:90). Philo's exegetical method applied to the Old Testament mirrors the philosophical approach of the early Greek philosophers, particularly Plato. An allegorical hermeneutic is used to search for messages hidden within the text that must first be uncovered, and then a spiritual meaning is applied to arrive at the final interpretation and application.

For Philo, virtually all animate and inanimate objects have a unique spiritual meaning that the reader must discern in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

Yet, Philo abandons allegory and leans strongly to a literal interpretation when Hebrew symbolic rituals are being interpreted, such as circumcision or the Sabbath (*Mig.* 89–93, *Spec. Leg.* 1.1–11). Philo’s allegorical hermeneutic permeates his writings, particularly when he describes the nature and work of the logos.

Philo’s writings defy a narrow classification, but can be generally separated into three groups; writings on the Pentateuch, philosophical treatises, and historical-apologetic writings. Each of these writings reveals different perspectives of Philo’s logos. Philo’s view of the transcendence of God, particularly with personified divine wisdom (Job 28:12; Prov 8, 9) and the role of the ‘utterance’ of God in creation, are common themes. Another important theme is Philo’s explanation or description of how a transcendent God is able to have a relationship with humanity. Philo’s system of beliefs reflects the Platonic view of a separation between imperfect humanity and the perfect God, thus an immanent yet eternal, divine intermediary is required. The logos, the highest of the intermediary creations of God, often called the ‘first-born’ (*Agr.* 51; *Conf.* 146), and his allegorizing of the Hebrew Bible are perhaps the two most prominent themes found in his writings. Philo’s allegorical interpretive approach does have its limits. When Greek philosophy and Old Testament writings contradict, Philo inevitably chooses the former while always strongly supporting the Jewish One True God. The most important intersection of thought between the Prologue and Philo is his understanding of the logos (Beasley-Murray (2002:iiv), the subject of this work.

2.3 Finding Logos in Philo’s Writings

Searching Philo’s writings for clues to his views of the logos was performed in a two-step process. First, a morphological search of Borgen (2005) using the noun *λόγος* including cognates quickly identified each occurrence of this word within Philo’s original Greek writings. The search results were manually filtered for specific instances in which *λόγος* or cognates were found that describe attributes of God related to Philo’s philosophical logos.

Those instances were then cross-referenced to the English translation of Yonge (2006) to determine context. Next, further semantic searches were conducted on Yonge's (2006) English translation of Philo's writings using search terms suggested by the Liddell and Scott (1995) lexicon and others gleaned from a close examination of Philo's writings for important statements about the logos that do not include the word logos.

This two-step search approach does not guarantee every reference or allusion to Philo's philosophical logos was identified, but the results of the searches are extensive and certainly satisfactory for identifying important characteristics of Philo's philosophical logos.

3. Similarities and Differences: John's Logos Christology compared to Philo of Alexandria's Logos Philosophy

In this section, we compare and contrast the results of the investigation into Philo of Alexandria's philosophical logos with the outcomes of the exegetical study conducted in Part One that characterized the apostle John's Christological *Logos*. The standard for this comparison is the ten-point description of John's Christological *Logos* developed in Part One, summarized by the section heading, followed by Philo's description of what he describes as like or dissimilar characteristics. A conclusion is reached with each of the ten points of comparison with respect to Philo's philosophical logos.

3.1 The *Logos* is Preexistent and Eternal

Philo of Alexandria describes the logos as having a close relationship with God (positioned above the Mercy Seat and between the Cherubim in heaven) although contextually the reference describes physical proximity rather than being due to relationship or composition (essence). The Philonic logos does not enjoy the intimate relationship shared by the members of the Godhead. For Philo, the logos is looking onto the throne of God as one would attend an event honouring others. Philo's logos is watching and observing, not contributing to God's actions in the throne room. Philo's logos is a heavenly observer, not a participant.

Philo describes God as the supreme being who stamped his wisdom onto the logos, making the logos second in the heavenly line of authority (*Op.* 24). Philo defines wisdom in his writings as 'the knowledge of all divine and human things, and of the respective cause of them' (*Congr.* 79).

Since the wisdom of the logos is a copy of God's wisdom and the logos is a created being, according to Philo, we are obliged to conclude that the logos occupies this exalted position not by divine right but by the sovereign selection of God. The logos, according to Philo, occupies an exalted position in relation to God but does not have the same familial position, relational, or share the divine nature as God as does the *Logos*.

Philo often depicts the logos as having divine characteristics, such as 'firstborn', 'archetype of God', or 'chief deputy'. On the surface, each of these titles appears to describe divine characteristics. However, on closer observation, we find that Philo is describing functions of the logos, not divine characteristics. For example, Philo's 'firstborn' description in context describes the logos as an 'imitator' or 'image' of the Father in a Greek dualistic sense. Instead, from Philo's view, this and like terminology explicitly describe the logos as God's first creation imbued with certain divine attributes by God, 'For that [logos] must be God to us imperfect beings, but the first mentioned, or true God, is so only to wise and perfect men' (*Leg. All.* 3.207). In other words, the work of the created logos, from the view of humanity, appears to be the divine in action although those actions are based on God's creative power hidden from humanity.

Philo's logos has many other forms and purposes, such as an angel of the Lord that appeared in order to reveal God's will to particular people (*Som.* 1.228–239; *Cher.* 1–3). God remains transcendent yet the immanent logos appears visibly to humanity, presenting certain characteristics of God that Philo describes as divine characteristics.

The 'image of God' (*Leg. All.* 1.43) is particularly crucial to Philo's Greek dualistic logos philosophy, such as the logos is God's messenger and supplier (not originator) of wisdom to humanity. Philo's dualistic philosophy requires the separation of divine God from immanent humanity, thus the created logos is the intermediary. The 'image of God' motif is used by Philo to justify a divine logos because it is described as an exact copy of the wisdom of God. The 'image of God' from which the logos is formed is not an exact duplication but rather the image is limited to the 'wisdom' of God that is shared. The logos is viewed as the 'stamp' of wisdom that is then imprinted onto humanity via the logos thereby maintaining God's distance from humanity. Philo also calls the logos the 'high priest' and the 'chief of angels' (*Conf.* 146), further functional descriptions rather than a description of divine characteristics.

Philo does call the logos the ‘paraclete’ that bestows God’s blessings on humanity (*Mos.* 2:134) and as God’s ‘reason’, which are, again, are functional descriptions of how wisdom and virtue flow from a transcendent God, through the logos, to immanent humanity. These, and many other descriptive terms are used synonymously and contextually wherever in scripture Philo found reference to transcendent God directly interacting with immanent humanity (e.g. angels in the Old Testament, Moses speaking to the burning bush, the angel with the flaming sword guarding the Tree of Life [Gen 3:24], etc.). In each of those episodes, Philo substitutes a contextually appropriate appearance of the logos as the revealer of God found in scripture, but not God.

Philo’s view of God is not of prime importance within the scope of this work although a short discussion is appropriate in light of Genesis 1. Philo certainly views God as One God, transcendent and uncreated, although he does embrace Greek dualistic thought with respect to God’s functions displayed in scripture, especially when it relates to God’s relationship with his created. Philo recognized the seeming two ‘faces’ of God described in scripture (love and judgment) and he puts a name to these two functions. First, the Beneficent Power is closely related to the creative and judgmental characteristics of God. Second, the Creative Power reflects God as truth and his love for humanity. Philo views the logos as the intermediary between these two ‘faces’ of God and humanity thus providing humanity a glimpse of God through the work of the logos.

Humanity exists as an image of God to the degree or amount of wisdom provided to humanity by the logos. In fact, each person receives a small yet specific portion of the wisdom of the logos, and it is through that act we each have some likeness of God.

Humanity is an image of the logos, which is an image of God—thus we possess a copy of a copy of God’s wisdom. The philonic logos stands between humanity and transcendent God.

It is through this clever act of interpretation that Philo is able to reconcile his monotheistic beliefs with Greek dualism. In contrast, John describes an immanent, divine, and eternal *Logos*, who humbly and voluntarily became human as the supreme act of love.

3.2 The Logos (Jesus Christ) is Divine

The fully divine Jesus Christ exists as a separate person within the Godhead in an intimate and perfect relationship with the Father. The eternal *Logos* exhibits the same divine nature and attributes of God.

The *Logos* is uncreated because he shares the same divine, eternal nature as uncreated God. Implicit in this description of the *Logos* is recognition that he shares God's holiness and separateness. God must also be separate and distinct, holy in all his ways (Lev 11:44) and never mistaken for the profane (Lev 10:9–11). Thus, these same attributes of holiness must apply equally to the *Logos*. The *Logos* also displays other incommunicable attributes or perfections that are implicit in God. For example, the three 'omnis' describe important incommunicable divine traits. First, the divine *Logos* is omnipresent. The totality of God is present everywhere in creation. The *Logos* is present in heaven with God at creation, but is also present in equal measure on earth or anywhere in the universe.

When the Bible speaks of God in heaven it is picturing God as being in control of all things and being exalted by all the heavenly hosts, not as God limited to a single physical space. Second, God is omniscient. *Logos* has perfect knowledge of himself and all other things, from eternity past to eternity future. Finally, God is omnipotent. God is all-powerful and may do whatever he wishes to do with his created. Philo does not ascribe these characteristics to his *logos*, likely because it would violate his monotheistic sensibilities.

Philo consistently interprets scripture using Hellenistic presuppositions, such as there can be no direct relationship between humankind's rational soul and the transcendent God (*Quaest in Gn* 2.62), and therefore a mediator is required. The role of the mediator found in scripture is, in the mind of Philo, the *logos*. As stated in the previous section, Philo's *logos* is a created being that does not share all the divine, eternal attributes of an uncreated God and none of the 'omnis'. The incommunicable traits found in the *Logos* are not present in Philo's conception of the *logos*. The *logos* is described as creator, but with a caveat: all the power found in the *logos* was imbued by creative power by God.

If the *logos* was God's first act of creation prior to the creation of the universe and humanity then by definition the *logos* was not present at time of creation, that is, it is God's creation. The co-eternal *Logos* was personally responsible for the creation of all things and his own creative power is not derived from that of God but is a feature of his eternal divine essence. This is an essential difference between Philo's philosophical *logos* and John's Christological *Logos*.

Philo also credits the *logos* with the role of binding together the polar Beneficent and Creative powers of God.

Regardless of Philo's view of which of these two 'sides' of God have precedence in power, the fact remains that Philo states that Creative power is the older of the two. Philo describes a bifurcated God that is no longer uncreated or eternal in his quest to syncretize basic Hebrew theology with Greek dualistic beliefs. Equally confusing is Philo's attempt to equate the created logos to Creative power in *Quaest in Ex.* 2.62. In essence, Philo describes the created logos as superior to God as Beneficent power. This logical inconsistency is not addressed by Philo. Philo also describes the logos as having the mind of God. Certainly, John's Christological *Logos* has the mind of God but for different reasons. The eternal uncreated *Logos* and eternal uncreated God share the same essence, exist in a perfect relationship, and therefore, have the same mind.

What one knows, the other knows. What one desires, the other desires. Philo's created logos does not share any of these divine characteristics.

3.3 The *Logos* is the Creator of All Things

Every single thing that has ever been created was created by the *Logos*, including physical life and all non-physical objects, including the basic elements from which all creation originates. The *Logos* created all things *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and therefore humanity creates from the things God has provided. The *Logos* is what holds together and sustains creation. *Logos* is sovereign over all of creation with no limitations, from the smallest detail, which means that he does what he wants, when he wants, and to whom he wishes (Ps 93:1)—also perfect. The corollary to this observation is, if *Logos* commands something to be done, then it will be done immediately and perfectly (Ps 33:6–9).

Philo describes the logos as preexistent but only because his creation preceded the creation of the heavens, the earth, and humanity. For Philo, the creation of the logos appears to be primarily one of timing, not eternity. This is a necessary conclusion because Philo states that the logos is a created image of God that was used as a template for the creation of all things (*Leg. All.* 1.43).

Philo also calls the logos the 'soul of the world' (*Aet.* 84), among other titles, although, to the Greek mind, the soul is the life-force that animates life and leaves the body at death for life eternal. The soul takes up residence on the moon according to Plutarch (c. 40–120 CE) while Greek philosophers have suggested many other destinations.

Philo sheds some light on his view of the soul more clearly in *Leg. All.* 91 where we learn that the immortal part of the soul is given to humanity from the Father through the logos, a view clearly informed by Greek dualism. The Prologue does not directly address a theology of the soul although John clearly states that the *Logos* was the creator of all things and thus whatever the *Logos* created was by his hand without the need for an intermediary being, particularly the eternal soul that inhabits every person.

Philo views important functions of the logos as the creation of the universe, which includes the perfect man (*Som.* 8), and holding together the physical world including the soul within the physical bodies of humanity. The apostle Paul describes Jesus Christ as holding ‘all things’ together (Col 1:17), although there are significant differences between the two views to be explored.

First, Philo states that the acts of creation were performed by God using the logos as his ‘instrument’ (*De Cherubin* 127). In contrast, the *Logos* was the proximate cause of creation, not through an intermediary. The divine *Logos* is quite capable of creation *ex nihilo*, including humanity with an eternal soul. Philo, on the other hand, describes the creative work of the logos based on the prior presence of the ‘four elements’ (earth, air, water, and fire). In other words, the creative acts of the logos are derived works from God having been provided the four elements as the building blocks of creation. In the Stoic mind, the act of holding together creation is described by Philo as ‘bringing disorder and irregularity into order and regularity’ (*Som.* 1.241), thus creative acts by the logos appear to be more ‘housekeeping’ than original works of creation. Also, Philo describes the immanent logos as the only means for humanity to understand the created world. It is through the wisdom of the created logos that formed and controls the universe. The logos is created by transcendent God as the means to interact with the immanent universe. Hence, the philosophical creative and sustaining acts attributed to the logos are derived works and inconsistent with John’s statement that the *Logos* is creator and sustainer of all creation *ex nihilo*.

Philo also describes his philosophical logos as the conduit to humanity that produces rational thought, intellect, and free will (*Quod Deus.* 47) thereby bringing order to humanity. In Philo’s view, God breathed the logos into Adam to give life to humanity (*Leg. All.* 1.37) and then stepped back allowing the logos to interact with humanity in the many forms discussed earlier. Some may liken these tasks as remarkably similar to God’s creation and sustaining of humanity through Adam.

However, the apostle John affirms that creation is the sovereign territory of uncreated, eternal God. The *Logos* created and then breathed life into humanity. The *Logos* is life-giver and sustainer, the author of humanity's soul, eternal, and therefore there is no need for the *Logos* to take on different names, forms, or functions. Philo is using finite descriptions of forms and function to describe the infinite, an impossible task. The unbegotten eternal *Logos* subsumes all functions of the philonic logos.

Philo describes the logos placing a portion of the 'stamped' and 'copied' soul within each person. Philo describes the 'soul [a]s divided into seven divisions; there being five senses, and besides them the vocal organ, and after that the generative power' (*De Opificio Mundi* 217), obviously derived from Greek Platonic thought.

However, it is not surprising that Philo would be comfortable with this definition as the word 'soul' is never used in the Old Testament as a reference to the immortal soul but rather as a life principle, to a particular living being (e.g. Gen 1:20–21, 24), or to the creation of humanity (Gen 2:7) when God breathed life into dust. For John, the *Logos* created each person as a unique individual who must personally answer to God for their actions (v. 1:12) so John implicitly sees each person as possessing a God-given unique and complete soul, not an identically 'stamped' portion of soul given by the logos to every person.

The *Logos* implicitly incorporated free will and intellect into his creation and Philo agrees with that assessment. However, that motif is consistent with Scripture and their agreement on this point is not surprising. However, for Philo, intellect is one's ability to exercise the wisdom 'stamped' onto humanity by the logos, which is an image of God's wisdom. Philo and John do agree that God did the creative work, however, the *Logos* stands front and centre as the creator. Philo's logos, as second to God as his 'Shadow,' executed God's plan, although from the viewpoint of humanity the work was completed by the divine logos. For John, the creative work of the *Logos* is made apparent in all of creation and is independent of humanity's view of the *Logos*.

3.4 Jesus Christ is the Source of Humanity's Spiritual Enlightenment

Philo's interpretive construct of the logos is guided by his Greek philosophical hermeneutic. For Philo, philosophy is 'the desire to see things accurately', particularly God and his logos. The mind of humanity is finite and cannot conceive of the mind of an infinite God, so Philo's philosophical journey is doomed from inception.

It seems that humanity's innate need to pursue God is a possible point of agreement between John and Philo, although this point is debatable given the depraved sin nature of humanity. There are wide differences between Philo and John in their understanding of how God reveals himself to humanity. For Philo, God may only reveal himself through an intermediary, that is, the wisdom of God, the *logos*. Philo describes the spiritual enlightenment brought by *logos* in the form of a simile, 'of light to light,' to describe how the *logos* reveals God. However, Philo also believes that philosophers have an inside track to enlightenment compared to the remainder of humanity.

Philosophers alone seek to comprehend God, while all others are limited to an understanding of God based on his actions, that is, the actions of the *logos*. The apostle John writes of the *Logos* coming to bring spiritual enlightenment to all of humanity, not to a privileged few based on personal effort. Philo believes that humanity desires wisdom except that it rejects the wisdom of God (*Post.* 136). The apostle John writes that the *Logos* came incarnate but was rejected by his own people. Rejection is a common theme, although Philo's view of humanity's rejection of wisdom is a rejection of the opportunities to come to a greater understanding of God. The apostle John describes rejection in terms of humanity rejecting the spiritual enlightenment that results in a personal relationship with God in terms of becoming a child of God and enjoying eternal life with the *Logos*, an incomprehensible concept to Philo. Philo sought philosophical enlightenment rather than spiritual enlightenment and eternal relationship.

Philo also describes the *logos*, a creation of God, as fundamentally a messenger between transcendent God and immanent humanity. After the creation of the *logos*, God retreated from his created and remained distant. The *logos* became a vague image for humanity, alternately playing the role of an angel, prophet, or even *Yahweh*. The roles of the *logos* are read into scripture and Philo, often using an allegorical hermeneutic to justify his Greek dualistic presuppositions, identifies the work of the *logos*. The apostle John views the work of the person of the *Logos* by his actions, such as creation, salvation, rejection, and incarnation.

There are no disguises or interpretive legerdemain at play. The *Logos* goes about his work in perfect submission and relationship with the Father. The philonic *logos* is commissioned by the Father to perform works.

The *Logos*, as will be described in an upcoming section, directly touches humanity through his incarnation. The *logos* interacts with humanity in various disguises.

The *Logos* singular is worthy of the glory of humanity. In fact, the logos steals the glory due God when humanity is fooled into believing that the logos is God. God never countenances stealing of his glory in scripture and he warns readers that punishment follows. The *Logos* reveals God to humanity. God earnestly desires to be revealed to humanity and he did so through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and glorification of the *Logos*. The infinite God revealed himself to the finite. The role of the created logos, whether intended or not, was to conceal the uncreated God from humanity. Philo assumes that a transcendent God does not desire to directly interact with his created and never considers the possibility.

The work of the *Logos* is the transcendent God reaching down, in love, to touch humanity. For Philo, immanent humanity will not reach out to touch God, only the logos.

3.5 John the Baptizer called for repentance, heralded the coming of the Messiah

Philo's view of repentance is, as we should expect, closely aligned with the call of John the Baptizer. Philo often calls for his readers to turn away from sinful action and redirect one's life in conformance with the Law (cf. *Leg. All.* 2.78; 3.105–106). Philo describes the logos as God's messenger, but does not cite a comparable forerunner of the logos.

There are approximately 100 instances in his writings where Philo calls for one to repent of sin. One entire section is dedicated to repentance (*Virt.* 175–186) in which Philo defines repentance in a very philosophical manner, 'crossing over from ignorance to a knowledge of those things to be ignorant of which is shameful; from folly to wisdom, from intemperance to temperance, from injustice to righteousness, from cowardice to confident courage' (*Virt.* 175–186). Each of these characteristics clearly has Greek wisdom overtones, and they are only a shadow of the covenantal law requirements of repentance. John the Baptizer came to testify about the true Light of the world and preached repentance in light of judgment (Luke 3:17). Philo's repentance has the purpose of accessing God's wisdom in order to acquire divine knowledge and a vision of God (*Quod. Deus.* 143), to become like God, and to rise above the material world (*Fug.* 63), in order to contemplate the divine logos (*Som.* 1,71; 2.249).

The differences between Philo and John related to repentance are clear: Philo wishes to grow in wisdom and knowledge about God (static condition) in order to become like God, while John the Baptizer encouraged people to make a radical change in their life (Matt 3:11) and return to their covenantal relationship with God (although as an individual, not in response to a collective call to repentance) in order to avoid eternal condemnation of their sin. John says repentance requires a response (active condition) to the Light of the world in order to experience life change. For Philo, humanity is passive and through the work of the logos some amount of wisdom is ‘stamped’ into the human soul (*Leg. All.* 2.31–32). Philosophically, Philo and his colleagues gain the wisdom necessary to see and possibly to know God through personal achievement. For John, true repentance begets a right relationship with God and explicitly avoids eternal punishment.

3.6 A Majority of Fallen Humanity Reject Spiritual Enlightenment

Wisdom, in an Old Testament sense, is a form of knowledge that allows humanity to have a deep understanding of something or understand the practical significance of something (Ps 104:24; 136:5). Scripture also describes wisdom as putting knowledge to work in a practical sense (Prov 2:2–5) or to increase in wisdom in order to understand the person of God more fully. For Philo, wisdom leads to a deeper philosophical understanding of transcendent God and the universe.

Philo views the logos as the source of light for humanity although the product of that light was that portion of wisdom embedded in the soul of each person. Philo presents the logos as more than one form of light but rather as one of many forms of light. For example, the Israelites fed on manna provided by the ‘most ancient logos of God’ (*Det.* 118). In addition, wisdom is provided to humanity by a ‘stream’ that injects God’s people with ‘manna’ by which God’s people are nourished by the logos (*Leg. All.* 3.175–176). Philo resorts to an allegorical interpretation to identify the provider of the manna (the logos) and the content of the manna (wisdom). Philo is speaking in terms of God’s covenant people, but it is best to view this statement as collective (all humanity).

Philo also relates that not all will benefit equally with this infusion of wisdom from the logos. Wisdom is proportioned based on, in the view of Philo, the more perfect the person. The more perfect the person, the more wisdom is received. Perfection, however, is viewed as the possession of various virtues. Philo dedicates an entire writing (*On the Virtues*) to defining the virtues.

Generally, the virtuous few are those who have overcome the indignities of human life by diligently pursuing virtue over seemingly a long time and thus collecting a disproportionate share of wisdom. Greater wisdom allows one to have greater knowledge of the *logos* (which is only visible to humanity) and thus come closer to transcendent God. For Philo, anyone can pursue wisdom although it is relatively few Greek philosophers with a sufficient stockpile of virtue who have success with their pursuit.

The apostle John states the unique *Logos*, the One and only Son of God, brought the promise of spiritual renewal first to his own people and then to the world. Every person that hears of the person and work of the *Logos* has an opportunity to embrace the Truth. The message is universal and the grace and truth of the *Logos* is easily comprehended by the world, 'so that all might believe through Him' (John 1:7b), not a select few philosophers.

3.7 A Minority of Fallen Humanity Embrace Spiritual Enlightenment to Become Children of God

Most of the Jews who heard Jesus speak rejected Messiah Jesus, but a few individuals, not limited to Jewish descent or nationality, did accept Jesus' salvific message and were adopted into the Kingdom of God and became children of God. To be a child of God is to live in his presence and enjoy all of the familial benefits of that relationship. Philo's philosophical *logos* is given the responsibility of the spiritual welfare of humanity by nourishing their souls with God's wisdom and pastoring the flock as the Royal Shepherd (*Mut.* 113–116). The *logos* appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai as the giver of the Mosaic Law to the Israelite nation (*Mos.* 95, 253). Philo's *logos* is also said to be the source of virtue (*Som.* 118–119) and rational thought for humanity (*Det.* 86–90). The *logos* has many other functions, such as prophet (*Deus.* 182), healer of the soul (*Mos.* 2.134), the source of judgment and forgiveness for humanity (*Quaest in Gen.* 3.27, 28, 51) and represents personified wisdom (specifically as presented in Prov 8:22). The philonic *logos* as a healer of the soul in context means the *logos* delivers God's blessings to humanity in the form of wisdom. Philo writes that Moses calls this wisdom the 'sight of God' or the 'vision of God.' Philo views the wisdom of Moses written in the Pentateuch as the predecessor and foundation of all Greek philosophies.

A common theme found in Philo's philosophical writings is the value of philosophy to humanity. A small portion of humanity will pursue a virtuous life in order to increase in wisdom (provided by the *logos*, *Sacr.* 9; *Som.* 1.182) as mentioned earlier.

The gift of reason was received from God (*Op.* 77) and those who use reason to pursue wisdom will receive the greatest knowledge of God. Philosophy, according to Philo, is what allows humanity to 'live in conformity with nature' (*Prob.* 160), which is Philo's way of saying how humanity may live a moral and virtuous life. Philo defines the four virtues as wisdom, self-control, courage, and justice (*Leg. All.* 1.63–64).

Philo views the logos as providing humanity with a path to gain wisdom through personal effort in order to become enlightened with knowledge of God. The philosopher represents those who pursue this enlightenment through their personal efforts to live a virtuous life. Philo's philosophical logos may allow a minority to become enlightened about God and the universe, but John's Christological *Logos* allows all of humanity to become children of God, although only a minority will accept the offer.

The minority of respondents is a point of similarity between Philo and John, although the object of our faith and the means by which faith is pursued are remarkably different.

3.8 Salvation is Not the Product of Human Work

The apostle John rejected the Jewish view of their special relationship with God that ensured their communal righteousness based on keeping the Mosaic Law. Works righteousness, nor being born into a particular people or ethnic group, does not produce a relationship with God. It is only through faith in the completed work of Christ on the cross that results in salvation and eternity in the presence of God. Works righteousness does not replace salvific faith.

As touched on in the previous section, Philo's logos is the image of God's wisdom that was used to imprint each person with wisdom. The logos, as the Word or Thought of God, connects the thoughts and wisdom of God to humanity. As part of creation, individuals remain with an imperfect understanding of the logos. Our understanding of the logos may only be perfected through perseverance in understanding wisdom and limited only by the reasoning capability given to each person. For Philo, in general, it was the philosopher who was granted the necessary quantity of the gift of reason to allow him to pursue wisdom and thus a greater experiential understanding of God and the universe. There is a marked difference between John's view of salvation through the completed work of Christ and Philo's philosophical pursuit of works righteousness.

3.9 Jesus Christ Arrived Incarnate in the World

The *Logos* incarnate, Jesus as 100% flesh and blood and 100% divine, has no parallel in Philo's philosophical writings or in history for that matter. For Philo, transcendent God does not initiate contact with finite humanity much less take on the humble form of his created and walk on earth with immanent humanity. Philo does speak of the Beneficent Power that performs legislative, chastising, and correcting functions, but those functions are carried out by the *logos* by directive action of Beneficent God. Philo writes that the *logos* is the source of destruction on earth as well as the source of forgiveness to humanity. The *logos* is also described as guiding God's judgment of the universe and will judge humanity at some time in the future. Philo believes in the immortality of the soul although only a portion of the soul is immortal and, again, it is the *logos* that provides it to humanity.

In sum, Philo certainly recognizes the presence of evil in the world and the eternality of the soul, but does not attempt to define a means to reconcile humanity's sin with God's righteousness. The limit for humanity is a deeper knowledge and understanding of God and the universe. Philo's metaphysical concept of the *logos* placed as the mediator between God and humanity is perhaps the only similarity with the anthropomorphic *Logos* described by the apostle John. The *Logos* reaches down to humanity. The philonic *logos* encourages a segment of humanity to reach up to the *logos* in its futile attempt to understand God.

There are further, very significant differences between Philo's philosophical *logos* and the apostle John's Christological *Logos* that should be considered at this time. First, the incarnation of the *Logos* certainly demonstrates God's love for humanity and his desire to be in an eternal, loving relationship with his created. For Philo, the Creative Power is peaceable and gentle, but personal interaction with humanity is impossible. God, regardless of Philo's functional descriptions, never reaches out to humanity because the infinite cannot penetrate the finite (the same apologetic response used today by many agnostics). The *logos* is the mediator of all things to humanity. Philo describes the *logos* as a created being (*Leg. All.* 2.86) that is eternal (a logical inconsistency, *Deus.* 47, *Cher.* 1.27–28) that is humanity's source of virtue (*Som.* 118–119), humanity's paraclete (*Mos.* 2.134, 135), interpreter of God's will (*Leg. All.* 2.207), and sustainer of humanity with wisdom (*Leg. All.* 2.175–176). The *logos* also appears in various forms, such as personified wisdom (Prov 8), High Priest, chief deputy, and even as the image of God (*Leg. All.* 1.43). And, as motioned earlier, the *logos* appears as the messenger of God to humanity.

This is the limit to which the logos, the messenger of God, appears to humanity in many forms. However, the logos never appears in a form that calls humanity into a direct relationship with God.

None of the many forms in which the philonic logos appears describes the humanity and divinity of the logos, a mark of the *Logos*. The logos does the will of God in creation, for example, but the relationship is one-sided—the logos responds to an order with the immediate action of creation and interacts with humanity when commanded, but never communicates back to God. The logos was a messenger, but never returns a message. In the first century the words of an emissary from a distant king are the words of the king himself. Thus, the logos speaks with the authority of God. However, this is a description of merely a functional relationship between God and the logos, not a relationship based on the two moving together in perfect synchronism and for the same purpose, as is the case of God and the *Logos*.

Philo's logos never addresses humanity's sin that separates God from humanity because God is transcendent and the separation was forever permanent. Reconciliation of humanity with God is not possible because there was never a relationship to begin with. In contrast, John's *Logos* walked among humanity for the sole purpose of reconciling sinful humanity with a righteous God. The *Logos* was not a messenger from God because he is God and therefore possessed within himself the power of reconciliation. The incarnate *Logos* walked on earth to facilitate his ministry of reconciliation, as well as present to humanity an intimate picture of God's perfect grace, mercy, and love.

For Philo, the purpose of the logos was to bring rational thought to humanity (*Op.* 146; *Praem.* 163; *Det.* 86–90), which in turn motivates humanity's free will and intellect (*Quod Deus.* 47) and allows one to comprehend one's environment and spiritual things (*Quis Het.* 234–236; *Det.* 90). Humanity may have free will and the ability to grasp spiritual things through the work of the logos but this philosophical stance does not consider the basic sinful nature of humanity who, left to their own devices, would not seek deliverance from God, free will or not. Thus God reached down to humanity by sending *Logos* as the means for humanity to be reconciled to God. None of the many forms or functions of the logos replicate this act. Nor does Philo describe the actions of the logos as voluntary actions on behalf of humanity. Instead, the relationship between God and the logos should be viewed as hierarchal—God commands and the created logos obeys as his intermediary. Humanity's only relationship with uncreated God is once removed through the created logos.

Jesus Christ said, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father' (John 14:9); this represents John's view of the divinity of the *Logos*. God has reached down to humanity through the uncreated *Logos* and it is through the *Logos* humanity may view God. Philo views the relationship as unidirectional. The apostle John does not view the need of an intermediary for God's salvific message. God sent the incarnate *Logos* to humanity for the purpose of lifting up humanity into eternal familial relationship. The nature of Philo's God is secretive, 'For he has not revealed his nature to anyone' (*All. Leg.* 3.206) and only the *logos* reveals transcendent God. God created the *logos* and the *logos* then proceeded to carry out the plans of God with respect to humanity. It is only through the *logos* as an intermediary that humanity may have any interaction with God. In fact, the *logos*, what Philo also calls the perfect man, creates humanity based on the image of God 'stamped' on the *logos*. John's *Logos* arrives among humanity incarnate, God in flesh.

3.10 Jesus Christ is our source of grace and truth

If one can earn salvation, then one does not need grace. It is only through the reason and wisdom provided by Philo's *logos* that one may become knowledgeable about God and the universe. God's grace does not play a role, because the *logos* does not require an understanding of and repentance from one's sin. Instead, one must only strive to lead a virtuous life. In much the same way, the standard of truth stated hundreds of times throughout scripture as 'Thus says the Lord' is based on the unchanging character of God. John the Baptizer preached a message of repentance, that is, turning away from sin and back to conformance with the Law in preparation for the coming of the divine *Logos* and his message of forgiveness and eternal life.

Grace and truth are attributes that reflect the fullness of God and thus the *Logos*. Philo's *logos* is the messenger that brought a limited set of God's characteristics to humanity. John's *Logos* is God living among humanity. The grace and truth of the *Logos* bring glory to God by sharing those attributes with humanity. For Philo, the *logos* is the revelator and we may only see God through the created *logos*, an image of an image (*Praem.* 43–44; *Leg. All.* 1.37–38). The *Logos* is God thus seeing the *Logos* is to see God, an unthinkable proposition to Philo. We see God through spiritual eyes when we believe in his name and become a child of God. This new familial relationship allows us to see and abide with our Father. It is only through the *Logos* that we may properly comprehend the Father.

As a side note, John speaks of grace and truth as the essence of the *Logos*. Philo views grace and truth within the framework of four Greek virtues (temperance, prudence, courage, and justice, although Plato replaced prudence with wisdom in some writings) that define good moral behaviour. The pursuit of these virtues was supremely important to Philo's Stoic mind. Plato argued that the four virtues are mutually exclusive as one may act with great courage but with injustice. Bad behaviour or poor choices stem from a lack of wisdom possessed by the individual. The Greeks viewed the four virtues as evidence of a moral existence, yet the virtues are based solely on wilful personal acts. They are volitional acts for the purpose of a person being viewed as exceptional within Greek society. However, the presence of the four virtues in any amount does not reflect the heart of the individual, reminiscent of Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs (Matt 23:27). In contrast, grace and truth are divine attributes that describe the essence of the *Logos*.

For the child of God, grace and truth are to be emulated, but cannot be replicated because these are immutable attributes of God.

Philo describes one further action of the *logos*: the *logos* dwells in the soul of persons whose 'life is an object of honour' (*Post.* 122). Philo suggests that the invisible God does have an earthly presence in the invisible soul (*Cher.* 101). Philo sees the presence of an image of the invisible God present in each person by virtue of the 'image of an image' motif discussed earlier. Each person is born with this image as part of one's soul. This is where and how God grants the gifts of peace, 'the highest of blessings' (*Mos.* 1.304) and 'joy' (*Som.* 1.71). Once again, the gifts of peace and joy are experienced only by the virtuous and thus represent works righteousness. Philo's words sound remarkably similar to the peace and joy that comes from being a child of God. However, as is often the case with Philo, like terms often have different definitions.

Philo understood the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* (source of the English word apathy), that is, the desire to be free from all emotions or passions. These are not emotions or passions in the modern sense of the terms. The Stoics classified emotions as either healthy or unhealthy (generally presented as pairs of opposite emotions) and that our reactions to either must remain under strict control by the individual. Healthy emotions include joy, peace and so on. The unhealthy emotions are part of opposite pairs, such as pain or suffering, fear, lust, and pleasure, and so on. Stoicism was an ethical approach to life,

the way to live a virtuous life or attainment of moral excellence, therefore, it was the practice of the virtues that created happiness.

One who lives a virtuous life controls one's emotional responses to uncertain events of life, even those that are highly desirable, such as peace and joy. Thus, the *Logos* was the source of the virtues and the desirable emotions of joy and peace. The apostle John implicitly moves the frame of reference for a follower of *Logos* from dealing with the daily vagaries of life to an eternal perspective. The peace and joy that comes from the *Logos* is the result of becoming a child of God and is based on the finished work of the *Logos* on the cross, not through human efforts, for the reward of eternity in the presence of God.

4. Summary and Conclusions

A detailed exegetical analysis of the Prologue produced ten essential statements about the origins, person, and work of John's Christological *Logos*, and was compared to Philo's description of his mythological *logos* using the set of ten criteria developed in Part One.

1. The *Logos* is preexistent and eternal. Philo's *logos* was a created entity possessing a necessary portion of uncreated God's divinity for performing the tasks given to him. Philo uses descriptive terms reminiscent of those used to describe the person and work of the predicted Messiah found in the Old Testament. The *logos* was not present at the creation, therefore the *logos* is not the Word.

2. The *Logos* (Jesus Christ) is divine. Philo views God as transcendent and thus requires a mediator with humanity. The *logos* does not share all the divine or eternal characteristics of the *Logos*. The power of the *logos* is bestowed by God and is not part of his nature. The *Logos* and God are both uncreated and share the same essence and exist in perfect relationship. Therefore, the *logos* is not divine.

3. The *Logos* is the creator of all things. Every single thing that has ever been created was created by the *Logos ex nihilo*. The *Logos* holds together all creation and is sovereign over creation. For Philo, the *logos* was created by God to perform particular tasks using a variety of contextual identities. The *logos* created all things from the 'four elements' that were provided (earth, air, water, and fire). The *logos* does not create *ex nihilo* therefore the *logos* is not the *Logos*.

4. Jesus Christ is the source of humanity's spiritual enlightenment. The *Logos*, as part of the act of creation, placed a divine light within humanity (wisdom), our intellect, and an internal moral compass sufficient to discern the existence of God and the *Logos* as the source of eternal salvation. For Philo, the mind of humanity is finite and cannot conceive of an infinite God thus the need for the unique and privileged role of the philosopher who seeks to better understand God is required. The major point of disagreement is centred on the incarnation of the *Logos* who seeks the salvation of humanity in the form of an eternal, personal relationship with God. These concepts were completely foreign to Philo and do not describe the work of his description of his mystical logos in any way.

5. John the Baptizer called for repentance, heralded the coming of the Messiah. In context, John's call for repentance distinctly reflected the Old Testament action of spiritual cleaning and personal recommitment to the Law of Moses, clearly consistent with Philo's beliefs.

John describes the *Logos* as calling for a radical change in a person's life so that individuals may come into an eternal personal relationship with God. For Philo, the logos enables persons to gain the wisdom necessary to know God better by means of virtuous actions (works righteousness). The *Logos* offers salvation through repentance and faith, unlike the logos that looks for personal virtuous works.

6. A majority of fallen humanity reject spiritual enlightenment. John describes the *Logos* as the source of humanity's spiritual enlightenment although many will reject the *Logos* as true Light and will intentionally continue to embrace the darkness. Spiritual enlightenment, in context, is a personal knowledge and belief in God. Philo also describes spiritual enlightenment as the possession of the various 'virtues' individually earned, for the purpose of attaining a greater understanding of the logos, not God. The ultimate goal is that one becomes closer to transcendent God, rather than personally 'knowing' God, as John teaches.

7. A minority of fallen humanity embrace spiritual enlightenment to become children of God. John states that the majority of Jews rejected the *Logos* as Messiah, yet those who do embrace the *Logos* become children of God and receive all the benefits of that familial relationship for eternity. Philo describes his logos as having the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of humanity.

The logos appeared many times in scripture as personified wisdom, thus delivering to humanity blessings in the form of increased wisdom. Pursuing wisdom for the purpose of personal enlightenment conflicts with John's description of the Logos pursuing humanity for eternal salvation.

8. Salvation is not the product of human work. John states that salvation comes as a free gift from the *Logos*. Philo writes that our understanding of the logos is perfected by personal perseverance with acquiring wisdom and our success is limited only by our capacity for reason. Humanity may pursue knowledge of transcendent God only through increasing knowledge of the logos. Eternal salvation for eternity is a free gift from the *Logos*.

9. Jesus Christ arrived incarnate in the world. The incarnate *Logos* as 100% divine and 100% human has no parallel in Philo's writings. There is also no parallel with an immanent God reaching down to humanity with the purpose of developing an eternal relationship. Philo does describe the logos as guiding God's judgment of the universe, including humanity.

Reconciliation is not a function of Philo's logos and, for Philo, it is impossible for God to directly interact with humanity. The *Logos* came in incarnate form into the world with a message of salvation. The logos was commanded to be a messenger to humanity in a functional relationship with God. Philo never speaks about the logos and humanity's sin nor the need for God's grace, mercy, and love.

10. Jesus Christ is our source of grace and truth. John uses the terms grace and truth in the Prologue as essential elements of our understanding of salvation and the work and person of the *Logos*. To know the *Logos* is to know God. God is grace and truth and therefore cares about the eternal destiny of individuals. For Philo, the logos functionally is the revelator of God and has a presence in our invisible soul. But since the logos is 'an image of an image' of God, we see God imperfectly and dimly. The logos is all that humanity may 'see' of transcendent God. Peace and joy come only from virtuous actions (works righteousness), not as the free gift of God's grace.

This work concludes that there are no intersections of thought between John's description of the Christological *Logos* and Philo's logos philosophy. Therefore, John's Prologue is an *explicit* 'rejection' of Philo's logos philosophy, whether or not the apostle John was aware of the writings of Philo of Alexandria. John's Prologue is also an *implicit* apologetic, or better,

a polemic against Philo's logos philosophy insofar as John's knowledge of Philo's writings can be determined through circumstantial evidence, although specific motives are impossible to determine without direct knowledge of John's state of mind at the time of writing the Prologue.

These conclusions have many implications. For example, the view held by many scholars that Philo's mystical philosophy was an evolutionary step into what was to become John's Christological view of the *Logos* or that John's *Logos* is Philo's logos in abbreviated form must both be rejected because neither conclusion is supported by the evidence presented. If there are no similarities of thought then there can be no evolution of thought.

John's Prologue to the fourth Gospel was written for multiple purposes. John wrote a persuasive evangelical tract with the purpose of attracting Greek-speaking Jews and Gentiles with the purpose of persuading readers to accept John's apologetic description of the incarnate *Logos* as God in flesh. In doing so, John *explicitly* rejects the Philonic logos as the detailed comparison of John's Christological *Logos* and Philo's philosophical logos demonstrates.

John chose the word 'logos' because it is a term recognizable to Gentiles and Jews, living within a Hellenistic culture, as a literary device to attract the largest possible audience as a means to present his gospel message so that all his readers '... may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name' (John 20:31).

Appendix 1. The Works of Philo of Alexandria

Abr De Abrahamo On Abraham

Aet. De Aeternitate Mundi On the Eternity of the World

Agr De Agricultura On Husbandry

Cher. De Cherubim On the Cherubim

Conf. De Confusione Linguarum On the Confusion of Tongues

Congr. De Congressu Eruditionisgratia On the Preliminary Studies

Decal. De Decalogo On the Decalogue

Det. Quod Deterius Potiori insidiari solet The Worse attacks the Better

Ebr. De Ebrietate On Drunkenness

Flacc. In Flaccum Flaccus

Fug. De Fuga et Inventione On Flight and Finding

Gig. De Gigantibus On the Giants

Hyp. Hypothesica/Apologia pro Iudaeis Apology for the Jews

Jos. De Josepho On Joseph

Leg. De Legatione ad Gaium On the Embassy to Gaius

Leg. All. Legum Allegoriarum Allegorical Interpretation

Mig. De Migratione Abrahami On the Migration of Abraham

Mos. De Vita Mosis On the Life of Moses

Mut. De Mutatione Nominum On the Change of Names

Op. De Opificio Mundi On the Creation

Plant. De Plantatione On Noah's Work as a Planter

Post. De Posteritate Caini On the Posterity and Exile of Cain

Praem. De Praemiis et Poenis On Rewards and Punishments

Prov. De Providentia On Providence

Quaest in Gn. Questiones et Solutiones in Genesin Questions and Answers on Genesis

Quaest in Ex Questiones et Solutiones in Exodum Questions and Answers on Exodus

Quis Her. Quis rerum divinarum Heres sit Who is the Heir

Quod Deus. Quod Deus sit Immutabilis On the Unchangeableness of God

Quod Omn. Prob. Quod omnis Probus Libersit Every Good Man is Free

Sac. De Sacri Nciis Abelis et Caini On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain

Sob. De Sobrietate On Sobriety

Som. De Somniis On Dreams

Spec. Leg. De Specialibus Legibus On the Special Laws

Virt. De Virtute On the Virtues

Vit. Cont. De Vita Contemplativa On the Contemplative Life

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The Realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa¹

Roland Paul Cox

Abstract

The application of Isaiah 61 in Africa is considered by studying the original audience of Isaiah 61, exegeting the passage, studying Jesus' audience of Isaiah 61, including a brief exegesis of Luke 4:14–30, examining why Isaiah 61 was never fully realized in either audience and considering the applications to Africa. While the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 61 will be in the eschaton, and while there has already been a partial realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa; a greater realization of Isaiah 61 is contingent upon Africans meeting the conditions of this vision: acceptance of Christ, following God, fighting injustice and helping the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless.

Keywords

Isaiah 61; Luke 4:14-30; Africa; Fulfillment of prophecy; Fighting injustice

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¹ Interactions with Dr. Emmanuel Mbennah in the early stages of this work were key to the formation of this article.

² The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

Isaiah 61 represents God's vision for his people of hope, healing, freedom, comfort and salvation. It is a vision that has been preserved and passed down through the ages with Jesus himself quoting from this vision. It is a vision that has had a partial positive fulfillment on the continent of Africa;³ however, Africa—as a whole—with its conflicts,⁴ injustices,⁵ disproportion of diseases⁶ and spiritual tenuity⁷ should desire and seek a greater realization.⁸ However, there are a number of issues that demand careful prayer and reflection before attempting the implementation of Isaiah 61.⁹

The goal of this article is to highlight the major points of consideration.¹⁰ It is intentionally written with a very broad theological stance, so that emphasis can remain on prayer, contemplation and realization of the vision of Isaiah 61 in Africa with a spirit of unity rather than a resolution of all the details.¹¹ While there are many issues to consider, the key ones are:

1. The original audience of Isaiah 61 along with an exegesis of Isaiah 61:1–7
2. Jesus' audience of Isaiah 61 and a brief exegesis of Luke 4:14–30
3. Factors that prevented the realization of Isaiah 61 in the Bible
4. Factors to consider in the realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa

In looking at the exegesis and the original audience it will be shown that the original audience never fully attained the vision of Isaiah 61, rather the vision was mostly a vision of future hope. Likewise, a brief exegesis on Luke 4:14–30, along with a comparison of the reaction in Nazareth to other areas will show that the audience who heard Jesus read Isaiah 61 never saw the

9 This paper focuses on the realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa; one section of this article is very specific to Africa, although, the other sections are more universal and could potentially be applied to another region with prayer and careful reflection. To think that one can address all the critical issues before starting realization is ludicrous. There will always be new issues and problems discovered during the implementation of anything worthwhile. However, should one fail to pray and think critically before starting implementation, disaster is almost assured.

10 The application of Old Testament passages to a 21st-century audience raises critical theological questions that must be addressed. This article is written with the belief that Isaiah 61 has modern day application to 21st-century audience; the last footnote (drawing from the overall thesis of this work) defends this stance. Interpretation of prophetic genre, the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and the authorship and the date of the book of Isaiah are difficult theological topics. This article attempts to address these topics only to the extent needed to defend its stance that Isaiah 61 speaks to the modern African continent. Detailed analysis of these topics is unequivocally beyond this work.

11 The details are important and their careful study is warranted. However, a broad theological stance will allow the arguments presented to have validity for a larger audience and provide a rallying point of unity in realization.

3 More will be said on this in the section Factors to Consider in the Realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa.

4 The 2018 World Health Organization report has the Africa region as the second highest region for direct deaths from major conflicts per capita.

5 This will be further delineated in the section Factors to Consider in the Realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa.

6 In the 2018 World Health Organization report, there are statistics for four infectious diseases across the various world regions. The Africa region has the highest per capita incidence for all four of these diseases. For two of these diseases, the occurrence in Africa is more than four times greater than the second highest region.

7 The well-respected African Bible Commentary notes: 'Christian leaders identified deficient knowledge of the Bible and faulty application of its teaching as the primary weakness of the church in Africa. They recognized that the church in Africa was a mile long in terms of quantity, but only an inch deep in terms of quality' (Adeyemo 2006:viii).

8 The author is aware of the call to change the African narrative from an exclusive focus on negative issues to also include positive aspects and the great potential of Africa (Thakkar 2015; UN Women 2018; UNESCO 2016). The discussion of an already realized fulfillment of Isaiah 61 (already pointed out in footnote 3, will be discussed more fully in a later section) is an attempt to have an accurate-looking both at the positive and negative—African narrative.

12 This statement could raise some objections. The sections Jesus' Audience of Isaiah 61 and Kingdom and Isaiah 61 provide a better-nuanced statement.

realization of the vision.¹² Given that neither of these audiences achieved the vision it is worthwhile discussing the factors that prevented the realization of Isaiah 61 in Bible times. This will lead to a discussion of present day factors that could prevent the realization of the same passage in Africa.

2. Original Audience

Anyone who has studied Isaiah knows that to speak of the authorship and audience is terrain riddled with theological peril, especially after chapter 39. While an attempt is being made to avoid the resolution of all the details and differences, a brief diversion into some details is necessary.

There are two major possibilities for the author of the original vision of Isaiah 61. The first one being that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, in the eighth century BC, had this vision which was received by an eighth-century audience with the probable intent for a postexilic audience (Grogan 1990; Lessing 2014). The second possibility is that an anonymous author, Deutero-Isaiah or Trito-Isaiah,¹³ either during or after the exile had the vision for an exilic or postexilic audience (Goldingay 2014; Watts 2002a). Hence, from a very broad perspective, Isaiah 61 was written either by Isaiah (eighth century BC) or by Deutero/Trito-Isaiah. Keeping the same broad perspective there are three possible audiences, an eighth-century BC audience, an exilic audience and/or a postexilic audience.

Since the goal is the realization of Isaiah 61, in the consideration of the original audience, it will be presumed that this is a prophetic vision of God delivered to his people.¹⁴ The issue of who received and communicated the vision, for the purpose of this argument, is not the critical factor. Whether it was Isaiah (eighth century BC) or Deutero/Trito-Isaiah, the crucial point is that God communicated the blessings he desired to bestow upon his people. Hope for healing and restitution were imparted to the audience and the intent of God to give freedom and restoration was clearly received.

As mentioned above, there are three possible audiences: an eighth-century BC audience, an exilic audience and/or a postexilic audience. Exegesis of Isaiah 61 followed by a review of the vision of Isaiah 61 in relation to each audience is warranted.

13 The term Deutero-Isaiah or Trito-Isaiah can also refer to the later chapters of Isaiah. These terms can be a flashpoint for debate see Coggins (1998).

14 This statement does narrow the theological stance of this argument. However, prophetic visions from God to his people are vital to the Christian faith, without prophetic vision there can be no hope of an eschanton.

3. Exegesis of Isaiah 61:1-7

Isaiah 61 consists of four parts: verses 1–3 speak of the tasks for which God has anointed and sent the prophet. Verses 4–7 tell of God’s restoration of and blessing to his people. In verses 8–9 God reaffirms his covenant with his people. Verses 10–11 close the chapter with rejoicing and exultation for what God has done. This article focuses on verses 1–7, thus these are the only verses exegeted.

3.1 The Tasks for Which God has Anointed and Sent the Prophet (Verses 1-3)

Verse 1. ‘The Spirit of the Lord GOD¹⁵ is upon me’¹⁶ (or more literally translated ‘the Spirit of *my* Lord GOD is upon me’ רִיחַ אֲדֹנָי (יהוה עָלַי) opens this chapter with the prophet describing who—the Lord GOD—is acting upon him.¹⁷ ‘Because the LORD has anointed me,’ details that the LORD has acted on the prophet to anoint him (qal verb מָשַׁח). There is an important connection between the Hebrew verb מָשַׁח (to anoint) and Hebrew noun מְשִׁיחַ (anointed or messiah), which is often translated with the Greek word *χριστός* (anointed) in the Septuagint.¹⁸ Normally anointing in the Old Testament is reserved for kings and priests; hence it is atypical that a prophet is anointed.

To anoint is followed by a string of infinitives: to bring good news (1b), to bind up (1b), to proclaim (1b), to proclaim (2a), to comfort (2b), to grant (3a) and to give (3a).¹⁹ These infinitives explain the purpose of the prophet’s anointing.

The first purpose in the prophet’s anointing is ‘to bring good news to the poor’.²⁰ The Hebrew word for ‘poor’ (עָנִי) is difficult to translate in this context and could also be translated as oppressed (NASB/NRSV) or meek (KJV). The poor/oppressed/meek will hear God’s message of hope through his prophet.

There is another verb in the string of infinitive constructs, ‘he has sent’ (qal verb שָׁלַח). In addition to anointing the prophet, the LORD is also sending the prophet to ‘to bind up the brokenhearted’. The LORD has also purposed that his prophet will bring comfort to those who are hurting.

The prophet is also ‘to proclaim liberty to the captives’. This has a reference to the Year of Jubilee by using the same words as Leviticus 25:10 ‘and proclaim liberty’.²¹ Following the LORD’s purpose the prophet is announcing freedom to the prisoners. The next line provides a synonymously parallel thought ‘and the opening of the prison to those who are bound’. Both Leviticus 25

15 GOD (capital ‘G’ small caps ‘OD’) or LORD (capital ‘L’ small caps ‘ORD’) indicates יהוה.

16 Unless otherwise noted, English quotations are from the ESV.

17 Some view this opening as a Trinitarian formula with רִיחַ (Spirit) referring to the Holy Spirit, אֲדֹנָי יהוה (my Lord GOD) referring to the Father and the pronominal suffix יָ (me) with the preposition עָלַי as a referent to Christ—given that Christ quoted this passage in reference to himself in Luke 4:18 (Martin 1983:1115).

18 In the New Testament *χριστός* takes on the meaning of messiah or a personal name ascribed to Jesus. For further reference see Kidner (1994:667), Koehler and Baumgartner (2001:s.v. ‘חַשַׁח’ and ‘מְשִׁיחַ’), Liddell, Scott and Jones (1996:s.v. ‘χριστός’) and Martin (1983:1116).

19 The infinitive constructs are: לְשׂוֹם, לְנַחַם, לְקַרְא, לְחַבֵּשׁ, לְבַשֵּׁר and לְתַתּוֹת.

20 שָׂרָא to bring good news’ is translated with *εὐαγγελίζω* in the Septuagint. *εὐαγγελίζω*, is also used in the New Testament referring the bringing of the good news of Jesus Christ. *εὐαγγελίζω* a verb, is a cognate of *εὐαγγέλιον*, which is the noun used for ‘gospel’ in the New Testament. As seen in this footnote and the previous footnotes, there is a strong lexical and thematic connection between the prophet in Isaiah and Jesus.

21 לְקַרְא לְשׂוֹמִים דְרוֹר in Isaiah 61:1 and וּקְרָאתֶם דְרוֹר in Leviticus 25:10.

and Isaiah 61 stress ‘amnesty for the impoverished and downtrodden’ (Friesen 2009:387).

Verses 2-3. ‘To proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour’ is another reference to the Year of Jubilee along with the antithetically parallel statement ‘and the day of vengeance of our God’. Justice requires both God’s restoration and favour to the oppressed along with God’s retribution and vengeance on the oppressor. Along with announcing God’s favour and judgment, the prophet also has the purpose ‘to comfort all who mourn’. Comfort here has two parts. It is both an announcement that lifts people’s spirits and a concrete action, which provides a basis for positive change (Goldingay 2012:347).

The following lines in verse 3 reiterate the theme of restoration and comfort started in verse 2. Verse 3a has two consecutive infinitives ‘to grant’ and ‘to give’. The first indicates purpose and the second designates attendant circumstance or manner (Smith 2009:636). The LORD’s purpose toward ‘those who mourn in Zion’ is to provide (NIV and NRSV)—or ‘to grant’—for them by giving. Three powerful metaphors follow, ashes is a metaphor for sorrow that is being replaced by the metaphors of a headdress, oil and garment, which imply preparing for a jubilant festival. The last metaphor ‘oaks of righteousness’ points to a well-established, strong and fruitful people that the LORD himself has planted for his glory.

3.2 God’s Restoration and Blessing (Verses 4-7)

Verse 4. The theme changes—and continues through verse 9—from the purposes and the means of the LORD’s anointed to the restoration and blessings of the LORD. The destroyed cities and their ruins are to be raised up and rebuilt.

Verse 5. There is a change of voice to the second person. The works that God is bringing about will change the nature of the workforce. Before God’s people were working the land and tending the herds to pay tributes and taxes to foreign powers. Now strangers and foreigners will be working the land of God’s people. There is no suggestion of forced labour or reprisal being imposed on the strangers and foreigners. It seems ‘that this service will be done out of gratitude, thankfulness, and cooperation’ (Smith 2009:637).

Verse 6. God’s people now take up their rightful role of serving God and ministering to the nations. In response, the wealth of the nations will be given to God’s people in gratitude for their service.²²

²² There is a difficulty with the final phrase of verse 6, וּבְכֹבוֹדָם תִּתְיַמְרוּ ‘in their glory you shall boast’. תִּתְיַמְרוּ can be either the hithpael imperfect of יָמַר (to exchange) or the hithpael imperfect from root II of אָמַר (to boast). A variant reading from 1Q Isaiah would support the last option.

Verse 7. The double portion is representative of God's abundant blessing, which leads to rejoicing, rather than shame and dishonour. Along with this is a double portion of land with resultant joy.

4. Relation of Isaiah 61 to Possible Audiences

The vision of Isaiah 61 could not have been realized in an eighth-century BC community. Isaiah 61:5 and 6 call for aliens and foreigners to serve God's people. However, during this time period the Northern kingdom, Israel, will be taken into captivity by Assyria and the Southern kingdom of Judah will be defeated by the Arameans and attacked by Assyria. In addition, the gross idolatry of Israel and the idolatry present during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz would be in contradiction to the promises of righteousness and priestly ministers found in Isaiah 61:3 and 6. Hence the vision of Isaiah 61, for an eighth-century BC community, would have been a vision of future hope and restoration to God's people that was not realized in their generation. One could possibly argue for a partial fulfilment during the reign of Hezekiah.

There is no doubt that Isaiah 61 could not have been fulfilled during the exilic period. Jerusalem was in ruins and God's people were in captivity in Babylon. The vision of Isaiah 61 would have been nothing but a distant dream of hope.

Isaiah 61 has a partial fulfilment during the post-exilic period. God's people have returned from captivity to Jerusalem, the temple is rebuilt and the wall around Jerusalem restored.²³ Undoubtedly captives and prisoners were freed (Isaiah 61:1), gladness filled the hearts of God's people (Isaiah 61:3) and cities were restored (Isaiah 61:4). However, a complete fulfilment of Isaiah 61 was never realized during the post-exilic period. Nations never served nor contributed to God's people as envisioned in Isaiah 61:4 and 5. From the admonishments of the postexilic prophets, it is clear that the righteousness and priestly ministry of Isaiah 61:3 and 6 were never realized. To the post-exilic community Isaiah 61 was both a vision partly fulfilled and a hope for what God would accomplish in the future.

In looking at the original audience it has been shown that Isaiah 61 was never completely fulfilled to the original audience(s). The vision of Isaiah 61 was not realized in the eighth-century BC community or during the exile and only partially attained during the post-exilic period.²⁴

23 There were 71 years between the completion of the temple and the rebuilding of the wall.

24 The theologically curious and courageous could ask what would have been the implications had Isaiah 61 been completely fulfilled in the Old Testament? It must be noted that an Old Testament fulfilment of a prophecy does not negate a New Testament interpretation and/or fulfilment of the same prophecy. A well-known example of this is Isaiah 7:14 where there is a complete Old Testament fulfilment and a New Testament fulfilment/interpretation. For further information and a good discussion of the varying views see Comfort (2005 42-45).

5. Jesus' Audience of Isaiah 61

Luke 4:14–30 is a striking account of Jesus reading from Isaiah 61 and the reaction of the people of Nazareth. In considering the fulfilment, or lack thereof, of Isaiah 61 in the New Testament an examination of this passage and related material is required. This examination contains a brief exegesis of Luke 4:14–30 and a comparison of the reaction in Nazareth to other areas.

5.1 A Brief Exegesis of Luke 4:14-30

Luke uses Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61:1–2 and subsequent proclamation that he is the Messiah who will usher in God's kingdom as the initiation of Jesus' ministry. This quotation and proclamation is made in the Nazareth synagogue and those listening reject Jesus' word and attempt to kill him. Matthew (13:53–58) and Mark (6:1–6) record Jesus' rejection at Nazareth later in their narratives. It is likely that Luke has moved this event from its historical position to the initiation of Jesus' ministry, as it provides an excellent introductory synopsis of Jesus' message (Marshall 1994:988).

Verses 14–15. An initial summary of Jesus' ministry is given by Luke declaring that Jesus operated in 'the power of the Spirit' in the region of Galilee. Jesus taught in the synagogues and was 'glorified by all'.

Verses 16–21. Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth, the scroll from the prophet Isaiah is given to him and he reads from Isaiah 61:1–2. Luke's quotation of Isaiah is from the Septuagint, which has some variances in comparison to the Hebrew text. This explains some of the differences between the quotation in Luke 4:18–19 and Isaiah 61:1–2. The line 'to bind up the brokenhearted' (which is in the Septuagint) from Isaiah 61:1 is omitted by Luke. The phrase 'the opening of the prison to those who are bound' in Isaiah 61:1 is from the Hebrew text and is not contained in Luke's account nor in the Septuagint text. The phrase 'recovering of sight to the blind' is in the Septuagint text of Isaiah 61:1 but not the Hebrew text. 'To set at liberty those who are oppressed' is a phrase added from Isaiah 58:6 with the likely intention of emphasizing the year of Jubilee (Nolland 2002:197). It is probable that the reading of Isaiah 61:2 stops before the line 'the day of vengeance of our God' as a means of emphasizing the present possibility of salvation for those listening (Stein 1992:157).

After reading this passage, Jesus rolls up the scroll, returns it to the attendant and everyone is looking at him. Luke then records an incredible assertion: 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in

your hearing.’ It is reasonable to see this assertion as a summary of the sermon Jesus preached at Nazareth (Nolland 2002:198).

Verses 22–30. The responses of those in the Nazareth synagogue can be taken in either a positive or negative way (Liefeld 1990:48855/61616).²⁵ Most commentators and translators take the first two phrases (‘all spoke well of him’ and ‘ marvelled at the gracious words’) in a positive way and the question (‘is not this Joseph’s son’) in a negative way.

Jesus’ response with the famous proverb ‘physician heal yourself’ and his often quoted statement ‘no prophet is acceptable in his hometown’ clearly indicates that some part of the response from those at the Nazareth synagogue was negative. This is combined with Jesus knowing that they wanted proof of ‘what we have heard you did at Capernaum’. The statement ‘what we have heard’ indicates they did not believe Jesus had performed the miracles.

Jesus then tells of how Elijah was sent to Zarephath, a gentile, in the land of Sidon rather than to a widow in Israel and about Elisha healing Naaman the Syrian instead of a leper in Israel. Jesus’ messages that Nazareth cannot exclusively claim him nor must he do miracles for them and that he is free to minister to others in the two accounts is clear (Stein 1992:159).²⁶

Jesus’ response invokes the wrath of those in the synagogue. They rise up, take Jesus out of town with the intention of throwing him over the edge of a cliff. However, he passes through them and goes on his way leaving Nazareth.

5.2 Comparison of the Reaction in Nazareth to Other Areas

In thinking about Jesus’ audience of Isaiah 61, it will be beneficial to compare the reaction of those in Nazareth to other regions. The negative reaction, recorded in Luke 4:22–30, of those who heard Jesus read Isaiah 61:1–2 and his sermon on this passage are detailed above. In addition, Matthew 13:53–58 and Mark 6:1–6 provide parallel accounts that detail Jesus ‘did not do many mighty works’ (Matthew 13:58) in Nazareth and that Jesus himself marvelled at the unbelief of those in Nazareth.

Luke 4:14–15 makes a comparison of Nazareth to another area by reporting that in the region of Galilee Jesus’ teaching in the synagogues resulted in him being glorified. This provides a stark contrast to the following verses (16–30) where those in Nazareth reject and try to kill Jesus.

The very next pericope in Luke (4:31–37), providing another contrast to the Nazareth reaction, records Jesus teaching and

25 πάντες ἐμαρτύρουν αὐτῷ ‘all spoke well of him’ can be literally translated as ‘all bore witness to him’ or ‘all bore witness against him’. The translation of the phrase hinges on whether αὐτῷ should be translated as a dative of advantage or disadvantage. μαρτυρέω can be used in both a positive sense (John 15:27) and a negative sense (Matthew 23:31). Likewise θαυμάζω ‘marvelled’ can refer to a favourable response (Matthew 8:10) or an unfavorable response (Mark 6:6). Lastly, the question ‘is not this Joseph’s son’ can be asked incredulously or admiringly.

26 In Luke’s gospel these examples also serve as demonstrating the extension of God’s grace to the gentiles.

casting out a demon in the Capernaum synagogue with the result of (positive) amazement and reports about him going into the surrounding region. The Sea of Galilee is recorded as an area where Jesus is positively received by large crowds with many healings (Matthew 15:29–31 and John 6:1–2). Large crowds followed Jesus and he healed them in Perea (Matthew 19:1–2 and Mark 10:1).

Like Nazareth, there were other locations where Jesus did not receive a warm welcome. In the country of the Gerasenes (Matthew 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39) after Jesus cast out demons from the demoniacs, the demons entered a herd of swine, which consequently drown in the sea. When the people of the city learned what had happened they asked Jesus to leave. Jerusalem gave a mixed reception to Jesus, on one trip the people attempted to stone Jesus (John 8:48–59). There was a triumphal entry (Matthew 21:1–11, Mark 11:1–11, Luke 19:29–44 and John 12:12–19) which is contrasted to those crying for Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:22–23, Mark 15:12–14, Luke 23:21–23 and John 19:15) and his subsequent death.

Other locations could be mentioned; however, what is clear is that some regions and people accepted and welcomed Christ. In these regions there are healings, miracles and the positive reception of Jesus and his message. Other areas and people rejected Christ, in the case of Nazareth—especially compared to the area where Jesus is accepted—this resulted in fewer healings and limited teaching by Jesus.

This section exegeted Luke 4:14–30 and compared the reaction of Nazareth to other areas. From this, it is clear that the audience who heard the very Son of God read from Isaiah 61 and give the declaration that the vision was fulfilled in their hearing never realized—in any significant manner, especially in comparison to the town of Capernaum and the region of the Sea of Galilee—the promises contained in Isaiah 61. Nazareth missed the realization of the vision in Isaiah 61.

6. Kingdom and Isaiah 61

Isaiah 61 and Jesus' quotation of it in Luke 4 clearly invokes kingdom language, warranting a discussion of the relationship between Isaiah 61 and the kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, the kingdom of God is clearly affiliated with the Davidic covenant in 1 Chronicles 17:11–14 where God promises David—through his offspring—an everlasting kingdom. There was the expectation (Psalm 72) that the earthly kings of Israel (and subsequently

Judah) would mediate the kingdom of heaven, and its ensuring righteousness and justice, on earth (Seal 2016:s.v. 'kingdom of God'). After the fall of Judah, this expectation became a future vision and hope, with the prophets expecting a messiah to re-establish the kingdom.

There are a number of factors that indicate the connection Isaiah 61 has to the Old Testament theme of kingdom. They are the connection between the Hebrew verb *מָשַׁח* (to anoint) and Hebrew noun *מָשִׁיחַ* (anointed or messiah), liberty/year of Jubilee language, the sense of restoration and retribution, transformation of Zion from mourning to jubilant festival, restoration of destroyed cities, strangers and foreigners working the land of God's people, the wealth of the nations being given to God's people and a double portion of land.

In the New Testament, the kingdom of God is a key teaching of Jesus. On one hand Jesus indicates that the kingdom of God is at hand (Matthew 3:2 and Mark 9:1). On the other hand Jesus speaks of the kingdom as a future event (Matthew 25:1–13, Luke 12:35–48 and 19:11–27). Paul's writings also view the kingdom as something present (1 Corinthians 4:20 and Colossians 1:13) and also as something happening in the future (1 Corinthians 15:23–24). Revelation announces the final victory of God's kingdom (Revelation 11:15).

Within Christianity, there is much debate as to how much of the kingdom Jesus inaugurated during his earthly ministry, how much of the kingdom exists now and when the final kingdom will arrive.²⁷ It is safe to say, that Jesus, to some extent, inaugurated the kingdom during his earthly ministry. Likewise, it can be said with confidence, that there is a coming kingdom where all things are made right.

Matthew records a partial realization of Isaiah 61 and at least a partial arrival of the kingdom. In Matthew 11:2–5, John the Baptist is in prison and wants to know if Jesus is the messiah or if they should look for someone else. Using a phrase from Isaiah 61:1, Jesus assures John the Baptist that he is the messiah by having it reported to John that the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor.

Jesus quoting Isaiah 61 in Luke 4 is an inaugural statement of his kingdom, and those in the synagogue at Nazareth heard this inauguration. Hence it can be said that Nazareth in some sense took part in the kingdom inauguration. However, as shown above, they did not receive the benefits or realization of Isaiah 61.²⁸

27 Due to this debate, this article (other than this section) tries to limit the use of the word 'kingdom'. As mentioned in the introduction, this is in keeping with the purposeful broad theological stance to have validity for a larger audience and provide a rallying point of unity in realization.

28 From a broader perspective, first-century AD Israel as a whole missed the realization of Isaiah 61. While Israel was granted a degree of religious freedom, Rome was the clear power in opposition to a possible realization of Isaiah 61:4 and 5. Jesus' harshest words of rebuke were directed to the Jewish religious leaders in contrast to the vision of Isaiah 61:3 and 6. Israel of the first century AD rejected and killed the Messiah and then proceeded to persecute and kill those who would follow him.

7. Factors that prevented the realization of Isaiah 61 in the Bible

The previous sections have demonstrated that in the Old Testament and New Testament the vision of Isaiah 61 was never fully realized.²⁹ This raises a critical question of why the vision was never fulfilled? What factors prevented the realization of the vision? After addressing these two questions it is critical to address the question: Could these same factors prevent Isaiah 61 from becoming a reality in Africa?

In Nazareth, Jesus himself was present to fulfil the vision. Yet the people of Nazareth did not even receive a partial fulfilment of Isaiah 61. The people of Nazareth rejected the Saviour. They could not believe that one of their own was the Messiah and had come to fulfil prophecy. Their unbelief and rejection of Christ prevented the realization of Isaiah 61 in their midst.

In the Old Testament a closer look at the vision of Isaiah 61 is needed to reveal the factors why God's people missed or only partially received the blessings promised. Isaiah 61 must be put into the proper context. Isaiah 61 is only part of the vision of the author. The vision of the author also includes (at minimum) chapters 58 through 60.³⁰ Chapter 58 sets out the conditions for the fulfilment of the prophecy. Chapter 59 is a testimony against the iniquities of God's people and a promise of both vengeance and a coming Redeemer. Chapter 60 continues the theme of redemption started at the end of chapter 59, providing hope for restoration and prosperity. Chapter 61 is a continuation of this theme of hope.

When looking at prophecy one must always look for the conditionality, both implicit and explicit, of the prophecy (Chisholm 2010). The vision contained in Isaiah 58 through 61 is no different. If there is not a fulfilment of Isaiah 61 then the required conditions were never met.

Chapter 58 details some very specific conditions required for the fulfilment of chapters 60 and 61. The first part of chapter 58 deals with the hypocrisy of God's people; they were fasting, supposedly for God, while they were quarrelling and doing whatever they wished. The rest of the chapter explicitly gives the required conditions for God's blessings. The conditions include: loosing the chains of injustice, setting the oppressed free, sharing food with the hungry, providing shelter to the poor wanderer, clothing the naked, not turning away from own flesh and blood, satisfying the needs of the oppressed and keeping the Sabbath.³¹ In Isaiah 61:8 the LORD reminds his people of his requirements: love justice, hate

29 Unrealized prophecy raises questions of human responsibility and choice along with God's intentions and sovereignty. There is a great debate around this topic. For further discussion on this topic relating to unfulfilled prophecy see Chisholm (2010).

30 There is much debate about how to divide the book of Isaiah; however, there is strong agreement that chapters 58 through 61 are part of one vision from the author; whether this vision starts at chapter 56 or 58 is debated.

31 The Old Testament concept of Sabbath rest is transformed in the New Testament, both by Jesus' teaching and by the epistles. Care must be taken in defining Sabbath rest in the light of the New Testament. The commandment to keep the Sabbath is the only one of the ten commandments that is not repeated in the New Testament.

robbery and injustice. These expectations in Isaiah 61 have direct reference to the conditions from chapter 58.

Chapter 59 details some factors that will not only prevent the fulfilment of Isaiah 61 but will incur the judgment and wrath of God. Some of these factors are: murder, lies, injustice, rebellion against God and turning away from God. So in addition to the explicit conditions set out in chapter 58, chapter 59 adds some implicit requirements.

As pointed out in the section on original audience, the eighth-century BC community did not meet the required conditions. The Northern kingdom of Israel was blatantly worshipping idols, and idolatry was present in the Southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz.

During the exile there was a reappropriation and 'rediscovery of their deepest identity as members of the covenant' (Skiba, 1984:48). In chapter 9 of Daniel we see a prayer of repentance by Daniel. Given the above and the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem it would seem the exilic community met enough of the conditions for the previously mentioned partial fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in the postexilic community.³²

There is no doubt that the postexilic community did a better job at meeting the conditions and requirements of Isaiah 58 and 59 than the other communities that have been discussed. However, the warnings and exhortations of the postexilic prophets give evidence that the community was not completely fulfilling the conditions and requirements.

In review, the major factors that prevented the full fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in the Bible can be summarized as follows: rejection of Christ, turning away from God, inactivity against injustice and failure to help the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless.

8. Factors to consider in the realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa

It must first be clearly understood that the complete and full realization of Isaiah 61 for all Christians will be the eschaton. Ultimately Isaiah 61 is an eschatological hope for the Christian that will be fulfilled at the second advent of Christ. As factors for the realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa are discussed, it must be remembered that the final and comprehensive realization of Isaiah 61 will be when Christians see their LORD face to face. Hence the

32 There is also the promise of return from Babylon after 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10). For more discussion on conditionality, sovereignty and prophecy reference the article by Chisholm (2010) already mentioned.

33 Holter (2014) discusses the relation between the biblical book Isaiah and Africa.

34 This is not a claim that missionary service and kindness between Africans has been perfect. No doubt there have been plenty of mistakes. But compassion, kindness and love has been demonstrated to many in Africa in the name of Christ.

35 With over one trillion US dollars of given to Africa over the last 50 years (Moyo 2009), some could argue that Africa has fed on the wealth of nations (Isaiah 61:6). However, the sense in Isaiah 61 is one of a powerful region receiving because of its power rather than a needy region receiving charity.

36 Manus (2009) addresses this need along with importance of caring for the poor via detailed exegesis of Luke 4:7-19 for a Nigerian context.

rest of the discussion deals with how to achieve a greater partial fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in Africa.³³

Before asking what factors need to be considered in the partial realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa, it is worthwhile considering the limited realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa that has already taken place. The good news has been preached to the poor (Isaiah 61:1). 40.8 percent of the world's Protestants are African, which is more than double the percentage of the second largest region of Protestants, Asia with 17.7 percent (Johnson et al. 2017:43). Further, Africa is the fastest growing region for Protestant Christianity with a 2.88 percent annual rate change from 2000 through 2017 (ibid:50). The brokenhearted have been bound up and those who mourned have been comforted (Isaiah 61:1 through 2). To deny this is to deny the effectiveness and kindness of missionary service to Africa over the last century and the compassion that Africans have shown to each other.³⁴ Given the above, it is clear that there has already been a partial fulfilment of Isaiah 61.³⁵

The question is what factors need to be considered for a greater fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in Africa? The factors that prevented the complete fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in the Bible will be the same factors that will prevent a greater fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in Africa. A closer look at the major factors identified in the previous section is warranted.

Acceptance of Christ is the greatest factor in the realization of Isaiah 61. He is the good news to the poor. He is the one who binds the broken-hearted. He is the one who comforts those who mourn. To reject Christ is to miss not only the vision of Isaiah 61 on earth but also the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for abundance of life; not to mention missing the ultimate fulfilment of Isaiah 61 in the eschaton.

Acceptance of Christ is a tremendous start in the fuller realization of Isaiah 61. However, after acceptance has to come following God. It is not enough just to accept Christ, but one must follow after him to receive the vision of Isaiah 61. Obedience to the commands of God is not optional if Isaiah 61 is to be realized.

The greater realization of Isaiah 61 also requires a fight against injustice. It is not enough to accept Christ and follow God. Injustice must be fought. Corruption must be fought. It is God's expectation that his children will actively combat systems of evil. God's children are not meant to passively accept wrongdoing in any circumstance.³⁶ Please note that God's children do not wage war in the same way as the rest of the world. God's children wage

war against evil with love, kindness and compassion. The truth is spoken in love. The other cheek is turned. The extra mile is walked. Enemies are fed.

Lastly the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless must be helped in order for a greater fulfilment of Isaiah 61 to be realized. The command of God to his children has always been to show compassion to those in need.³⁷

At this point the astute observer is asking: is Isaiah 58 through 61 a self-fulfilling prophecy? The conditions that God has set out for fulfilment are activity against injustice and helping the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless. He then promises that these very same things will be fulfilled. Like many things with God, there are some paradoxical qualities to the vision. You have to lose your life to find it. Give, and it will be given to you. As God's people start to obey his commands there is an empowering of his Spirit that supernaturally provides such a greater fulfilment it cannot be called self-fulfilling. If this supernatural fulfilment is not present, it should be questioned whether God is truly involved in the endeavour or whether it is simply a work of the flesh.

It also should be noted that the realization comes to the very ones who are meeting the conditions: acceptance of Christ, following God, activity against injustice and helping the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless. In thinking about Africa, there has been an acceptance of Christ and a following of God, 40.8 percent of the world's Protestants are in Africa (Johnson et al. 2017).³⁸ However, Africans have not actively fought against injustice, nor taken seriously the business of helping others.

Human trafficking—especially of women and children (Okyere-Manu 2015), abuse of women (Kretzschmar 2009), violence (Bouju & de Bruijn 2014), corruption at all levels of government and fraud (Carnes 2005; Ojo 2011)³⁹ are all commonplace in Africa. If Africa wants a greater realization of Isaiah 61 Africans must actively fight these injustices. It is not the job of aid agencies, the UN or outside mission organizations. It is a battle for Africans. There will be those who go to jail because they refuse to pay a bribe. It will take courage for honest government officials to stand up to their colleagues and demand they stop embezzling money. Ordinary Africans will have to get involved if they suspect human trafficking, abuse of a woman or other violence. There is no doubt that this will be a difficult war, especially since God's weapons of war are love and compassion, but a greater realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa hinges on Africans fighting injustice.

37 Hofheinz (2017) develops this argument from Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 for a North American audience.

38 This does not imply that the work is finished but rather is an affirmation of the tremendous progress that has been made in the last century.

39 Ojo (2011:61) asks the penetrating questions: 'Why are there frequently and deep-rooted moral failures and corruption among Christians who hold political power and are in leadership positions? Why do contemporary African Christians not strive to lead good and exemplary lives in the belief that they are in the end time and that they are preparing for the final events of this age and Christ's return?'

40 A Google search on Africa dependence on aid will yield thousands of interesting and varying opinions. Fr Kimaroyo (1997) has written on this topic from a Catholic perspective. Much of what he says would have direct application to the evangelical church.

41 Note there are slight differences between figures in this paper and the article. In this paper, missionaries per million Christians equals 'Missionaries sent per million Christians'. It should also be noted that comparing the number of missionaries that Africa sends to the number of missionaries North America or Europe sends is not a fair comparison because of the vast differences in economic capacity to support missionaries. However, comparisons to other regions of the world are reasonable.

Africans have not taken seriously the business of helping others. This is seen in the current debate amongst aid agencies and mission agencies about aid dependence in Africa.⁴⁰ Although, the clearest place to see this is in the number of missionaries from Africa versus the number of Christians in Africa and comparing this to other parts of the world. In 2010 Africa had 494 million Christians and 20,700 missionaries. This means that Africa had 42 missionaries per million Christians (pmC.). What is indicting is that Latin American had 106 missionaries pmC, Asia had 134 missionaries pmC, Oceania had 215 missionaries pmC, Europe had 226 missionaries pmC and North America had 477 missionaries pmC (Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2010).⁴¹ Africa had the lowest number of missionaries pmC of any region in the world. It is not just the lowest number, but the closest region (Latin America) had more than double the number of missionaries pmC than Africa. Further, in the last 100 years Latin America, Asia, North America, Europe and Oceania have increased their missionaries to pmC ratio by multipliers of 21, 11, 2.7, 2.4 and 2.4 respectively. While in the last 100 years Africa has only increased its missionaries to pmC by a multiplier of 1.5 (ibid.).

If Africa wants a greater realization of Isaiah 61, Africans must start helping the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless. African churches must get involved in the affairs of missions. Not only is this something that has to be organized by African churches and organizations, but it also needs to start happening every day on the street between Africans of differing ethnic origins.

At this point, a word of caution is in order. Isaiah 61 can be used as a springboard simply for social reform (Hanson 1985). Jesus' claim that he is the fulfilment of Isaiah 61 puts him at the centre of a greater realization. This realization 'is not spiritualized into forgiveness of sins, but neither can it be resolved into a program of social reform. It encompasses spiritual restoration, moral transformation, rescue from demonic oppression, and release from illness and disability' (Nolland, 2002:202).

9. Conclusion

A biblical framework for the application of Isaiah 61 to the context of Africa was set by a study of the original audience, an exegesis of the passage, examining Jesus' audience of Isaiah 61, a brief exegesis of Luke 4:14–30 and asking why Isaiah 61 was never fully realized in either audience. It was shown that the ultimate fulfilment of Isaiah 61 will be in the eschaton; however, there has already been a partial realization of Isaiah 61 in Africa. If Africa

wants a greater realization of Isaiah 61 then it must meet the conditions placed upon this vision, which are in summary form: acceptance of Christ, following God, fighting injustice and helping the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless. For a greater realization it must be Africans, empowered by the Holy Spirit, who meet these conditions.⁴²

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42 The application of Old Testament passages to a 21st-century audience raises critical theological questions that must be addressed. The questions required will depend on one's theological position, especially one's view of the relation between national Israel and the church. However, no matter one's theological disposition, two questions are key: 1) how is the passage used in the New Testament? 2) do the conclusions from the use of the Old Testament passage agree with the New Testament? If the New Testament gives an Old Testament passage validity to a modern audience and the conclusions drawn are consistent with the New Testament, then most other questions and concerns become secondary for most theological positions.

The New Testament use of Isaiah 61 provides a very strong case that the passage can be applied to a 21st-century audience. In Luke 4:21 Jesus claims Isaiah 61 was fulfilled in the hearing of his audience; in addition, there are also allusions to its fulfilment in Matthew 11:15. Jesus' claim clearly makes Isaiah 61 a messianic passage with at least a partial fulfilment found in Christ's first advent.

The overall conclusion of this paper, which is derived from Isaiah 61, could be summarized as: accept Christ, follow God, fight injustice and help the oppressed, hungry, naked and homeless. This summary is clearly affirmed in many other places in the New Testament.

There are three major factors that guarantee Isaiah 61 has an application to a 21st-century audience: 1) Jesus quotes the passage with an intended application to his audience, 2) the New Testament affirms there is at least a partial fulfilment of Isaiah 61 found in Christ's first advent, and, 3) the overall conclusion of this article agrees with the New Testament.

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Cultural Analysis and Thematic Biblical Theology Cross-Cultural Approach of Gospel Communication¹

Ronaldo Almeida Lidorio and Abraham Jun

Abstract

How can culture be analysed and organised, and how can the cultural findings be used to facilitate cross-cultural evangelisation through thematic biblical theology? The objective of this article is to explore and generate ideas and principles for integrating cultural analysis and thematic biblical theologies better to communicate the Gospel in the contexts and sub-contexts of Konkomba culture. The first component presents an anthropological approach for cultural analysis and a case study of the Konkomba people of Ghana in a functionalist-interpretivist framework. The second component uses a missiological framework provided by elements of the Four-Horizons Model, the Tridimensional Model and the Grand Story approach for organising and presenting the biblical themes in a hermeneutic perspective, engaging with the main cultural questions previously identified, answering them biblically and approaching the audience for comprehensive applicability.

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Keywords

Cultural analysis; Gospel communication; Thematic biblical theology; Missionary anthropology; Cross-cultural evangelization.

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² The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The relationship between the Gospel and culture is at the root of missiological studies, especially in cross-cultural environments, where there is a constant need to communicate the Gospel in a way that is theologically faithful and also culturally intelligible and applicable.

The question addressed by this article is: how is culture to be analysed and organised, and how are the cultural findings to be used to facilitate cross-cultural evangelisation through thematic biblical theology in similar contexts to the Konkomba people of Ghana?

The final objective is to present an approach for Gospel communication based on cultural analysis and thematic biblical theology for use in cross-cultural missionary initiatives in similar contexts.

The objective is divided into two parts. First, to develop and present an approach for cultural analysis arranged in four dimensions (historical, ethical, social and phenomenological), based on a case study of the Konkomba people of Ghana, West Africa.

Second, to propose a framework that organises and presents the biblical themes in a way that is theologically faithful and culturally applicable. The overall result is the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication.

2. Intercultural Communication

Shaw and Van Engen (2003:103) defend that missionaries have often missed the connection between Gospel proclamation and theories of communication, stating the crucial need to study and practise their mission using cultural and communicational principles.

Intercultural communication is a line of study within both communication theory and cultural analysis, as it combines both areas.

Ting-Toomey (1999:272) proposed that intercultural communication happens when individuals, influenced by different cultural communities, negotiate meanings.

Gudykunst (2003:163–166) explained that some scholars refer to intercultural communication as a phenomenon that occurs expressly between people of different nationalities, whilst others extend the concept to communication occurring between representatives of different ethnic, religious or regional groups. Those authors in the latter group advocated that any meeting of individuals could be conceptualised as an intercultural meeting. They transformed the current conceptualisation of intercultural communication by inserting academic, anthropological and scientific values into its conceptualisation and experience, as expressed in works such as *Beyond Culture* (Hall 1976), *Communicating with Strangers* (Gudykunst and Kim 1997), *Communicating across Cultures* (Ting-Toomey 1999), *Handbook of Intercultural and International Communication* (Gudykunst and Bella 2002) and *Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication* (Gudykunst 2003).

According to Hiebert (2008:14–15), interculturality emerges from movement between cultures, not necessarily from cultural diversity. In this way, interculturality can be understood as everything that occurs from the encounter of cultures. On the one hand, the encounter of cultures is highlighted through the construction of social sciences, the scale of linguistic and sociocultural differentiation between different groups; but on the other hand, it argues for its similarities.

Conceptual construction of intercultural communication intersects with the base of knowledge about culture and semiotic concepts to explain the theoretical foundations of communication between cultures with its exchanges of symbols and ideas. Thus, it can be understood that intercultural communication is the process of an exchange of symbolic movements, involving different cultural patterns, that results in mutual understanding.

2.1 Functionalist-Interpretivist Framework

Schultz and Hatch in the article *Living with Multiple Paradigms: The Case of Paradigm Interplay in Organisational Culture Studies* (1996) reflected on the studies of Burrell and Morgan (1979), Gioia and Pitre (1990), Hassard (1988), Parker and McHugh (1991), Weaver and Gioia (1994) and Willmott (1990) and presented a new strategy called Paradigm Interplay, suggesting that paradigms for cultural studies could not only be compared, but interchangeably applied in different areas.

Schultz and Hatch (1996:529) used functionalism (Durkheim 1949; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Parsons 1951; Merton 1957) and interpretivism (Schutz 1967; Garfinkel 1967; Geertz 1973) as a way to present the strategy within the domain of organisational culture studies, which is basically built on an emphasis on simultaneous appreciation for both the contrasts and the similarities found between two or more paradigms. They assert that the similarities between both theories inspire interplay between the paradigms.

In their strategy, analysing and contrasting functionalism and interpretivism, they identified three implications of interplay: generality/contextuality, clarity/ambiguity, and stability/instability. Furthermore, according to the interplay strategy, the recognition of the interdependence between these theories enables the researcher to come to a more elusive and complex appreciation of organisational culture (Schultz and Hatch 1996:552).

Functionalism and interpretivism differ, in the area of organisational culture studies, as they define an analytical framework. For Schultz and Hatch, the functionalist analytical framework is predefined and universal, presenting similar levels and functions of culture found in the entire unit. An interpretivist analytical framework is emergent and specific with opportunities for the creation of understanding in a unique way in each cultural context.

The models for analysis of information are also different. Functionalists approach culture in a categorical pattern searching for the identification of cultural elements and discovering the causal relations between them, while the interpretivist approach is more associative, searching for meanings and exploring the associations between them. In terms of the analytical process, functionalists are convergent, condensing and bringing elements of cultural analysis together, while interpretivists are divergent, expanding and enriching cultural analysis.

This theoretical framework is used in the cultural analysis of the Konkomba people of Ghana in an ethnographic assessment, combining the analysis of segments and functions of the culture in a functionalist approach and also seeking for meaning and implications that go beyond the local reality in an interpretivist perspective.

2.2 Models of Gospel Intercultural Communication

Although the Gospel speaks supra-culturally and trans-temporally, the way to formulate the questions to which the Gospel is the answer varies from culture to culture (Newbigin 1989:141–142). The Gospel is the same, but the human questions vary from place to place and group to group (Hiebert 1999:171–172).

Three models for cultural analysis and Gospel communication are presented as they bring fundamental contributions to our goal. The first one is the Four-Horizons Model formulated by Daniel Shaw and Charles van Engen (2003), a hermeneutic process for Gospel communication. The second was developed by Christeena Alaichamy (1997) and named the Tridimensional Model. It proposes that communication should happen in three parts: coupling, commonality and bridging. The last is a result of a number of theologians and missiologists such as Leslie Newbigin (1986), Michael Goheen (2011) and Christopher Wright (2014), who defend a hermeneutic approach to reading Scripture as one grand story.

The Four-horizon's Model emphasises different worldviews represented in various contexts, aiming to communicate what God said through: God's context-specific intended meaning in revelations found in the Old Testament; God's revealed intended meaning in the New Testament that involves a new understanding of the Old Testament; the Gospel communicator; and the contemporary recipients. It is designed to collaborate with an effective hermeneutic for communicating the Gospel in an intercultural context (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:82–95).

Four horizons are highlighted, God, the particular context in which God spoke, the context of the communicator and, finally, the context of the new recipients. Therefore, new information from specific contexts may bring new perspectives to biblical texts (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:97). The authors contend that the Gospel will always be communicated in a particular context and understood in a specific cultural matrix, so all horizons should be taken into consideration when proclaiming the Gospel (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:98).

The second model was developed by Christeena Alaichamy (1997), named the Tridimensional Model. It proposes that communication should happen in three parts: coupling, commonality and bridging. Coupling connects the message with the recipients' assumptions, mediating between the content and the recipients.

Commonality identifies what is common with both the author and the audience: worldview, history, assumptions or other common elements. Bridging builds a bridge between the intended message and the recipients' context, the author or translator having the main responsibility for that (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:117). The technical structure of the method is based on three parts: analysis, synthesis, and presentation of the message. Therefore, Gospel communication should happen as an intentional initiative to analyse the intended message, synthesised in an approachable framework and presented in a way that is understandable and applicable to the recipients' context.

The third model is a hermeneutical perspective for reading Scripture as one grand story. It is the result of several studies conducted by a number of theologians, missiologists and scholars; such as Leslie Newbigin (1986), Michael Goheen (2011) and Christopher Wright (2014); and consists basically of the theological assumption that the biblical message (and any message or passage in Scripture), is part of a grand unified story and should be communicated as such.

This hermeneutic concept is based on three main movements. The first one is to approach and embrace Scripture as the narrative that gives meaning to all human history. Newbigin (1986:61) argues that the Christian faith is the lens by which we should observe and understand the whole of history, not just Christian religion. The Scriptures, therefore, are not a private story for Christians, but the only true universal narrative for the whole world. For Wright (1992:6), the Bible is a drama consisting of events that expose the truth about God and humankind, especially the telling of the story of redemption. Reformer John Calvin (1846:48–49) stated that the reality of creation and its meaning is accessed only by God's revelation by faith. Although creation is a manifestation of God, it is not self-explanatory, as it can be fully understood only through God's revelation by faith; therefore the whole Scripture is crucial to guide humankind to the whole truth of God. Goheen (2011:204) contends that the proclamation of the Gospel should be narrative, Christ-centred and missional; and it should be communicated as an integrated narrative, as the Scriptures reveal one unfolding story, which is the world's true story.

The second movement is to approach the human history and human context with a prophetic and apologetic perspective, contrasting the world's worldview, values, principles, convictions, religions and behaviour with the true story revealed by God in the Scriptures and having the church as his living message.

Kevin Vanhoozer (2016:17) contends that the drama of doctrine exposes the church before the world to testify God's truth by proclamation of the Gospel and the impact of the church's testimony. Goheen (2011:215–217) presents a comprehensive explanation of this understanding, defending the combination of words and deeds. He defines evangelism as a verbal communication of the Gospel (Jesus' life, death and resurrection) and states that proclamation without a public healthy Christian life harms the communication of the Gospel, that both word and deed should work together, making the Gospel credible.

The third movement is a combination of the first two, applied to a local context. It is about partnering with local people with the goal of facilitating their own application of the universal truth of God in their context. Goheen (2011:9, 216) calls attention to this point and calls organic evangelism the effort of the church living and proclaiming the Gospel in everyday life in a way that makes sense to everyday questions. He defends that this approach demands from the communicator intentionality and patience, listening, interacting and dialoguing with the audience and paying focused attention to their questions: what are the deepest hungers to which the gospel gives answer?

There are four relevant similarities in the three methods presented. The first similarity is the recognition of the original message intended in Scripture that should be faithfully communicated. The second similarity comes from the recognition of a tension – or a challenge – when dealing with the intended biblical message in a human cultural context. Three of these contexts are highlighted: the context within which the Scriptures were revealed, Old and New Testaments, the communicator's context, and the audience's context. The third similarity is the conviction that God is acting and guiding the communication of his message in a human context. The fourth similarity is the necessity to use a more comprehensive and unified presentation of the Gospel; that the Gospel is not made of a few sentences with specific meaning, but that the Good News is part of the universal truth of God.

3. The Konkomba People of Ghana

The Konkomba people of Ghana's ethnographic assessment combines the analysis of segments and functions of the culture in a functionalist approach and also seeks for connection, meaning and implications that go beyond the local reality in an interpretivist perspective.

3.1 Overview

Although the Konkomba people are perceived by outsiders as one group, they see themselves as having different sociocultural divisions, each with distinguished cultural profiles and dialects. According to Tait, the most well-known Konkomba tribes are the 'Betshabob, the Bemokpem, the Benafiab, the Begbem, the Besangma and the Bekwom' (1961:151). Their mainland is in the northeast of Ghana and northwest of Togo, and the population is estimated in 2019 as more than 1 million. According to the *Ethnologue*, the main Konkomba dialects are Komba, Lichabol, Ligbeln, Likoonli (Likonl, Liquan), Limonkpeln, Linafiel and Nalong. They are part of the Gur ethnic cluster and speak different dialects (Lewis 2009; 2015).

The complete picture of the Konkomba people today covers the traditional and the modern, villages and cities, as well as traditional religion and Christianity. However, the picture presented in this article, which is a partial picture, is of the traditional culture of Konkomba farmers practising their traditional religion and living in their homeland.

Sources of information about the Konkomba are the ethnographical studies of David Tait (1958; 1961), studies about the people and cultures of Ghana (Allison 1997; Assimeng 2007; Fortes 1945; Fortes 1987 and Opoku 1978) and the anthropological field investigation done by the author from 1993 to 2001 while serving as a missionary among the Konkomba people of Ghana, Limonkpeln speakers, in Koni village and surroundings, Nkwanta region, northeast of Ghana (Lidorio 2001).

3.2 Four Dimensions: Historical, Ethical, Social and Phenomenological

Konkomba cultural data was organised according to functions and segments, and analysed as part of the cultural unit, proposing the symbolic meanings, arranged into four components: historical, ethical, social and phenomenological.

The historical dimension addresses the question: where do the people come from? It deals with the origin of the people's group according to their own worldview, and searches for reports, beliefs, myths, and religious records that indicate how the group understands its own origin. The areas investigated are: beginning, creation and ancestorship, territory and land.

The ethical dimension addresses the following question: what are the people's values?

This dimension relates to social and moral values and should cover areas such as the cultural group's secular heritage, kinship and religious heritage. The areas investigated are: tradition, ruptures and tribal identity. The social dimension seeks to answer the question, how do the people organise their society? This ethnographic study addresses the gathering, social organisation and social categories.

The areas investigated are: social authority, family and clanship. The phenomenological dimension's question is: what are the forces among them? This dimension explores how the group perceives the spiritual world, both visible and invisible. The investigated areas are: rites and ceremonies, ancestor reverence, spiritual persons, spiritual entities, mystical medicines and death and funerals.

3.2.1 Historical Dimension

Beginning. The beginning of time is unclear, but related to the creator of everything and the first ancestors. Myths point to an ancient time when the first family broke their relationship with the creator. The myths among the Konkomba are mainly myths of origin, rebirth and renewal, apotropaic spiritual beings and transformation. There are no well-known messianic or soteriological myths, although there is a strong belief in life after death in a kind of god's house, *Uwumbordo*. There are hundreds of myths about heroes who are basically ancestors; and there are different totemic myths, especially tracing the clans' origins with specific kinds of animals (Lidorio 2001:93, 115; Tait 1961:59, 226; Opoku 1978:26).

Creation and ancestorship. *Uwumbor* is identified as the creator of everything and is a personal entity. He is good and merciful. He is everywhere and can see everything but does not interact with people. It is not clear how he allows or interacts with evil, as life can also be taken by evil spirits, sorcerers or witches. Ancestors are the spirits of important elders who have died. They are connected with *Uwumbor* and a totemic influence; they also continue to connect with their families and are revered, communicating through living elders and are believed to have great power and wisdom, as they are now in the unseen world (Tait 1961: 43, 54; Lidorio 2001:86–87, 115; Lévi-Strauss 1983:290; Opoku 1978:10, 36–37; 54–56, 60).

Territory and land. Territory is connected to a group's ancestors and every clan, segment, lineage or family traces its history to the territory of its ancestors. These territories are believed to provide and transfer spiritual power to the people.

Konkomba identity is connected to their land, the concept of territory and especially the formation of their compounds. These are not only places of residence and farming, but areas with social and spiritual meanings under the overall protective influence of the ancestors (Tait 1958:180; Tait 1961:14; Dawson 2009:84; Lidorio 2001:16–17).

3.2.2 Ethical Dimension

Tradition. One of the primary values is the capacity to understand and keep traditions. The main traditions concern knowledge of myths, relations with ancestors, use of the language and performance of familial rites, including funerals. All traditions are kept by the group and not by any individual, as the Konkomba see themselves as one community that involves not only the living, but also the dead, their memories and influence (Lidorio 2001:12, 17, 18, 42–43; Opoku 1978:35–36; Fortes 1987:66–67).

Ruptures. Shame and honour are values of the group that are connected especially with traditions. Neglecting to perform a respectable funeral for parents is seen as a dishonour to their memory. Neglect of sacrifice, or of pouring libation are also seen as dishonours to the family. In one sense, sin is perceived as any kind of departure from the main traditional elements, especially if involving the ancestors or the patrilineal extended family (Tait 1961:59; Lidorio 2001:51; Evans-Pritchard 1966:326).

Tribal identity. Although there is a sense of unity based on genealogy, the strength of the groups is in clans, segments, lineages and families. They see themselves as different from non-Konkomba tribes and are deeply connected with their land and territory. Their identity is mainly founded on an understanding and maintenance of tribal traditions, with emphasis on clanship and ancestorship (Tait 1958:180; Talton 2010:1; Fortes 1987:66–67).

3.2.3 Social Dimension

Social authority. The main social authority among the group is the elders, both living and dead, including ancestors. This authority is used to create and keep the clans, segments, lineages and families together. Another layer of authority derives from a chieftaincy that may make decisions or bring elders together for the same purpose. A third layer is to be found in the spiritual leaders, diviners, fetish keepers and even sorcerers and witches.

A final social authority may be found in the consensus of the group, whenever it is deemed appropriate (Tait 1961:34, 61, 77–78; Assimeng 2007:36, 167; Lidorio 2001:45, 56–60; Opoku 1978:36–37).

Family. A traditional Konkomba family is extended, patrilineal, patrilocal and sometimes polygamous, and formed by a residential group comprising a series of close relatives built around a patrilineal line, where men from this same line will divide the space with their wives and children. Marriage happens by agreement, consent or exchange in a singular or polygamous format, and always involves formal negotiation. All marriages occur within a patrilineal inheritance system. Exchange marriage connects individuals in a binary system: a man will give his sister, niece or cousin to his future brother-in-law in return for receiving a wife in exchange. Lately, marriage also may occur by consent when a young man and a girl propose to marry. In any format, marriage is a long formal process that involves family agreements (Tait 1961:93–94, 160–162; Lidorio 2001:12, 70–71).

Clanship. There are three types of clans: the unitary, the compound, and the special form of the compound, the contrapuntal. Clanship is a defining factor for organising life among the Konkomba, as it defines marriage possibilities and agreements, dimensions of loyalty on several levels, chieftaincy, compound composition, religious ceremonies, land rights and several other social specifics. The Konkomba social structure is based on powerful ethnic loyalties to clans, but intraclan fissures in new clans, as well as disputes and warfare, also occur (Olson 1996:296; Tait 1961:69; Lidorio 2001:65).

3.2.4 Phenomenological Dimension

Rites and Ceremonies. There are rites and ceremonies for every important moment in life. After birth, a child receives a traditional medicine to protect it from evil spirits. During divination, offerings are given to the ancestors to thank them for their guidance. Sacrifices of animals are made to please the ancestors and seek their help. At any time when an elder feels it is appropriate, libation is used to pay respect and please the ancestors. Ceremonies, followed by sacrifices, are used to protect against sorcery and witchcraft. Sacrifices seeking protection usually happen during a pregnancy, birth, the naming of a child, marriage, travelling and farming, as well as when facing illness, deliverance and during a funeral (Tait 1961:21, 35, 43, 54; Allison 1997:87–90; Lidorio 2001:84, 86–87; Sarpong and Adusei 2012:70; Sundermeier 2002:10; Opoku 1978:9, 11, 54, 56, 60).

Ancestor reverence. Ancestors are acknowledged by their families, lineages and clans through rites, ceremonies and general acts of reverence. The main ways of expressing reverence to the ancestors are by pouring libation, making sacrifices and keeping the shrines and idols of the family. The main responsibility for doing that rests on the shoulders of the elders of the family and the oldest sons in an extended family compound. Connection with the ancestors is believed to assure blessings in life and protection after life (Fortes 1987:66–67; Fage 1961:7; Kopytoff 1971:129–131; Lidorio 2001:42–45).

Spiritual persons. In one sense the category of spiritual persons involves all people from the group, as there is no clear division between material and spiritual realities. There are, however, specialised categories: elders who are in charge of libation, shrines and sacrifices in an extended family, lineage or clan; elders who are advisers about tribal taboos; diviners who guide people through their contact with the ancestors; fetish keepers, who keep the idols, spiritual amulets, medicines and sacred objects of the family; spirit holders, who are believed to control certain spirits and prevent their attack; fetish priests, who perform more elaborate ceremonies, normally connected with specific spirits; sorcerers, who manipulate medicines, spirits and other elements to make evil; and witches, who are believed to attack spiritually and even kill others with a spiritual evil power. During times of conflict, some are also distinct: *ululedaan*, the one who can disappear; *kidjakamon*, the one who cannot be hurt by bullets and arrows; and *udjakanja*, the warrior who will win a war with his spiritual power (Lidorio 2001:47–48, 89; Opoku 1978:37; Tait 1961:59).

Spiritual Entities. There are several categories of spiritual entities among the Konkomba group. The best known are god (*Uwumbor*), the creator of all things; ancient ancestors, normally related to the clans in ancient times; ancestors from a clan, lineage or family genealogy; spirits, who were never human beings and may be manipulated by people; bush spirits, who are evil and hardly able to be manipulated by people; powerful evil spirits which may control others; dwarves, which live in the forest and may attack people; transformational spirits, which may inhabit people and animals in a totemic relation; spirits which inhabit shrines; spiritual powers related to idols and sacred objects; and spiritual totemic forces that are impersonal. Some of them are known by name and skills, also associated with fetishes. *Kininbong* is the main evil spirit. *Tywonpamakan*, evil spirits or demons, can assume different forms, like trees, rocks and human beings.

Inyameh is a spirit that follows someone during the night and shows itself as fire. *Utoye* also follows people during the night and makes a specific sound, but it is not seen as dangerous. *Nwaar* is a fetish like *grumadii*, *tigalii* and *nkunpatapa*: the one who kills those who make mistakes. *Nana* (grandfather) is another main fetish, which needs to be built first, before other fetishes. *Grumadii*, known as having great power, can be invoked by his followers to protect or harm people (Tait 1961:223; Opoku 1978:10–11; Lidorio 2001:88–90).

Mystical Medicines. A large range of amulets, talismans and mystical medicines are used by the group to protect, attack or kill people and can be made by either ordinary people or spiritual men. Sorcerers and witches are known to make specific types of mystical medicines, such as poisons. Sacred objects are used to protect children, pregnant women, and those who are farming, building or travelling. Mystical medicines are used mainly to heal those who are sick and to protect anyone from evil spirits. In order to prevent witches, magicians, sorcerers, and other evil powers from harming someone, a person may be put under the protection of a spiritual entity by using its talismans and *jujus*. They may be worn around the neck or, in the case of women, around her waist, or around the wrist or hung on the door-post of the house. *Yenho* are amulets made by the *unhodaan*, a medicine man for different purposes: protection against snakes and poisons; increasing farm production and giving extra strength during a time of conflict. *Bikpuaniib* is a cloth that is put outside when a *kebek* (a traditional instrument) is played, invoking special spirits for foretelling (Lidorio 2001:88–90; Tait 1961:232–233; Evans-Pritchard 1966:322; Opoku 1978:147–149).

Death and Funeral. There are three different levels of funeral: *likpuul*, performed three or four days after the death; *ubua*, which can be repeated a few times depending on the dead person's age, clan and social status; and *ubuarja*, the final funeral. A funeral has many different meanings and functions: to maintain tradition and family unity, to publicly acknowledge the importance of the dead person, to present family status in society, and to ceremonially guide the spirit of the dead person to set it free (Sundermeier 2002:10; Lidorio 2001:76, 84; Opoku 1978:135; Matsunami 1998:64; Sarpong and Adusei 2012:71–72; Fortes 1949: 323).

4. Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication

The proposed approach guides the application of thematic biblical theologies to better address the specific cultural questions highlighted by the four dimension's framework in a functionalist-interpretivist perspective; and presents biblical themes based on a missiological framework provided by elements of the Four-Horizons Model, Tridimensional Model and the Grand Story approach in a hermeneutic perspective, engaging with the main cultural questions previously identified, answering them biblically and approaching the audience with a comprehensive applicability.

This article uses the expression 'thematic biblical theology' to refer to a biblical theology described and arranged by themes in the Scriptures as part of the biblical grand story.

4.1 Overview

The Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication is organised into seven stages:

1. Collect and organise the cultural data obtained by literary or field research.
2. Revise the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication's framework.
3. Complete the suggested questionnaire made up of 215 cultural questions.³
4. Reference the data used with its source.
5. Build a cultural profile in four dimensions, analysing each dimension's information and identifying the thematic biblical theologies that address the main points.
6. Summarise the cultural profile in 15 points, considering the implications for Gospel communication in each point, and prepare the thematic biblical theologies that are connected with the cultural profile.
7. Present the thematic biblical theologies in five steps.

3 The author developed a questionnaire with 215 questions divided into four dimensions (historical, ethical, social and phenomenological) to enable the process of collecting, organising and analysing the cultural data.

The thematic biblical theologies are presented in a progressive system of five steps, as follow:

1. A verse or portion of Scripture that is related to the thematic biblical theology is chosen.

2. The narrative's explanation is prepared, which is divided into two parts: the original context (which involves the context of the original text and the original audience) and intended message.
3. The central lessons related to the narrative are placed as part of the biblical grand story.
4. Contrasts and similarities between audience's cultural beliefs and biblical perspectives are investigated.
5. A dialogue with the audience is promoted, applying biblical truths to the daily lives of the people, having in mind the cultural analysis and the biblical answers in specific areas of the theme.

4.2 Presentation's Design

Redemption is one of the thematic biblical theologies developed by the author to present the Gospel to the Konkomba people of Ghana as a result of the proposed approach. Following the suggested framework: 1st step, a biblical narrative was chosen (Rom 3:22–26), and, 2nd step, the narrative was explained (text, context and audience) with an emphasis on the intended message. In this case, the intended message was summarised in three points: there is a universal effect of sin in humanity; God's solution for the crisis is historical, universal and spiritual; and salvation happens as promoted by God through a specific mechanism.

Then, 3rd step, the central lessons were identified: God's plan to redeem people exists because men sinned against him, having been expelled from his presence; and God's plan to redeem people was motivated from the beginning by love and culminated in the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Searching for contrasts and similarities, 4th step, the contrasts between the Konkomba traditional way to understand redemption and the Christian biblical proposition could be understood in two different aspects. The first one is the source of redemption. The similarity is the understanding by both Konkomba traditional culture and the biblical teachings that the offender cannot redeem himself, as he or she needs a spiritual power to forgive, redeem and solve the human crisis. The contrast is found in the fact that Konkomba seek for redemption through social and spiritual rites that are performed by society, through communal participation and specialists in the tribal society: elders, clan leaders, sorcerers and others. In the biblical perspective, the source of redemption is purely God. He is the one who, by love, invites his people to be transformed and freed from sin and death.

He is the one who initiated the movement of human freedom. It is God who sent the Saviour, Jesus Christ, to die for those who sinned, bringing back to him those who believe.

The second aspect is the mechanism of redemption. The first similarity between Konkomba rites and biblical proposition is the recognition of a broken universe in a moral, spiritual and legal way. Both agree that redemption (in any form and time) is necessary, as there is evil in human society, the human heart and the overall universe. The second similarity is the personal posture of those who are seeking redemption. Both picture people with a humble attitude. Those who are offering sacrifices for spiritual entities in the Konkomba world, as well as priests and common people sacrificing to the Lord in the Old Testament, come before the unseen world with a humble and deprived posture. The main contrast in the mechanism of redemption is clearly defined. For the Konkomba, redemption (which is only partial, never for life) is the result of human performance, well-conducted sacrifices for specific spiritual entities done by specialists with the correct elements. The mechanism of redemption is promoted by the offender and conducted by specialists. In the Scriptural perspective, the mechanism of redemption lies entirely in God's hands, God's will, and God's initiative. Through the voluntary death of Jesus on the cross, God revealed his legal act to forgive the sins of those who believe. It happened through the substitutive sacrifice of Christ, in place of the offenders. And this divine sacrifice cannot be received by human merit, effort or payment, only by faith.

The validity of redemption is also a contrast. For the Konkomba, there is no concept of complete redemption (for the whole of life or for eternity), but practices that redeem people partially, keeping them away from the spirits' revenge. In Scripture, the validity of redemption is eternal, once and for all. Since the sacrifice of Jesus was universal and eternal, those who believe are invited for a life of total and eternal freedom.

The 5th step, dialoguing with the audience, Paul's intended message in this portion is divided into three parts. The first one is the universal effect of sin in humanity. He explains that there is no difference between Gentiles and Jews as 'all have sinned' (v.23). Paul teaches about the universal aspect of sin that goes beyond languages, cultures, territories and times. The Scripture is inviting the Konkomba to see and embrace the reality of the universal effect of sin, starting with the Konkomba perception of the sins' effects (diseases, conflicts, lack of rain and death) and expanding to the universal effects among all cultures and nations in all times.

Therefore, the daily crisis lived by the Konkomba on different levels of life are part of the overall picture and their pain is experienced by other people in different levels and contexts.

The second part is God's solution for this crisis, which is historical, universal and spiritual. Paul explains the crisis, affirming there is 'no difference between Jew and Gentile' (v.22) as 'all have sinned' (v.23) and presents the solution stating that 'all are justified' (v.24). He teaches that this solution is an act of God, motivated by God's grace. It is free and happens through Jesus (v.24). The Konkomba seek redemption through social and spiritual rites, sacrifices, libation and mystical medicines, but all these efforts aren't enough. Therefore, they are invited by God to embrace, by faith and thanksgiving (believing and praising him), the singular and eternal solution in Jesus Christ.

This solution is not partial or temporal (as sacrifices and libations are seen to provide, demanding new acts in every season), but total and eternal. It is not conducted by the offender, elders or specialists, but by God, and therefore has no error or weakness.

The third part regards the mechanism of salvation. Paul uses legal terms to express this mechanism in a judicial scenario. Sin contaminated human history and the human heart making all people unrighteous before him, as expressed in verse 10: 'there is no one righteous, not even one'. So, God became flesh in Jesus Christ, was tempted but did not sin, being righteous and paying on the cross what humanity was supposed to pay, death. The Konkomba mechanism for salvation, rites and ceremonies, can't save, as there is no one righteous. The specialists who lead the ceremonies, elders who make sacrifices, ancestors who lived in ancient times, and the dead, for whom funerals are performed, are all unrighteous, as all seek for purity and redemption. Only through Jesus, the pure and righteous Son of God, was the price paid, the sacrifice accepted and people set free, being able to enter into the *Uwumbordo*, the house of God.

5. Conclusion

The problem raised in this article was how culture could be analysed and organised, and how the cultural findings could be used to facilitate cross-cultural evangelisation through thematic biblical theology in similar contexts to the Konkomba people of Ghana. The objective was to explore and generate ideas and principles for integrating cultural analysis and thematic biblical theologies to better communicate the Gospel in similar contexts.

The article presented an anthropological approach for cultural analysis in a functionalist-interpretivist framework defended by the Paradigm Interplay theory, organizing the cultural findings into four dimensions (historical, ethical, social and phenomenological) based on a case study of the Konkomba people of Ghana. Then, it presented a missiological framework provided by elements of the Four-Horizons Model, the Tridimensional Model and the Grand Story approach, organising the biblical theme's presentation in a hermeneutic and contextualized perspective.

The overall result was the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication, structured in seven stages and culminating in the exposition of thematic biblical theologies distributed in a progressive system of five steps: a portion of Scripture; its original context and intended message; central lessons in the text as part of the grand story; contrasts and similarities between audience's cultural beliefs and biblical perspectives; and dialogue with the audience, applying biblical answers for cultural questions in specific areas of the theme.

For its first application, it can be used to research specific people-groups, when similar to the context presented, to produce a comprehensive ethnographical profile through a functionalist-interpretivist framework arranged into four dimensions. The second application is specific to the missionary world, where the cultural findings can be organised and analysed to facilitate Gospel communication using thematic biblical theologies that address, explain and answer the target-group's cultural issues theologically, producing a comprehensive evangelisation project, especially in contexts similar to that of the presented case study. This approach can be potentially helpful among unreached people groups similar to the presented context and not well-exposed to biblical redemption's grand story.

This article makes two suggestions for further studies in this area. First, there can be further application of this approach in other cultural settings, testing and expanding the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication in broader environments. Second, there can be further exploration of missionary anthropology as an area of study, development, application and training, through the comparison and integration of different models and approaches as a dynamic furtherance of learning, testing and expanding these models in missionary fields.

Specifically, this study suggests the investigation of the potential integration of two anthropological theories (functionalism and interpretivism) in the missionary effort of cultural analysis; and

the three models presented as missiological framework for communicating the biblical narratives: Four-Horizons Model, Tridimensional Model; and a hermeneutical approach for reading the Scriptures as one grand story.

In this capacity, this proposed approach aims to serve the church of God, especially those who give their lives to seeing the name of Jesus well understood and glorified among all people.

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A New Proposal for A Biblically Grounded Christian Social Welfare Provision Among the Ghana Baptist Convention Member Churches in the Ashanti Region, Ghana¹

Joseph Adasi-Bekoe and Annang Asumang

Abstract

The aim of the study was to seek a theologically sound, biblically grounded and sociologically appropriate means of organizing social care for the Ghana Baptist Convention (GBC) member churches in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The absence of formal social support, amidst severe social welfare challenge has led to the emergence of several mutual, self-help societies, including the social welfare schemes of the GBC churches. Using the Zerfass (1974) practical theological model as a primary tool for the study, the research showed that the current social welfare system of the church lacks a distinctive Christian identity. Relying on an exegesis of four anchor texts to discover the standards of God, the study made proposals to address the identified deficiencies of social welfare in the churches. This study could serve also as template for other Christian communities especially in Africa.

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² The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

Israel, as the precursor of the church was given a responsibility for the provision of social welfare of its citizens, and the same is expected of the church today. The Israelites were to be generous to people in need as a reflection of the generosity of God towards them (Lev 25:36–38). The New Testament Church followed this same pattern as laid down by God for Israel, and made provisions for the welfare needs of its members one of their major focuses (Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–37).

In pre-colonial African societies, the social welfare needs of citizens were not a major problem as the extended family and other social institutions were strong enough to take care of most members of the society (Neville2009:44–45). Mbiti captures this succinctly in his view of life in pre-colonial African society, which implied that the traditional life was characterized by blissful holism (Mbiti 1989:106). However, in the modern urban environment, the ability of the traditional social welfare institutions to perform this important function is seriously challenged.

A brief review of the current formal systems for Social Protection of Ghanaians suggests that even though Ghana, theoretically, has an elaborate social protection system, its benefits accrue to a few in formal employment. A typical social protection system of a country is made up of Social Insurance, including their related labour market provisions, Social Services and Social Safety Nets. In Ghana, the benefit of social insurance, like pension, accrues only to people engaged in either private or public formal employment representing less than 14% of all citizens (GSS 2012:28). The non-existent or very weak formal social safety nets has led to the emergence of several mutual, self-help societies providing assistance on their own terms.

To help deal with the practical reality of social welfare shortfalls, each member church of the Ghana Baptist Convention (GBC), has a mutual association to which members needing assistance with social welfare issues are referred. The social welfare schemes of the GBC member Churches are, however, fraught with several practical difficulties. It is this context which has necessitated the present project, seeking critically to analyse and propose biblical, theologically grounded and sociologically informed solutions to the challenges.

The main objective of the study was to find out how the GBC member churches can develop a biblically grounded social safety net that effectively protects the poor and vulnerable members. The subsidiary questions are as follows:

- How effective is the social protection of the current welfare scheme offered to the poor members of the church?
- What is the theological and biblical basis for Christian social welfare provision?
- How is social welfare presently understood and practised among the GBC member churches in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, and how can it be improved?

The study used the Zerfass (1974:165–166) model of practical theology as its primary tool for collecting and analysing data. The Zerfass model was considered the best tool for the study because it provides an operational process for incorporating theological tradition and situational analysis into a practical theological approach to correct an ecclesiological practice. Using the model, data was collected from twenty churches to give a thick description of the current situation. Relying also on an exegesis of four anchor texts (Lev 25:35–39; Matt 25: 31–46; Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–37) to discover the standards of God, the study made proposals to address the identified deficiencies of social welfare in the churches. The proposed scheme was then subjected to theoretical and theological reflection on how it fulfils the biblical standards.

2. Review of Literature on Social Welfare

2.1 Origin of social welfare in the West

A crucial development in the twentieth century was the emergence and expansion of institutions responsible for social welfare in the advanced democracies (Schludi 2001; OECD 2005; Myles and Quadagno 2002). This has been accompanied by an increasing number of studies that deal with the origins and development of social welfare practice in Western democratic societies (Stolleis 2013; Crouch and Farrell 2004).

It is difficult to trace the beginning of formal social welfare because the issues covered and the efforts to deal with them have always been with man after the Garden of Eden (Stolleis 2013: 23; Poe 2008:106). Faherty (2006:108), however, urges us to ‘re-imagine the history of social welfare, as beginning with the dawn of the human race’. Certain historical events may have combined to shape views of society and influence social policy positively in favour of formal social welfare (Stolleis 2013:24). However, there is consensus among scholars that the practice of social welfare and many of the original foundations of benevolence and charity have their beginnings in religious institutions (Placido 2015:4; Brandsen and Vliem 2008:59).

2.2 Christian influence on the evolution of formal social welfare

Historically, as Langer (2003:137) has suggested, the desire to help others, and, ‘therefore the beginning of social welfare appears to have developed as a part of religion’. Karger & Stoesz suggest that the roots of modern social welfare in the Western democracies go deep into the soil of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Karger & Stoesz 2008:39). These traditions are derived from the laws and culture of the nation of Israel. The instructions in the Old Testament highlight Israel’s responsibility for the poor, which was not to be limited to their fellow Israelites, but also extended to foreigners sojourning among them (Exod 22:21–25; Lev 25:35). In the New Testament, Jesus added new and more challenging ideas to the care of the poor (e.g. Luke 10:33; 15:20).

2.3. Evolution of state participation in social welfare

Several historical factors may have positively influenced views of society on poverty and how to respond to the needs of the poor (Poe 2008:105). The ‘outbreak of the bubonic plague in the 1300s, that killed nearly 1/3 of European population’ (Rengasamy 2009:1) is one example. Stolleis (2013:25) has further suggested that the ‘emergence of cities and slums and the beginning of trade in the 15th and 16th centuries brought to the fore the already difficult conditions in which citizens lived, and the need for organized social welfare.

In England, ‘the Statute of Labourers in 1349 became the first enacted law that assigned some responsibility for supporting the poor to the government’ (Poe 2008:67). It sought to control the movement of labourers, the poor and also fixed a maximum wage (Karger & Stoesz 2008; Poe 2008:66). Following series of reforms of the poor laws, the responsibility for the management of the poor gradually shifted from the church to the state (2008:67). As the state took control, harsher and more stringent laws designed to control movement of the poor were enacted (Poe 2008:72; Sider 1999:103). A distinction was made between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The philosophy emphasized self-discipline, frugality, and hard work, and led its adherents to frown on those who are dependent or unemployed (Stolleis 2013:27–28, Schilling 1997:26–27).

2.4 Traditional social welfare systems in Ghana

The pre-colonial welfare regime of the Ashanti Region, like most parts of Ghana, was dominated by private welfare provision by members of the extended family (Stiles-Ocran 2015:30; Opoku 1978).

In Ashanti, the idea of a family extends beyond its conjugal members to a larger web of relationships in which all members have a common ancestor (Kutsoatia and Morck 2012:2). Opoku (1978:155) argued that the ancestors play an important role in the welfare of the living by taking an active interest in the family or community affairs. Busia intimates that, the belief among the Akans that the ancestors are ‘watching over their living relatives’, accounted for the effective role the extended family system played in meeting welfare needs of its members (Busia 1954:157). The practice of expecting assistance from family members triggers a cascade of mutual dependency (Stiles-Ocran 2015:32). Thus, here, one can discern the existence of ‘a local “secular” structure of poor relief’ (Tonnessen 2011:1).

3. Situational Analysis of Social Welfare in the Ashanti Region

3.1 Poverty Profile of the Ashanti Region

The nature of poverty in the Region is clarified by several studies that utilize the ‘voices of the poor’ themselves (Nkum and Ghartey 2000; Ohene-Kyei 2000; Ashong and Smith 2001). These studies provide empirical evidence that suggests that while the prevalence of income poverty is reducing, there are concerns that human poverty and the social dimension of poverty is also increasing in the urbanized segments of the economy (UNDP 2010:12; Osei-Assibey 2014:1–10). Ghana’s recent relatively high GDP growth has created a wrong impression of economic well-being. However, the combined effect of an increasing inflation rate, averaging 14.6%, a crippling balance of payments deficit (US\$1.46 billion recorded in 2010) among several other drawbacks have contributed greatly in reducing the expected benefits of economic growth for the citizens of the country (GSS 2014:X). Consequently, the most recent Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS 6) conducted in 2013 suggests that the incidence of income poverty is quite high in most parts of the country. Just a little under a quarter (24.8%) of Ghanaians are income poor, whilst under a tenth of the population lives in extreme poverty (GLSS 2014: Xi).

3.2 The state of Social Protection in the Ashanti Region

Ghana has elaborate social protection provisions reflected in several programmes of the government. Article 37 (6a) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states that:

The state shall ensure that contributory schemes are instituted and maintained that will guarantee economic security for self-employed and other citizens of Ghana and (b) provide social assistance to the aged.

However, the present formal social protection system neglects people in the informal sector and places emphasis only on workers in the formal sectors of the economy (GSS 2013:121). For instance, among the economically active segment of the population in Ashanti Region, nearly 85% are self-employed. More than 44.5% of the self-employed are in agriculture, 18.4% in wholesale and retail trade, 12.2% in local manufacturing and repairs among several others. Only 13.7% are engaged in occupations classified under formal employment and thus qualify for formal social protection.

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3.3 Social Safety Nets

Social safety nets provide income support or access to basic social services for people in difficult times (ADB 2010:3). However, like in most emerging economies, public social safety nets are seriously curtailed due to budgetary reasons. Presently, the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) and the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) are the only non-contributory public transfers available in Ghana to a targeted segment of the poor. The LEAP currently provides support for less than 20% of the extremely poor families in Ghana (World Bank 2015:92; MGCSP et al. 2013:1).

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) is designed to provide one lunch for school children in poor public schools. However, its low coverage, offering assistance in 1,698 public schools out of the estimated 56,624 schools means that the majority of poor children are denied this service (GSFP 2011).

In the challenging context of the absence of Governmental and Non-governmental social welfare initiatives, informal social safety nets have become the most important means of welfare available to most citizens. An informal safety net consists of 'either actions to minimize risks or transfers between individuals or households to cope during difficult times' (DFID 2006:6). In Ashanti Region, informal safety nets build upon a long tradition of strong extended family systems. Faith-based safety nets have recently emerged as the most important social support groups providing support during key lifecycle events.

3.4. Social Welfare situation in the Baptist Churches in the Ashanti Region

In principle, all the GBC member churches make provision for social welfare assistance for their members who happen to need it. Members of the churches rated the social welfare schemes of the church as very important interventions, with more than 83% of the participants of the study claiming to have benefitted at some time, or knowing someone who had previously benefitted from the schemes' assistance. The top support issues that the current social welfare schemes provide to church members include formal/apprenticeship education assistance (22%), payment of hospital expenses (21%), business start-up capital (18%), living expenses (14%) and bereavement (12%). The study found, however, that despite being of good service to the church members, the welfare schemes in their present state are weak in organization. Also, their managers lack the necessary managerial skills to effectively run organizations of that magnitude. The present systems are constitutionally formulated and have very weak funding bases. Due to their financial limitations, their current interventions are quite restricted. Crucially also, the current welfare schemes of the GBC churches appear not to be adequately underpinned by biblically-grounded principles. They function practically like any non-Christian welfare association. As a result, the arrangements do not serve to enhance the witness mission of the churches. The study also found that due to its weak funding base, the long-term sustainability of the social welfare scheme cannot be guaranteed, and this has the capacity to affect its ultimate efficiency (ADB 2010:13)

4. Biblical and Theological Reflections on Social Welfare

4.1 Alleviating Poverty according to Leviticus 25:35-42

The anchor text in Leviticus 25:35–42 is a Levitical law on how to deal with poor neighbours. This text is probably the first biblical example of a system of a social safety net for a group of people. Social welfare challenges in the Old Testament are usually associated with poverty arising out of the lack of economic participation. Lazonby (2016:31) identifies indebtedness, land loss, land preservation and wealth accumulation as key social welfare issues in the ancient Near East. These were the problems that Leviticus 25 addresses, setting out how Israel's faith prescribed a distinctive solution.

The law was aimed at restoring the social welfare shortfall of the destitute, whenever they were compelled to sell or lease a productive asset. Yahweh had caused the land to be equally distributed among the tribes of Israel upon their arrival on the Promised Land (Josh 13–18). However, Yahweh anticipated that, temporarily, circumstances may cause some of the people to relinquish their control over their ancestral land by selling it to their rich neighbours (Brueggemann 2002:192). Leviticus 25 consists of four units, with each unit describing a social welfare situation into which a neighbour is likely to fall (verses 25–34, 35–37, 39–46, 47–54). Each type of destitution is introduced by the phrase 'if your kin becomes poor' (Jacobs 2006:135). There seem to be some 'logical progression in these four units, concerning increasingly desperate financial straits' which Israel is called upon to help prevent (Willis 2009:188).

The first possible anticipated action of the poor person was selling his right over land to survive a temporary situation. In such circumstances, the law required that relief would come immediately by family and community members assisting financially to redeem the sold property. The second situation involved mortgaging property, such as houses, or taking a loan from rich neighbours. The law required that such loans be granted with no interest. The third and fourth laws, anticipated even more difficult circumstances, when a neighbour attempted to sell himself into debt slavery (25:39b). The prescribed solution places the responsibility on the person to whom the destitute attempts to sell himself, by literally compelling the man not to treat the poor man as a slave. The law also made the Jubilee the ultimate social safety net, when all sold land properties revert to their original owners (25:54).

In all cases, the response of members of the community was to be far-reaching enough to restore neighbours who had fallen into economic difficulty back into the productive process, so they could take care of their families.

The main prescriptions in Leviticus 25 are buttressed by several other OT passages, where provision is made to address social welfare needs of the populace (Lev 19:9–10, 23:22, Deut 24:17–22, 15, 26). In these passages, Yahweh commands his people to open their hands wide to the poor and lend them enough to cover all their needs (Deut 15:8). The ‘first fruits’ of the land were to be shared with the Levite and the stranger living in their communities (Deut 26:2–11).

4.2 Alleviating Poverty According to Matthew 25:31–46

In the New Testament, Jesus set the stage in our anchor text with a simile of the eschatological judgment scene in Matthew 25:31–40. In this simile, all people are gathered before the throne of God to be judged at the end of the ages. The people are divided into two groups: the righteous on the right and the unrighteous on the left. The basis of the judgment is what the subjects did about the social welfare situations they encountered during their stay on the earth.

Hospitality then becomes the key action that the judge associated with righteousness. Hospitality is defined by the individual’s response to six main indicators of social welfare needs identified in the passage as; feeding the hungry, providing water for the thirsty, home for the homeless, clothing for the naked, visiting the sick and visiting the imprisoned. The text agrees with other passages of scripture that those who will inherit the eschatological kingdom will be revealed by their rendering of service to God through human agency (1John 3:17; 4:12; 20). The crux of Jesus’ teachings in this text is that services rendered to man are services rendered to God. Matthew’s description of the judgment scene in comparison with other contemporary Jewish judgment literature is unique in pointing out the fact that, the ‘acts of kindness towards the least of his brothers have been acts of kindness towards the Son of Man.’ (Keener 2014:113).

The question that has often been asked is what kind of poor person is worthy of receiving attention on behalf of Christ? St Jerome answered that the hungering Christ was fed when each of the poor is fed, and watered whenever a drink is offered to the thirsty. By this he implied that any action taken to provide the poor with their needs is an action done on behalf of Jesus, and would be duly rewarded (Jerome 2008:290).

4.3 Social Welfare according to Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37

Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35 are further examples of a social safety net involving members of the first church in Jerusalem. In these passages, generally perceived as a summary of the fellowship lifestyle of the infant church, Luke described the characteristics of the first social safety net of the church.

In this summary, Luke showed that all the members of the church came together as a community whose purpose centred on understanding the teachings of Jesus through his apostles. The leaders of this group were the apostles who became the managers of the social safety net of the first church. Luke described the attitudes and motivation of the group with such words as 'being together in a common place', 'having one soul and mind' 'having all things in common'.

Luke's description of the fellowship lifestyle of the first Christians has prompted some scholars to suggest that the example set forth is meant to be 'prescriptive for Christian communities' (Chung-Kim, Hains, George and Manetsch 2014:131). However, there are also some scholars who hold the opinion that this view of Acts is only described rather than prescribed for the church. Some say the author of Acts actually presents this practice as 'mistaken', since the sharing of possessions seems to disappear from view in the remainder of Acts (Hume 2013; Watson 2008:99-111).

The interpretation of the phrase 'were together' (Acts 2:44) has created the impression that the disciples adopted a common residence after their conversion (Walton 2008:103-107; Taylor 2001:147-61; Bruce 1990:132). However, while one can discern some elements of shared living in the text, it appears as MacDonald (2001:1588) suggested, that togetherness is an expression of fellowship implied by the 'desire of the new community of believers to be with one another'.

The social teaching of the leadership of the first church was consistent with that of Jesus and other actors of the Gospel scene. In the gospels, Jesus taught his followers that God expects his followers to give to the disadvantaged or the poor (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus, by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, implied that providing for the social welfare needs of the disadvantaged is obedience to the greatest commandments of God. Similarly, Paul, consistent with the teachings of Christ and the agenda of the first church, showed a lot of sensitivity to the poor. He was personally involved in soliciting support from the Gentile church to the poor members of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10).

5. A Proposal for Social Welfare for GBC Member Churches

5.1 Prioritizing social welfare

The leadership of the Baptist churches must take steps that show that the social welfare function of the church is treated as a priority programme.

This flows directly from one of the best practices of the first church in Jerusalem and also from the early church during the period between the first and third centuries (Faherty 2006:111–118). The first church in Jerusalem, according to Acts 2:42 prioritized the social welfare function of the church. Some of the practical steps recommended by the study include the following:

- Setting up a coordinating unit (a secretariat) within the offices of the Ghana Baptist Convention or its local Associations.
- Each local congregation allocating substantial funding in their annual budgets, organizing promotional programmes, and including issues of social welfare in their main preaching and teaching topics.
- Strengthening inter-congregation cooperation and learning among local churches.

5.2 Management of the Social Welfare System

The second strategy of the new proposed social welfare system calls on the churches to commit to entrusting the management responsibilities for the social safety net to mature, honest and professionally competent Christian leaders. In Acts 4:35–37, Luke shows that the leaders of the first social safety net of the church were the apostles, who also became the managers of its finances and distributed all resources of the group according to the needs of each member. A look at Paul's criterion for selection into leadership in the church, in 1 Timothy 3:8, suggests that Paul intended to show that the highest office bearers of the church (deacons and overseers) must all be matured and honest Christians. The selection of a blend of technically and spiritually competent leadership is not only positively aligned with scripture, but also aligned with several social welfare theories.

5.3 Strengthening the pro-poor character of the Social Safety Net

A key next step is to implement programmes that are friendly to the poor and vulnerable members of the churches.

One of the key issues is to be able to reduce the stigma associated with receiving welfare assistance. The first practical step that the study recommended is to strengthen the teaching function of the church. This ensures that issues around the giving and taking of social welfare assistance are placed in their proper theological contexts. Another practical step expected of managers of any social safety net is to take steps that strengthen and/or assure the confidentiality of transactions and the client's identity and information.

5.4 An all-inclusive group Membership with Responsibility

It is proposed that the GBC member churches set up a system that promotes equal rights and responsibilities of all members. The principle behind this best practice is that the organization of any effective social safety net is a shared responsibility. As in the traditional extended family systems, each member of the family is expected to play a role in meeting the needs of those who, for one reason or the other, need assistance. Similarly, in the first church, responsibility for the provision of the social welfare needs of all fell equally on all church members. There are several passages in the Old Testament that buttress the commandment to give to people on a need-based basis and not on any external qualifications. The same laws also expect all to contribute to meet the social welfare needs of all (Lev 19:9–10, 23:22, Deut 24:17–22, 15, 26).

5.5 Mainstreaming Gender Issues into Programming

Gender issues are to be considered as essential to the programming of the social welfare schemes. Gender issues can be defined as including all cultural and social traditions that have direct and indirect deleterious effects on the welfare of women, men, boys and girls. The current system, more importantly, has no consideration for child rights and wellbeing. Gender mainstreaming here should not be understood only as a tool in modern project management, but as a concept deeply rooted in Scripture. In the Old Testament, Yahweh's special concern for the people on the margins of society like widows, children and orphans should be understood from the context of gender considerations. The social ethics of Israel urged every Israelite to see such people as standing in a special place with God. Yahweh is said to be the father for the fatherless (Psalm 68:5) and the preserver of the stranger, widows and children (Psalm 146:6).

5.6 Increasing the Funding base of the Safety Net

One major area of consideration for the running of an effective social safety net for the GBC member churches in the long-term is the increase of the funding base of the programmes. This strategy encourages the whole church, including individual members to be involved in raising funds for the church as follows:

- Each church should set aside a fixed percentage of the church's income for the social welfare of its members.
- The churches can also organize special fund-raising events where all proceeds will be dedicated to solving the social welfare needs of members.
- Finally, the churches can also appeal to all rich members of the church to make special and regular donations to the church's social welfare.

6. Conclusion

The research was conducted into social welfare practice among a regionally based group of Christians with the aim of supporting the churches to meet the expectation of Jesus, which is to provide care for the poor. The study was conducted against the background of the severe challenges of the formal social welfare system. The study showed that the Baptist churches in the Ashanti Region, even though they are providing some form of care for their needy members, rely mostly on social insurance principles. In the absence of formal social welfare services provided by government or market sources, the church's contribution has filled a big social void. However, the social insurance principles are not distinctively Christian and biblical, and in any case, make it difficult for poor members to fully participate in the activities; resulting in some poor members being denied assistance when it matters most.

The study has made proposals to address these shortfalls associated with the present attempt to provide effective social care for its members. The study gives an opportunity for future researchers to further study the contribution of informal mutual assistance support groups in the Ashanti Region and beyond. It will also be interesting to see other researchers study the specific contribution of social welfare programmes of religious organizations in specific sectors of the economy like health and education.

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A Critical Evaluation of John Robert Stevens' Theology of Spiritual Formation in Dialogue with Søren Kierkegaard: A Dissertation Summary¹

Jeremiah Gruenberg and Annang Asumang

Abstract

John Robert Stevens (1919–1983) was a Pentecostal/Charismatic minister whose teachings emphasize Christian maturity. Utilizing the existential voice of Søren Kierkegaard as a dialogical partner, this project identifies, synthesizes, systematizes, assesses, analyses, and critiques John Robert Stevens' teachings on a walk with God. Stevens' concept of a walk with God includes the primary interrelated topics of Christlikeness, the Kingdom, and the believer's relationship with God. According to Stevens, Christian formation is an existential and relational endeavour. It naturally arises from a daily focus of relating to God in the course of life, and consistently moving in the direction of God's will. True spiritual formation results from an ongoing, obedient relationship with God, who is the only source of genuine transformation. The dialogue with Kierkegaard—the father of existentialism—highlights and sharpens Stevens' view of Christian spiritual formation.

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Keywords

spirituality, existentialism, relationship, walk, holism

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Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

The late John Robert Stevens (1919–1983) grew up in Iowa, in the United States. He graduated from LIFE Bible College with his G.Th. (Graduate in Theology) in 1947. In 1951, Stevens founded a worldwide fellowship of churches, and his ministry grew concurrently with the Charismatic movement. This ministry particularly flourished in the 1970s when his emphasis on the individual's relationship with God struck a chord with the hippie generation in the United States. At the height of his ministry, there were more than one hundred churches functioning under his ministry (Stevens 1976b:n.p.). That most of Stevens' books remain in print, particularly in Logos Bible Software format, is a testament to the continued interest in his biblical teachings.

The main question this project seeks to answer is this: what unique contributions does Stevens' theology of a 'walk with God' make to our fuller understanding of the nature of Christian spiritual formation? It is proposed that the writings of John Robert Stevens on the concept of a 'walk with God' present a holistic and relational theory of Christian spiritual formation. Stevens (1971a:81–82; 1987:694) utilizes the term 'walk with God' to encompass the active, transformational relationship with God which results in maturity. Interestingly, Stevens' theory of spiritual formation functions in ways which could be characterized as existential. Stevens' approach to spiritual formation emphasizes authenticity and prioritizes the process of becoming over the process of gaining knowledge, all of which relates him to the overarching existentialist project. Among the existentialist authors, Søren Kierkegaard stands as the most fitting dialogical partner for exploring Stevens' approach to spiritual formation. In addition to the general commonalities between Stevens and Kierkegaard—such as commitment, authenticity, and becoming—the productive compatibility of Stevens and Kierkegaard is found in that they both place a relationship with God at the centre of the human quest for spiritual maturation (Kierkegaard 1990:325–326; Moore 2007:xxi–xxvi; Stevens 2007a:163–164).

2. The Four Axes of Spiritual Formation

Due to the youth of the academic study of spiritual formation, there are not yet firmly established criteria by which we might assess and critique any proposed theory.

A primary contribution of this dissertation was to propose four primary axes which must be detailed and critiqued in order to adequately examine any theory: (1) the stated goal or purpose of spiritual formation, at times found in the author's definition of spiritual formation; (2) the paradigmatic concept which frames the theory; (3) the theo-philosophical principles which form the foundation of the theory as a whole; and (4) the resultant activities, keyed to these first three aspects, which cause spiritual growth. These four axes together comprise a discreet model by which Stevens' theory of spiritual formation may be described and critiqued. Further, the assessment of the holism of his theory is best achieved by examining how each axis interrelates with the others. The following is a short review of the various approaches to these four axes of spiritual formation in current literature.

Along the axis of the goals of spiritual formation, the scholarly literature divides into three major categories: Christotelic, personality and character, and universal. Christotelic goals focus on Christ as the embodiment of the endpoint of Christian spiritual formation (Packer 2009; Howard 2012). The next category emphasizes the growth of the character of the individual, either morally or in finding the true self (Wright 2010; Benner 2011). The final category involves universal goals which address spiritual formation in the context of the overarching plan of God—that is, how spiritual maturity affects God's will for mankind and the world (Habermas 2008; Greenman and Kalantzis 2010). Some theories address more than one of these categories of goals simultaneously.

The axis of paradigmatic concepts divides into six major categories: journey, developmental, educational, Biblical, devotional, and relational. Journey paradigms discuss spiritual formation as a movement through a spiritual landscape toward a goal given by God (Demarest 2009; Nouwen 2010). Developmental paradigms emphasize progressive growth, often in terms of stages of maturity (Dawson 2007; Ashbrook 2009). Educational paradigms discuss spiritual formation in the context of Christian education (Gangel and Wilhoit 1998; Habermas 2008). Biblical paradigms are images or concepts taken directly from Scripture (Anderson and Reese 2009; Peterson 2010). Theories in the devotional category present paradigmatic concepts related to the devotional life, such as the disciplines (Foster 2002; Willard 2009b). Relational paradigms utilize imagery of the believer's relationship with God as the central guiding concept of Christian spiritual formation (Benner 2009c; Foster 2009).

Along the theo-philosophical axis, foundational principles of spiritual formation divide into six major categories: systematic theology, doctrinal theology, biblical theology, denominational/historical theology, interdisciplinary studies, and relational brands of theology. Systematic approaches utilize the Bible as a whole in the effort to generate proper fundamentals of spiritual formation (Wright 2010; Willard 2014a). Doctrinal approaches view spiritual formation through doctrinal topics such as eschatology, the Trinity, discipleship, and the social gospel (Searle and Searle 2013; Vondey 2015). Biblical theology approaches focus on specific books or authors of the Bible (Jenkins 2011; Kendall 2015). Historical and denominational theology approaches view spiritual formation primarily through the study of the Christian authors of old or through specific denominational viewpoints (Valantasis 2005; Sims 2013). Interdisciplinary studies utilize work in a wide range of fields—such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and general religious studies (Conn 1999:96; Shults and Sandage 2006). Relational theo-philosophical foundations focus on the theology behind a relationship with God (Jenkins 2011; Farley 2014).

The axis of activities divides into five primary categories: devotional, study, denominational, spiritual counselling and direction, and attitudinal. Devotional activities are often referred to as the disciplines, including prayer, reading of Scripture, fasting, repentance, community, worship, and communion (Peterson 2000; Boa 2001; Mulholland 2001). The study category focuses on the formative power of the studying of the Word of God (Graybeal and Roller 2009a; Curran 2010). The category of denominational activities includes formative activities which arise from particular denominational viewpoints (Alvarado 2012; Howard 2012). The activities of spiritual counselling and direction are common enough to warrant their own category among the activities of spiritual formation (Moon and Benner 2004; Anderson and Reese 2009). Finally, there are activities recommended in the literature which are more descriptive of necessary attitudes in spiritual formation which must be actively pursued, such as obedience, love, and surrender (Christenson 2001; Koessler 2003).

3. A Synthesis of Stevens' Theory of Spiritual Formation

In his original writings, Stevens did not present a systematized overview of his conception of a walk with God. This section identifies the major components of a walk with God, systematizes these components, and synthesizes Stevens' writings into a cohesive summary of Stevens' position.

The writings of Søren Kierkegaard will provide a contrapuntal voice by which Stevens' concepts may be immediately compared and clarified. This study follows the structure of the four-axis model presented above.

Along the axis of goal, Stevens' theory maintains five components: Christlikeness, the establishment of the Kingdom, a relationship with God, individual purpose, and community maturity (Stevens 1974b:35; 1976a:175; 1976c:42–43; 2007a:501, 814–815). Christlikeness represents the completion of the process identified in Romans 8:29, that believers would be conformed to the image of the Son. The establishment of the Kingdom is a universal telos which situates the individual's progressive maturity in the bigger picture of God's plan for creation. The believer's relationship with God is the central component of each axis. While Stevens sees the relationship with God as the generator of change, it is vital to recognize that Stevens also situates a relationship with God as a goal of spiritual formation. The more maturity a believer achieves, the deeper and closer the relationship with God will become. The goal of a walk with God also involves identifying and pursuing the believer's individual purpose, which is primarily aligned with the furthering of God's will. Finally, the goal of spiritual formation must include the believing community, for spiritual maturity functions on both an individual and corporate level.

Kierkegaard and Stevens differ in important ways in how to account for the goal of spiritual formation. For Kierkegaard, the God relation is the means by which the human becomes and maintains his/her status as a single individual—that is an authentic being with divinely-discovered identity, focused on the highest good (Moore 2007:xxvi–xxvii). For Stevens, the relationship with God is presented as a goal in itself. For Kierkegaard, relationality is a path. For Stevens, relationality is a motivating telos. Stevens seems more concerned with framing the process of Christian maturity as a process toward deeper communion with the Father in order to accomplish his will, rather than the achievement of self-fulfilment. In this way, becoming like Christ is the central defining telos of Stevens' theory. Further distinction between the two is found in the eschatological element of the formative goal. Kierkegaard is focused primarily on how the individual is received by Christ upon his return. Stevens, on the other hand, views the establishment of the Kingdom by mature believers as an inextricable goal of Christian spiritual formation.

The paradigmatic concept of Stevens' theory is a walk with God. For Stevens (1980:104), the concept of a walk with God begins with

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where they ‘walked and talked’ with God. However, the first individual in Scripture who is directly stated to have walked with God is Enoch (Gen 5:24). Following Enoch, two prominent figures in Genesis, Noah and Abraham, are also said to have walked with God (Gen 6:9, 17:1, 24:40). In developing this paradigm, Stevens also looks to the NT examples of those who followed Jesus—particularly his disciples. Stevens points to the uses of the verb ‘walk’ in Ephesians as further scriptural examples of the concept, and he maintains that the epistle presents Christianity as a way of life embodied in the walking (Stevens 1974:63; 1976a:150). For Stevens, a walk with God embodies a Christian way of life centred on the believer’s submission to Christ as Lord (Stevens 1976a:218; 1986:608).

For Stevens, the concept of a walk with God comprises ten primary elements: relationship, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, submission, dedication, love, hunger, directional progress, God’s dealings, authenticity, and community relationships. A walk with God is primarily relational. This paradigmatic concept encapsulates an ongoing, practical, progressive relationship with God. A walk with God is founded upon the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The concept of Lordship identifies the nature of the relationship, which is one of obedience. In this manner, a walk with God is characterized by submission and dedication. In submission, the believer submits to God’s direction while walking with him. In dedication, the believer commits to stay close with God, to seek his will, and to respond to his direction. The relationship of a walk with God, however, is untenable without the motivating forces of love and spiritual hunger. The walk with God incorporates the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28–30) as the foundational connective tissue of the formative divine relationship. The concept of spiritual hunger describes the believer’s own internal desire for God and his righteousness. This is closely related to Kierkegaard’s concept of passion, which drives the inward journey of becoming. A walk with God is characterized by directional progress both internally and externally—that is, the believer will move forward in a journey toward greater maturity, and accomplish God’s will in the process. However, spiritual formation is dependent upon the dealings of God, in which God arranges difficult circumstances in order to encourage the believer’s seeking of God for his equipping through transformation. God’s dealings are a part of the purifying process in which the sin nature is removed. A walk with God requires authenticity on the part of the believer.

Authenticity, in turn, is made up of honesty, a rejection of empty religiosity, and a genuine desire to walk with God. Finally, a walk

with God cannot be undertaken alone, but functions in a community setting.

In some ways, the paradigmatic concept of a walk with God is similar to the paradigmatic concepts of journey often used in the context of spiritual formation. While Kierkegaard is aware of the paradigm of journey as it is used to exemplify human life, his treatment of it is peculiarly Kierkegaardian. He states that the spiritual road we must walk only exists 'when we walk on it. That is, the road is how it is walked' (Kierkegaard 2007:289–290). Kierkegaard often emphasizes the 'how' over the 'what', but here he seems to state that we must see the how as the what. For Kierkegaard, the road is only present when it is walked on. It seems this corresponds with Stevens' emphasis on the relationship with God (Kierkegaard's 'how') over the orbiting trappings of a walk with God. For Stevens, spiritual formation is so highly dependent upon the individual's relationship with God that attempting to identify the path through activity or direction first is not only counterproductive but nonsensical (Stevens 1976a:168). There is a destination and a path, but these cease to exist if the individual is not walking with God. Kierkegaard (1967:150) reiterates the biblical truth that Christ is the way in this context. Stevens would certainly agree with the application of this scripture.

Perhaps, though, the most dialogically insightful comparison regarding the paradigms of Kierkegaard and Stevens comes in Kierkegaard's characterization of the sacrifice of Isaac. Kierkegaard holds that the defining moment which proved Abraham esteemed his relationship with God above all else was not actually his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Rather, it was his ability to hear God stopping him from following through, and his resulting choice to stay his hand. Abraham's true obedience was his ability to change his mind quickly once he heard the voice of the Lord (Kierkegaard 2007:89–90). The hallmark of each paradigm is not necessarily the obedience to God beyond all other considerations, but rather the ongoing relationship which becomes the definition of the individual's being and choices. Stevens' paradigmatic concept of a walk with God places the relationship with God standing above all things, even God's prior commands. This ongoing attitude in a walk with God keeps the believer in a process of successive transformation, for the relationship itself is the path of Christian maturity.

The theo-philosophical foundations of Stevens' theory involve the interrelated concepts of Christlikeness, the sin nature, God's role

in spiritual transformation, pneumatology, relationship, revelation, and biblical anthropology (Stevens 1986:608; 1987:568-569; 2007a:407; 2007b:279–281). Stevens' theological foundations are primarily standard Christian tenets viewed from the angle of relational spiritual formation. The central theological foundation of Stevens' theory is the salvation through Christ provided by the Father. This foundation includes the process of becoming like Christ—for his salvation is meant to completely transform the believer into a new creature. The achievement of Christlikeness is a prevalent theme of the NT (John 1:12; 2 Pet 1:4a; Rom 8:17; Heb 2:10–11), and Stevens sees it as the end goal of salvation. This foundation addresses the sin nature and the need to remove it in favour of Christ's nature. In order to understand the process of spiritual formation, the believer must understand the nature of the object of transformation. The human being is naturally sinful in his or her ontological state. Genuine spiritual formation must address the sin nature, if any genuine change is to occur. Further, the sin nature is unable to change itself. This theological principle forms the heart of Stevens' view that Christian transformation only occurs by the hand of God, through Christ, and by the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, fuels the recognition of the next major theological truth in the theory, which is God's role in transformation.

This foundation places God as the originator of transformation. God sent Christ to the earth to reconcile man back to God. The reconciliation of relationship is both a means and an end of spiritual formation. The relationship with God through Christ generates change. However, the mature believer is equipped to relate to God in deeper ways. Pneumatologically, the Holy Spirit is integral to spiritual formation, for he is intimately involved in the process of becoming a new creation (Gal 3:3, 6:14–15). This direct connection between the Holy Spirit and a walk with God is seen more directly in the Pauline concept of walking by the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Stevens' theological foundation of relationship in a walk with God is further found in a Trinitarian grounding—that is, the believer pursues and maintains interconnected but distinct relationships with Father, Son, and Spirit. This relationality is pervasive in Stevens' theory, as the believer is spiritually impotent toward transformation and is therefore dependent upon the Trinity in the achievement of any genuine change. The foremost theological principle which drives this relationship is revelation. Stevens sees revelation as available and necessary in the present.

Revelation arises from Scripture and will always find confirmation in the Bible, but its receipt by the believer is not constrained to the

holy text. Revelation is an internal reception of the Word of God which naturally results in change. It is therefore a tool of relationship and of formation simultaneously. Finally, Stevens' theory cannot be understood outside of a spirit-focused biblical anthropology. Stevens emphasizes the difference between soul and spirit, stating that the spirit is the aspect of the human which is able to connect with God. This all must occur through the use of the believer's spirit, rather than his soul or body. God is a Spirit, and he can only be related to by spirit. The believer must therefore be aware of his or her spirit as the faculty by which the transformational relationship with God is pursued. These theological foundations together place Scriptural and theological truths as the basis of a walk with God.

The foremost general difference between Stevens and Kierkegaard is the weighting between philosophy and theology. Kierkegaard is more philosophical in his approach. Stevens is more biblical. Regardless, the role of Jesus Christ and the incarnation is central to both. The requirement of a relationship with God in the pursuit of transformation—while recognized from different angles—is also agreed upon as being of superlative importance. Kierkegaard pursues philosophical paradoxes and absurdities in order to show that pure rationality is insufficient in addressing the spiritual nature of a relationship with God. Stevens takes a different approach in that he focuses on systematically connecting scriptures in order to present a holistic view of a spiritual relationship with God in the Christian context. Kierkegaard desires to disrupt his reader's rationality with the intent to focus the believer on a subjective faith, which he sees as the only effective approach in attempting to achieve a true relationship with the Christian God. Stevens on the other hand desires to work with the reader's understanding in order to present practical applications of spiritual biblical truths. However, Kierkegaard's requirement of subjective epistemology is also compatible with Stevens' theory in that the believer must be personal in the application of the Word of God. Stevens would never assert that God's truth is subjective, but he would certainly agree that pure rationality is insufficient to the task of an authentic, spiritual reception of the Word. For Stevens (1987:886), revelation stands as the spiritual principle which answers the deficiencies of reason.

The primary activities in Stevens' theory are true to its relational centring: authenticity, intensity, awareness and focus, God's dealings, transference, the Word, repentance, and waiting on the Lord (Stevens 1971b:73–74; 1972:154–155; 1981:78; 1986:615–616). Some of these activities are not conventionally identified as

spiritually formative actions. Rather, they are internal attitudes or focuses which must be intentionally undertaken by the believer. Through Stevens' relational lens, activities of spiritual formation must contribute to the believer's relationship with God. For this reason, formative activities may actually be attitudes, such as authenticity, intensity, and awareness. In a walk with God, he accomplishes the movement of formation (Stevens 1987:568–569). If the activities of spiritual formation are merely an expression of self-discipline, they will be ineffective. However, if the activities of spiritual formation lead to increased intercourse with God, they will produce Christian maturity. This general attitude regarding the primacy of an enacted relationship with the divine—that is, a walk with God—informs Stevens' attitude on the activities. Acting is of utmost importance, but the form of such action arises from a focus on God himself. The attitude of authenticity allows for honesty and transparency in a relationship with God. Such authenticity allows God 'access' to the human being for the accomplishment of his formative goals. Intensity is required of the believer to continually seek God and his will. Awareness of God is a requirement in relating to him. The believer must cultivate a spiritual awareness of God in order to walk with him. Other activities describe the believer's reception of God, such as God's dealings and transference. God's dealings are God's own disciplinary activities which mature his children. Transference involves the impartation of godliness by God to the believer. Devotional activities such as the reading of the Word, repentance, and waiting on the Lord must also be enacted relationally. The reading of the Word is a practical activity which facilitates impartation of Christ's own attributes. Repentance pushes out the sin nature and seeks God for Christ's nature. Waiting on the Lord is perhaps the most relational activity of all, for it positions the believer to forego all other concerns in favour of hearing the voice of the Lord and receiving from him.

Kierkegaard's account of formative activities is also made up primarily of attitudinal stances or internal metaphysical acts. This is both complementary and confirmatory to Stevens' approach. For example, Kierkegaard's treatment of passion, choice, and the death to self corresponds with Stevens' treatment of intensity, authenticity, and the dealings of God. These activities are products of the fundamental relationality of both theories.

However, the difference between the two theories is Stevens' greater emphasis on the role of God. Kierkegaard is very focused on the activities which exemplify the state of being as an authentic

single individual. Kierkegaard certainly recognizes that God is the ultimate source of spiritual change, but he approaches the activities of the God relation as primarily acts of human will. Stevens, on the other hand, prioritizes God's role in transformation. The believer may be able to take action which garners God's response, but the ultimate executor of transformation is God.

This synthetic summary reveals that Stevens' writings on a walk with God represent a holistic and relational approach to spiritual formation. All elements of his theory function together as a whole, centred upon the spiritually formative efficacy of an ongoing relationship with God in Christ. The concept of relationship is the quintessence of Stevens' theory. The relationship with God functions throughout, from goal to activities, from end to means. The paradigmatic concept of a walk with God captures this in a biblical metaphor. A walk with God as well as such variants as 'walking in the Spirit' is ubiquitously resonant with the text of the Bible and is therefore particularly ripe to adequately represent a theory of Christian spiritual formation. The theological foundations include the reconciliatory power of Christ's sacrifice, which brings humanity back into relationship with God. This enables the process of maturation, for a relationship with God ensures an ongoing connection with the divine source of transformation. The pervasiveness of the principle of relationship is perhaps best seen in Stevens' formulation of the activities of spiritual formation. Such attitudes as intensity and awareness are not commonly construed as activities, but the relationship with God cannot be accomplished without them. Relationship, therefore, stands as a holistic glue in the theory as a whole, tying together goal, theology, and activity within the paradigm of a walk with God. The holism of the theory therefore primarily rests upon its relationality.

4. A Critique of Stevens' Theory of Spiritual Formation

In analysing Stevens' writings, there are four general problems which emerge: the lack of definitions of his terminology, the missing detail in his presentation of certain exegetical work, the general avoidance of addressing opposing viewpoints, and the lack of systematization. These weaknesses are the foundational issues behind the subjects deserving of the critique in his theory.

The first major area of critique regards Stevens' trichotomist anthropology. Stevens' theory maintains that a relationship with God must be undertaken in a spiritual manner—that is, by the

human spirit. Stevens often emphasizes the difference between soul and spirit, stating that the human spirit is the faculty by which transformational communing with God is possible.

It seems the dichotomist position is more in favour within contemporary scholarship, so the Scriptural support of trichotomy must be examined in order to critically address Stevens' anthropological enumeration. An analysis of Scripture regarding the various terms for 'soul' and 'spirit' reveals a broad overlap between the usages of soul and spirit. However, they cannot be said to be exactly interchangeable. A proper scriptural anthropology should recognize both the similarities and the differences in these concepts. A holistic view of anthropology may supply the necessary nuance with which to do so. Similarly to the organs of the body, perhaps the non-corporeal aspects of the human mentioned in Scripture—including soul, spirit, heart, self, and inner man—may be seen as describing various functionalities of the human being. In this critique of Stevens' anthropology, it is suggested that his trichotomist position should be abandoned as it does not accurately reflect the biblical usages of spirit and soul. Further, the holistic view of anthropology would be a better fit for his theory which is already strongly holistic in nature.

Another aspect of major critique is Stevens' lack of theological philosophical foundations regarding subjectivity, relationship, ontology, and ethics. Kierkegaard's existentialist approach to these four topics helps to establish missing theological-philosophical foundations required in Stevens' theory. Stevens' concept of a walk with God is based primarily upon a seemingly subjective generator of change—that is, the believer's relationship with God. Kierkegaard embraces subjectivity in the process of becoming, maintaining that truth must be apprehended personally and internally for it to cause genuine change. If Christ is ontologically the truth (John 14:16), then the fruit of a relationship with him will necessarily be objectively true. Further, Kierkegaard's distinction between the subjective and the abstract is beneficial in adding nuance to Stevens' emphasis on the internalized Word of God. An abstract knowledge of God is not transformative, but a relationship in which God's truth is internalized is transformative. This leads to the identification of ontology as another necessary foundation left unaddressed by Stevens.

While Stevens' nearly absent discussion of the ethical is a weakness of his theory, Kierkegaard provides a possible clarification of the problem in that he states that a focus on ethical behaviour does not lead to change. The transformational

relationship with God is a prerequisite to the genuinely ethical life, for the human being must be fundamentally changed, if he or she is to behave ethically.

A further element of Stevens' theory which deserves critique is his pneumatology, which is ever-present but never sufficiently detailed. The Holy Spirit and his role are discussed often by Stevens, but he does not provide a proper accounting of pneumatology as a whole. A deeper analysis clarifies Stevens' views, concluding that he sees the Holy Spirit as a person available in a distinct relationship to the believer among the Members of the Trinity, that the engagement with the Holy Spirit is the prerequisite for being spiritual, and that the Spirit is a purveyor of God's Word toward Christlikeness.

The final area of critique is Stevens' concept of impartation. The concept of impartation was clarified by Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication, by which he proposes that existential matters are best communicated indirectly. This is a relational view of teaching and is applicable in a theory of spiritual formation which sees the relationship with God as the means by which ontological transformation occurs. Impartation is a spiritual bestowal of a characteristic of God, often by the Holy Spirit, which causes permanent change or addition to the believer. Impartation is therefore a spiritual mechanism of relational formation.

John Robert Stevens' theory of spiritual formation certainly has its weaknesses, gaps, and unarticulated foundations. However, none of these problems are ultimately deleterious to the theory as a whole. Stevens' views are largely compatible with the spiritual formation literature and with Kierkegaard's existentialist concepts. Therefore, necessary theological supplementation is achievable.

5. Summary Propositions

The following are the summary propositions for the goal, paradigmatic concept, theo-philosophical foundations, and activities of spiritual formation, as well as of spiritual formation itself. These reflect Stevens' theory as well as the critique and supplementation of his theory:

The goal of spiritual formation is an internalized Christlikeness on both an individual and corporate level which emerges from a maintained ontological state of relationship with Christ, by the Holy Spirit, toward the establishment of God's Kingdom on the earth.

The paradigm of a walk with God encapsulates spiritual formation in the context of an active, authentic, covenantal relationship with God, centred on the Lordship of Jesus Christ, expressed in love, hunger, dedication, and submission, and enacted directionally, on both an individual and communal level.

The theological basis of spiritual formation reflects the complete salvific power of Christ manifested in a relational pursuit of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit engaged through a holistic anthropology, which results in the removal of the change-resistant sin nature and imparts Christlikeness through a process of spiritual transference.

Activities which promote spiritual formation are foundationally relational, including attitudes such as authenticity, spiritual hunger, and awareness, include the believer's proper response of accepting God's formative dealings, as well as devotional actions of spiritual connectivity such as engagement with the Word of God, repentance, and waiting on the Lord.

Christian spiritual formation is a relational endeavour in which ontological maturity toward Christlikeness is realized via an interactive, obedient, and holistic relationship with three persons of the Trinity in an ongoing walk with God, who is the only source of true spiritual transformation.

6. Conclusion

It was proposed that John Robert Stevens utilizes the Scriptural concept of a walk with God as a paradigmatic concept of a holistic theory of spiritual formation. This general hypothesis was proven to be true through the processes of identification, exegetical analyses, synthesis, and systematization of Stevens' writings. It was further hypothesized that Kierkegaard's views on identity and growth were relevant and potentially helpful in clarifying Stevens' views on spiritual formation. This was also found to be true through the comparison, contrast, and reconciliation between the two authors. However, the points of comparison between the two also highlighted a major critique of Stevens.

While Stevens' concept of a walk with God is existential in nature, he does not provide a strong theo-philosophical foundation for the required underlying existential concepts, such as authenticity, subjectivism, relationship, and ontology. It was also further suggested that Stevens' theory of spiritual formation was unique in two ways. Firstly, it is holistic in that all parts of the theory

relate to all other parts, and that it only works as a complete whole. Secondly, the theory is centred on a relationship with God.

These two points proved to be true in the course of this project, although Stevens' relationality is not as unique as initially hypothesized. Stevens' concept of a walk with God cannot be understood except as a holistic view of the Christian life which leads to the growth of the believer.

It is holistic in two ways: as a self-consistent whole along the four axes of spiritual formation in which all aspects function cohesively together, and in its holistic view of spiritual formation as an endeavour found throughout the Christian life. A walk with God inculcates the pursuit of spiritual growth into an obedient relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Its greatest strength is in its integration of the relationship with God as both the goal and the means of spiritual formation.

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Review of Craig G Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction*

Robert Falconer

Bartholomew CG 2017. *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

1. Author Profile

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¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

2. Background to the Book

It has been said that we are living in a ‘Kuyperian moment’, not to mention the recent translation of Herman Bavinck’s 4-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, his *Reformed Ethics* under translation, and Abraham Kuyper’s 12-volume *Collected Works in Public Theology* nearing the end of its translation and publication. Some, like Bartholomew and myself, argue that in this fragile age of ours, the Kuyperian tradition may offer resources for discovering constructive ways that may defuse some of the major threats we face in our world, and yet also bring renewed life to the church, promoting human flourishing. In his life and theology, Kuyper was proactive in contextualising the Christian faith in whatever new situation it might find itself. To that end, Bartholomew begins by orienting the reader to the current context of our modern or postmodern world a hundred years after Abraham Kuyper. Interestingly, being South African, he also starts off by setting the book in the South African context, the problems of Apartheid and today’s current political and socio-economic concerns.

3. Summary of the Book

Introduction: Seeking the Welfare of the City

While Bartholomew argues that religion is needed by healthy politics and the nation, in South Africa the relationship between politics and Christianity has had a troubled past, despite producing the likes of Desmond Tutu. He reminds us that many Christians, notably Reformed Christians, used Christianity to promote apartheid. It is for this reason that Reformed Christianity often lacks credibility in South Africa, so Bartholomew says.

The introduction to this chapter poses the challenge that Christianity can be part of the solution, and that South Africa, and other nations, are desperate for the church to find ways to bring about *shalom* in the future.

Abraham Kuyper sought to give expression to the notion that the role of authentic Christianity is to alert people to the universal reign of God, demonstrating ‘what it means to follow Christ in every sphere of life’ (Bartholomew 2017:100). Yet, while there are concerns about Kuyper’s views on racial purity,² his thought and the theological tradition that flows from him offer rich resources for Christians of every race in their faithfulness to their God-given calling to be ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world’.

² Nevertheless, in an obscure footnote, Bartholomew mentions a powerful anecdote, a conversation between John Bolt, an American-Dutch Reformed theologian who translated Herman Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* into English as *Reformed Dogmatics*, and the late great Ghanaian theologian of Christianity in Africa, Kwame Bediako. After hearing Bediako describe the chaotic political condition of West Africa and after having watched documentaries on Thomas Jefferson, Bolt asked Bediako whether West Africa was in urgent need of its own Thomas Jefferson. Bediako smiled and replied, ‘What Africa needs even more today is its own Abraham Kuyper’ (Bartholomew 2017:10-11); For an example of Kuyper’s racial views, cf. Kuyper’s *Stone Lectures on Calvinism*, (1905), pp. 32, 84, and 196. In response cf. Strauss (1996), and Jooste (2013), esp. p 245.

This book aims to offer an analysis of the systematic contours of Kuyper's thought, along with that of his followers, in order that we, today, might learn from the Kuyperian tradition.

Chapter 1: Abraham Kuyper's Conversion

No doubt, Abraham Kuyper's achievements were extraordinary! He was a pastor, a fine theologian, a political activist, a leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in Holland, prime minister, co-founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, a prolific journalist, an author of a good number of books, and a church reformer. Yet, he was critical of the kind of Christianity in which he grew up. Despite being a student of theology, his real interests were in literature, and he denied the eternal deity of Christ, insisting rather that Jesus was only a man, and was generally theologically unorthodox. But it was reading the British novel of 1853, *The Heir of Redclyffe* by Charlotte Yonge, that, as Kuyper retells it, broke his 'smug, rebellious heart' and brought him to his knees, pulling him into the kingdom of God. And in his first sermon, he emphasized how fellowship with God is 'the highest aspiration of the human heart' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:19). It was also during this conversion that Kuyper began to rediscover the theology of John Calvin. After an account of Kuyper's conversion, the chapter continues to describe his reaction to modernism, which he took as a kind of realism, but one which quickly becomes materialism. He compares it to the historic challenge of Arianism, which in the end only made the Church stronger having overcome it. Evidently, without his conversion, he would have never achieved all that he did, because it enabled him to see that the centre of the Christian life is a living relationship with God himself through Christ Jesus and by the work of the Holy Spirit. The chapter is a reminder to all of us that we too are to be converted, that we too might have such a living relationship with this celestial King. It is this relationship that enables us to have a missional vision of the kingdom. This conversion led Kuyper from a liberal view of Scripture to a hermeneutic of trust in God's written Word, putting emphasis on personal rebirth in relation to the experience of the kingdom of God, and he longed for a lively orthodox Christianity and a church that embraced contextualization without undermining the gospel of Christ.

Chapter 2: Creation and Redemption

The blazing centre of 'the Kuyperian tradition is the sovereign God, who has come to us in Christ' (Bartholomew 2017:35).

Kuyper advocates a *particular grace* for the salvation of the elect, which in turn presupposes *common grace*, that is, God's preserving of his creation after the fall.

His view of the work of Christ, therefore, extends beyond the saving of individuals, to include the renewal of all of creation. The implications of this are that Christianity is not only relevant to church and mission, as important as they are, but to all areas of life, avoiding sacred/secular dualism. The chapter highlights Kuyper's affirmation of re-creation, yet Bartholomew suggests, and I think correctly so, that Bavinck's theology of a *renewed* creation, that is, the restoration of creation,³ is considerably more helpful than Kuyper's view. Bavinck, who wrote more theology than Kuyper, offered a more helpful view on common grace and had a stronger emphasis on eschatology. I find myself appreciative of Bavinck's eschatology. I was glad to see Bartholomew pick up on the distinction and Bavinck's eschatological development.

3 cf. Bavinck 2008:715-730.

A helpful overview of Bavinck's theology of nature and grace is offered in the chapter, which then explores the major views in some detail, namely: (1) grace against nature (Anabaptism), (2) grace over nature (Roman Catholicism), (3) grace alongside nature (Lutheranism), (4) grace within nature (Calvinism), and (5) grace equals nature (liberalism). The Kuyperian tradition, of course, takes the view of grace working within nature, healing it of sin and evil. Kuyperians take the gospel to be the healing power that renews creation, bringing it in line with God's original design and future consummation— grace restores nature.

Chapter 3: Scripture

Bartholomew, unapologetically, makes it clear that at the very heart of the Kuyperian tradition is also the conviction that 'God has spoken authoritatively and finally in Jesus and that we find his fully trustworthy Word in the Bible, which is normative for all of life.' (2017:78). Both Kuyper and Bavinck were exposed to critical biblical scholarship, and yet while they were not biblical scholars themselves, they had a firm understanding of modernist theology and biblical criticism and responded to it accordingly with vigour. Kuyper developed three primary critiques of biblical criticism (2017:83): (1) it tears apart theology and substitutes it for something that is not theology, (2) it robs Christians of their Scriptures, and (3) it leads to unhelpful clericalism in the church.

While Kuyper affirms the inspiration of the original Biblical monographs, he rightly rejects the ‘magical dictation’ view, but does allow for some incoherence in one’s understanding of inspiration, so long as it maintains the orthodox view of inspiration, and yet, despite his criticism, he recognises the value of affirming critical biblical scholarship insofar as it explores the history of the Bible’s production.

Bavinck, on the other hand, stresses that word and fact go together in the revelation of Scripture, Scripture being the servant form of revelation. Bartholomew explains how Bavinck finds himself at home in Kuyper’s view, but he expands upon it, arguing for a more organic view of inspiration, enabling an understanding of Scripture coming more fully into its own. Both Kuyper and Bavinck saw with absolute clarity, the importance of holding fast to Scripture as God’s infallible word. The chapter ends on a disappointing note, that mainstream biblical criticism has, for the most part, triumphed in the Netherlands. In contrast, Bartholomew urges that Biblical studies in the Kuyperian tradition update and reform, and proclaims that ‘Kuyper calls us back to Scripture and then out into the world, to being thoroughly biblical and thoroughly culturally engaged.’ (2017:99).

Chapter 4: Worldview

Bartholomew offers an anecdote of how he experienced worldview and the illumination and excitement of being able to name his Christian faith as a worldview which extended beyond the ‘church view’ and included the whole of creation becoming the theatre of God’s glory. Yet, it never occurred to him that the Kuyperian tradition and the Christian worldview could be used in support of Apartheid. Nevertheless, it helped him to see how the gospel bears critically on all spheres of life, including the racism of South Africa.

Kuyper’s Stone lectures, or *Lecture’s on Calvinism*, presented at Princeton in 1898 gave expression to his passion that Calvinism relates to all of life, and that it ought to work tirelessly to relate God’s sovereign law to all of life. Unfortunately though, as Bartholomew relates, Kuyper never really developed a logically tight theory of the Christian worldview. Nonetheless, he saw Calvinism as a worldview because it has a distinct theology and church order, along with a political and social life, through which one might interpret the order of the world. One ought to keep in mind, according to Bartholomew, that while Kuyper saw Calvinism as the only adequate worldview in which to view the world, he used the term in a broader sense.

Worldview according to the Kuyperian tradition, is that which springs from our lives and our hearts and is then reflected and informed by what is termed antithesis, that is the gap between humanity's finitude and God's infinity. For Kuyper, Calvinism has restructured previous models whereby the church was against the world, setting the church over the world, and withdrawing control from the church in order for all of life under God to emerge.

The cultural mandate of Genesis 1 was therefore rediscovered along with the vocation, so that God is to be served in all areas in life. Despite frequent use of 'worldview', there have been some criticisms, namely (2017:118–124), (1) it intellectualizes the gospel, (2) it universalizes the gospel, (3) it relativizes the gospel, (4) it becomes disconnected from Scripture and thus becomes vulnerable to the spirits of the age, and (5) rather than leading to the transformation of society, a worldview entrenches middle-class Christianity and leads to unhealthy messianic activism. Notwithstanding, Bartholomew defines worldview as, 'articulation of the basic beliefs embedded in a shared grand story which are rooted in a faith commitment and which give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives.' (2017:124). Worldview is then an analysis of our beliefs and their interrelatedness. Bartholomew argues that if being human means that we all have worldviews, then surely as Christians we should have a Christian worldview.

Chapter 5: Sphere Sovereignty: Kuyper's Philosophy of Society

In this chapter, it is argued from a Kuyperian perspective, that 'Cultural engagement requires a philosophy of society' (Bartholomew 2017:131). Yet, as Bartholomew bemoans, Christians often fail to influence their contexts because of a lack of understanding of their own context; they are unable to develop a nuanced approach with respect to how the gospel might impact their culture. This chapter on Sphere Sovereignty demonstrates how Abraham Kuyper was remarkably engaged with his society and culture. His 'sphere sovereignty' really becomes the framework for his philosophy of society. One ought to keep in mind, however, that his 'sphere sovereignty' was built upon the work of John Calvin and his mentor and friend, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer. According to the framework of sphere sovereignty,⁴ God provides temporal and spiritual authorities as part of his plan for this world. The original and absolute authority resides in the majesty of the triune God who is the only sovereign.

⁴ 'In his *Our Program* Kuyper fleshes out the implications of sphere sovereignty for government and other areas of life'.

The notion finds expression in Kuyper's most famous quotation, 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!"' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:147). While this sovereignty does not lead to determinism, it offers the basis for authentic human freedom. Therefore, God delegates his authority to humans, which allows us to witness God's authority exercised in human office. At the very core of sphere sovereignty is that creation is never self-sufficient, but is contingent on its creator for existence, meaning, and flourishing. Sphere sovereignty helps us to differentiate between the various areas of culture and public life.

Bartholomew, however, does point out that sphere sovereignty is not as 'clear cut' as Kuyper has made it out to be and that 'the boundaries between spheres are far from absolute' (2017:143). As helpful as sphere sovereignty is, it seems to me that one ought not be too emphatic. The Kuyperian tradition encourages Christians to 'engage in the spheres in such a way that they become healthier and directed rightly so that they flourish' (2017:144). The chapter then offers further reflection on issues like (2017:147–157), (1) politics: the state between absolutization and libertarianism, (2) the church, (3) activity, that is, Christian involvement in the spheres, (4) the economics of globalization, (5) the challenge of Islam, and (6) the controversies of sphere sovereignty and apartheid. In light of Kuyper's racist views, Bartholomew unapologetically states that although his views reflect the times, they are the lowest point in Kuyper's thought. His racial comments were wrong and profoundly unhelpful with respect to the future of South Africa. Nevertheless, Bartholomew considers sphere sovereignty a helpful heuristic in discovering the shape of society, yet he believes, and I think rightly so, that it is in need of further thought and development.

Chapter 6: The Church

Bartholomew begins his chapter on the church by proclaiming, 'In our Western world the church is too often like a slumbering giant, fast asleep while its energy and life are sorely needed' (2017:161). Yet, Kuyper sounds the call to awake this slumbering giant, as he wrestled with what it means to be the church in such a way that it is contemporary and relevant.

Abraham Kuyper and the Kuyperian tradition lay emphasis on the church as our mother, reminiscent of Cyprian's words, 'You cannot have God for your father if you have not the church as your mother' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:163).

Bartholomew explains how one begins with the church and concludes with culture, with Calvinism as the glue that joins the two, at least this is according to Kuyper. Kuyper articulated a view of the church as follows: (1) the church is a free community of faithful believers, (2) voluntarily gathered through loyalty to Christ (Bartholomew 2017:167), (3) made alive by the work of the Spirit in the heart, (4) performs works of righteousness in the world, and (5) thus sows the seeds of the kingdom of God, (6) which is the distinctive teaching of Jesus. Among other discussions, Bartholomew explores issues of the church as organism and institute, liturgy, mission and the spirituality of the church, which are no doubt helpful in understanding the church from the Kuyperian perspective. Of interest, though, is the author's review of Bavinck's theology of the church.

Bavinck has a clearer articulation of the relationship between the church as an organism and institution, which for him are both parts of the visible church. The invisible church, on the other hand, reminds one that there is also a spiritual dimension to the church. Not dissimilar to Kuyper, Bavinck also views the church as our mother, but assigns the attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity to the church. He believes that the church 'distributes its spiritual goods for the benefit of the whole of humanity and for every aspect of human life' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:185; cf. Bavinck 2008:390). As Bartholomew points out, 'The gospel is good news not only for the individual but for humanity as a whole: for the family, for society, for the state, for art and academia, for the cosmos, for the entire groaning creation.' (2017:185; cf. Bavinck 2008:437).

Chapter 7: Politics, the Poor, and Pluralism

The introduction of Chapter 7 reminds us that Protestantism has generally viewed government as a post-fall institution and as an aspect of God's common grace to restrain evil and uphold social justice. Bartholomew is persuaded, however, that government is given with creation, having a far more positive role even after the fall. Nevertheless, politics is a significant part of contemporary society and thus ought not to be neglected. It is not surprising that Abraham Kuyper then gave much focus to Christian political action, in a pluralist milieu, a space in which alternative visions competed in the public arena. Kuyper was not a political theorist, and yet he was an 'organic intellectual' when it came to politics.⁵

At the very centre of Kuyper's political agenda was his theology of sphere sovereignty, arguing that the right to execute authority is delegated by God alone.

⁵ Some of his Christian political energies were in co-founding the Free University, establishing a political party, the Anti Revolutionary Party (ARP), and facilitating the development of a nationwide network of Christian schools.

6 cf. Kuyper 2015.

Kuyper argued that Scripture, as well as the study of creation and history, ought to be that by which the government is to determine its laws. Yet, when it comes to justice, God alone has the right to determine what is just and unjust. Nevertheless, as Bartholomew points out, Kuyper was careful to avoid biblicism, being mindful that the Bible is not a catalogue of legal requirements ready at hand, but is the inspired record of God's revelation about life. Kuyper emphasised that the state is a dynamic moral organism which arises in response to God's laws for creation. In this way it is a part of a living whole, that is one sphere among many spheres. One needs to keep in mind that Kuyper's agenda here in *Our Program* is not a vision for a Calvinistic utopia but is rather intended for the flourishing of the whole country.⁶ While being a realist and being acutely aware that inequality will always be with us, he pursued a certain degree of equality whereby basic needs would be met, namely, shelter, food, and clothing. Bartholomew ends off the chapter with the following exhortation,

When it comes to Kuyper's thought on the issues of his day, one cannot help but feel that Kuyperians have failed to hear this call. Prophetically, Kuyper saw consumerism emerging in the wake of industrialization, and in this respect, Kuyper must be reckoned alongside Karl Marx. We live now amid the tsunami of global consumerism, with an apartheid-like economic divide between North and South. And most Western Christians seem quite content with this situation (2017:212).

Chapter 8: Mission

The heartbeat of God's people is mission, to be sent. Abraham Kuyper and the Kuyperian tradition offer us a wonderful and comprehensive vision of mission. Bartholomew points out in the chapter how 'all of Christian life has a missional *dimension*, not all of it is characterised by a missional *intention*' (2017:214). While Kuyper addressed the topic of mission, as primarily evangelism, particularly to the Jews, Muslims, and pagans, his theology and worldview were thoroughly missional. He argued that Scripture ought not to be used to criticise the methodologies of missions, but rather to construct an architectonic theory of mission from Scripture, together with ethnological, historical, and psychological studies, in addition to knowledge of other religions and the skill of persuasion and the conviction of sin. Evidently, Kuyper recognised the need for contextualisation.

However, it was Herman Bavinck's nephew, Johan H Bavinck who pioneered missiology in the Kuyperian tradition, arguing that missiology is an integral part of theology.

He initially placed the focus on mission in preaching the gospel and on pastoral concern, but later integrated mission into the Kuyperian concept of mission in all areas of life. In turn, this anticipated the work of the Kuyperian scholar and philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff. For Bavinck, the doctrine of creation is foundational for mission, because creation means that no one nation is higher or better than another before God, for God is sovereign over all of creation, all of it is his. Biblically then, the motivation for mission is God's glory. Salvation is inclusive of both personal and cosmic dimensions and encroaches on every aspect of human life, according to Bavinck. For him, mission finds its place in the context of biblical eschatology and God's kingdom, 'missionary activity is oriented toward God's purpose for the world, his eternal kingdom' (Bartholomew 2017:229–230).

Chapter 9: Philosophy

In this chapter, Bartholomew tells us that while Abraham Kuyper himself did not give much attention to developing a philosophy, today the philosophy of such luminaries such as Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and C Stephen Evens have been deeply shaped by the Kuyperian tradition. Although Kuyper never says that he is doing philosophy, he does so, at least implicitly when he discussed science,⁷ and he does it well, according to Bartholomew. So, while Kuyper practised Christian Philosophy implicitly, Herman Bavinck explicitly recognised the need for a philosophy of revelation. Both Kuyper and Bavinck gave the Stone Lectures at Princeton, although Bavinck's lectures were devoted to the theme of the philosophy of revelation, arguing that 'Christianity does not conflict with reason but has a content that transcends reason. Revelation disclosed the mystery of God, providing us with insight that is available in no other way' (Bartholomew 2017:525). He believed that revelation has implications for all of life, including philosophy. Nevertheless, Bartholomew states that Bavinck's philosophy was actually more in line with studies in worldview than a Christian philosophy and that it was up to the Kuyperians, Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven to develop the contours of Christian philosophy. Today, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff have developed a Kuyperian philosophy along analytic lines, called Reformed epistemology. And the philosophy developed from Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven is known as Reformational philosophy.

The chapter offers discussions on both philosophies within the Kuyperian tradition. Firstly, in the Reformational philosophy, Bartholomew acknowledges how Dooyeweerd's philosophical work is heavily reliant on Kuyper's work.

⁷ Today when we talk of science we think of natural science, but for Kuyper it is all of the academic disciplines (Bartholomew 2017:243).

Drawing deeply from the Kuyperian understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, Dooyeweerd identified four ground motives in which he outlined much of his philosophy (2017:255–256), (1) the form-matter ground motive, (2) the mature-grave ground motif, (3) the nature-freedom ground motive, and (4) Creation-fall-redemption. Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty in creation was also foundational to Dooyeweerd’s philosophical output. Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven constructed their Christian philosophy from a Continental approach, having been influenced by neo-Kantianism, Martin Heidegger, and Edmund Husserl. Secondly, Bartholomew discusses Reformed epistemology. It was in 1980 that *Time* magazine identified Alvin Plantinga as the ‘world’s leading Protestant philosopher of God’ (Bartholomew 2017:260).

A result of Reformed epistemology is the theory of Classical foundationalism, which is ‘a picture or total way of looking at faith, knowledge, justified belief, rationality, and allied topics’ (2017:260), which has been hugely popular in Western thought. Plantinga and Wolterstorff have developed philosophy in many areas, such as science and evolution, education, liturgy, justice, biblical interpretation, and so on.

Although Bartholomew has a preference for Continental Reformational philosophy and views all of Christian philosophy as inherently missional, he believes that Reformed epistemology has been the more perceptive of the two, grappling with the epistemological foundations of philosophy in a major dialogue with mainstream philosophy. He implies that if one wishes to do Christian scholarship, one ought to be grounded in Christian philosophy.

Chapter 10: Theology

Although Abraham’s public work received most of the attention, he was first and foremost a theologian. Yet, little theology has been developed from the Kuyperian tradition in recent years, with most of the focus being placed on politics and philosophy. Bartholomew sees this as a serious mistake, and argues that the rich theology of the three great theologians of the Kuyperian tradition, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and GC Berkouwer needs to be retrieved and updated for our day.

For Kuyper, the knowledge of God is the object of theology, and thus natural theology has little consequence.⁸

⁸ Similarly, Bavinck writes, ‘Dogmatics is, and can only exist as, the scientific system of the knowledge of God. More precisely and from a Christian viewpoint, dogmatics is the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him’ (2003:38).

He distinguishes two types of knowledge of God, (1) *archetypal knowledge*, which is God's knowledge of himself, that which is unknown to us, and (2) *ectypal knowledge*, that is, a knowledge of God that he has revealed to us. Theology finds its object in this *ectypal knowledge* of God which has been revealed to us. Kuyper was aware of creation's context and that special revelation presupposed creation and that the *imago Dei* provides the vessel for God's revelation of himself. His major insight, according to Bartholomew was that God reveals himself for his own sake and not first for the sake of humankind; this is evident in creation.

In addition, special revelation takes sin into account, and in this regard, he offers an anti-individualist view of revelation, stating that revelation is not just for the individual, but is for all of humanity and the entire creation. Kuyper taught that Scripture is God's revelation to the communion of saints. This means that theology ought not to be simply the pursuit of an individual, but that Scripture requires the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in order for us to hear God's Word through it. The Holy Spirit then interprets revelation to the church, explains Bartholomew.

As is evident in his four-volume, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck was more systematic than Kuyper, yet there is considerable agreement between the two. The next major theologian after Kuyper and Bavinck was Berkouwer, who himself engaged with Kuyper and Bavinck continuously in his *Studies in Dogmatics*, but also engaged seriously with Karl Barth as a major dialogue partner.

Both Kuyper and Bavinck constructed their theologies on the certainty that God has spoken and has done so principally in Christ as well as in Scripture, and thus is utterly foundational to theology. Lastly, they did theology that kept the whole of creation in view, making their theology public theology. Here Bartholomew exhorts the church to develop a contemporary theology of the world.

Chapter 11: Education

Early in the chapter, Bartholomew states that today a crisis in education is acknowledged widely, and that it needs some kind of grand narrative in which it can find its purpose. He advises that the old consumer, mechanical, or technological approach for getting educated to get a job will no longer do.

The chapter highlights education as one of the spheres in sphere sovereignty,⁹ and that the family, school, and government all connect in this educational sphere.

⁹ cf. Kuyper's recently translated and published work, *On Education* (2019).

Kuyper disregards a neutral public education as ‘moral suicide’, and states that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children, and that inappropriate interference from the state is dangerous. Bartholomew explains how for Kuyper, while parents ought to decide on the way in which their children are to be educated, the church, on the other hand, decides how such principles would be preserved in the school, the government decides on the educational level, and lastly, the teachers decide how children will be taught.

He describes a sevenfold view of Christian education as follows: (1) parents hold primary responsibility for the education of their children, (2) the church has a right and the responsibility to see performed what has been promised at the time of a child’s baptism, (3) teachers must be able to make their own decisions about matters of pedagogy, (4) nurture and education are inseparable, (5) voluntary donations to support schools are better than compulsory taxation, (6) free initiatives by citizens ennoble a nation, whereas state meddling debases it, (7) a school that makes it difficult for the intellect to submit to God’s ordinances and so sets itself against the Christian religion must be deemed a curse and not a blessing for the nation (Bartholomew 2017:297).

Kuyper had a concern for the poor and the education of their children, and as Bartholomew notes, in South Africa, it is the poor who are likely to receive an inferior education, locking them into poverty. Christian education, he argues, ought not to remain a middle-class privilege, but ought to have a preferential option for the poor, especially when many poor people are Christian. This Bartholomew believes, ‘would be an extraordinary gift and witness if first-rate Christian schools were to emerge in South Africa specifically for the poorest of the poor’ (2017:305).

This chapter ends off by highlighting what Kuyper’s envisions for education: (1) *the need for intellectual coherence*. Students are to acquire a more connected view of the academic intellectual universe, in order for them to recognise and engage with the conversations that make the universe cohere (2017:309–313). (2) *the need for plausibility*. One might refer to a plausibility structure as a network of practices, habits and social interactions that support and make credible a certain set of beliefs, and the way in which one views the world. (3) *the need to be for the world*. The Christian worldview needs to be rooted in and to be embodied in a plausibility structure in order for it to be effective in being a credible witness to the world. Bartholomew argues that the Christian university as a Christian institution must not exist for itself, but for Christ and thus for his world.

It is to be a sign of the victorious ‘reign of Christ in a consumer culture gone mad’ (2017:313).

Chapter 12: The Need for Spiritual Formation

Bartholomew offers a warning to those who are as enamoured with Abraham Kuyper and his theological tradition as he is, imploring his readers not to absolutize him, reminding us of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:12 (ESV), ‘each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos”, or “I follow Cephas”, or “I follow Christ.”’ ... I follow Abraham Kuyper. The Kuyperian tradition is indeed very valuable, as long as it is biblical and offers an ‘authentic expression of Christian faith’ (Bartholomew 2017:315), and one needs to remember that the tradition is not the infallible Word of God. Thus, we ought to test all that we learn from the tradition against Scripture, says Bartholomew. Kuyper himself was very much aware of the dangers of intellectualism. Bartholomew shares such a concern, that the Kuyperian tradition may become unhelpfully cerebral, manifesting sometimes in some sort of messianic activism and triumphalism that would usher in God’s kingdom. In light of this, he sees that there is a great need for Christian spirituality in the Kuyperian tradition if we are to retrieve it, and bring it to its full potential. Prayer and the reading of Scripture, he argues are inseparable, and these practices are to be developed in the devotional life of the Kuyperian.

Herman Bavinck, himself, has argued that the imitation of Christ is the heart of spiritual life. He holds together a deep, Christocentric spirituality with cultural engagement, and suggests that true imitation of Christ is being conformed to the image of Christ. Much harm is done, Bartholomew argues, when Kuyperians make much noise about God’s sovereignty and grace but fail to demonstrate the grace and humility of Christ in their lives.

Bartholomew explains that spirituality is all about daily hidden practices that are ongoing which create space for the Holy Spirit to transform us in order that we might become more like Christ, and shine in our needy and dark world. It is therefore critical, Bartholomew argues, that Kuyperians need to learn even from those outside the tradition. But he continues to assure us that ‘the Kuyperian tradition has the resources to produce culturally savvy Christians today’¹⁰ (2017:323) Nevertheless, we are to continue to be deeply involved in our local churches, and make spirituality an integral part of our lives in every sphere, living ever more deeply in Christ the King.

¹⁰ cf. Staub (2008).

4. Evaluation of the book

Bartholomew's book, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Theology*, offers his readers a challenging, yet rich overview of a vast amount of theological output from Abraham Kuyper and Neo-Calvinism. Twelve well-chosen themes from the Kuyperian tradition were highlighted as chapters. As helpful as this is, though, one ought to keep in mind that the tradition consists of much more than these themes, and no doubt some readers would be surprised or even disappointed that other themes and issues of concern were not included in the book.¹¹ Be that as it may, the book was well ordered and skilfully written. Bartholomew's evaluations at the end of most chapters were very applicable for our own time and context, especially those instances when he related the tradition to South African history and the current situation of the beloved country. For those wanting a big picture, a bird's-eye view by way of a working summary of Abraham Kuyper's thought, and the contributions from other Kuyperians, this is an invaluable resource.

11 cf. De Jong (2018).

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Review of Chung and Mathewson, *Models of Premillennialism*

David Woods

Chung SW and Mathewson D 2018. *Models of Premillennialism*. Eugene: Cascade Books.

1. Background of the authors

Sung Wook Chung is Professor of Christian Theology and Director of Asian Initiative at Denver Seminary, where he has worked since 2005. He is an Evangelical scholar with a substantial list of publications and a record of service in both church and mission organisation leadership. David Mathewson is also on faculty at Denver Seminary where he has served as a New Testament scholar since 2011. He is well-published, particularly in the areas of Biblical Greek and the book of Revelation.

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¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

2. Purpose and approach

The Bible refers to a period of a thousand years (i.e. a millennium) explicitly only in Revelation 20, both without and with the definite article.² Premillennialism is an eschatological interpretation in which Christ will return prior to the millennium (hence *pre* millennial). The purpose of *Models of Premillennialism* is to provide an overview of how premillennial eschatology has been constructed by its proponents over the past nineteen hundred years, so that readers can understand the main characteristics of each model³ and what distinguishes it from the others. Without undue pressure to adopt any particular model, the authors seek to inform readers sufficiently to enable them to decide their own preferred form of premillennialism. Outstanding to me was their choice to avoid similar evaluation of postmillennialism and amillennialism, which are only mentioned in passing. This reduces their scope enormously, sparing the reader from a rapid spiral of complexity found in other such literature. (Of course, readers still need to establish their own preference of millennialism unless they are content to accept premillennialism on account of it being demonstrably more ancient than postmillennialism and amillennialism).

Models of Premillennialism is written for anyone who is willing to study biblical eschatology; it is not for experts; it does not require any knowledge of biblical Greek; and it is not essentially exegetical. Its aim is more modest, and its title encapsulates its focus perfectly.

3. Structure

Models of Premillennialism presents four such models, as well as several forms of premillennial eschatology propounded by influential leaders in South Korea, in five chapters. Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the chapters are not co-authored; Chung writes three chapters and Mathewson contributes two. The chapters are roughly sequenced according to the chronological development of each model, starting with historic premillennialism by Chung. He then tackles classical dispensational premillennialism in chapter 2, followed by Mathewson's review of progressive dispensationalism in chapter 3. In chapter 4, Mathewson continues to describe what he calls thematic millennialism, with Chung authoring the final chapter on historic premillennialism in South Korea. Thus, the chapters and authors are:

² The authors (p. xi) claim it appears only in Rev 20:4-6. I see it (*chilia etē*, a thousand years) from 20:2-7.

³ In this context, a 'model' refers to an interpretation of scriptural prophecy and its resulting eschatological outlook. Each major model has characteristics that distinguish it from the others, though diverse versions of a model may exist by variation of its parameters (i.e. different interpretations of some biblical texts yet within the broad boundary of that model's distinctive features.)

1. Historic premillennialism, by Chung
2. Classical Dispensational Premillennialism, by Chung
3. Progressive Dispensationalism, by Mathewson
4. Thematic Millennialism, by Mathewson
5. Historic Premillennialism in South Korea, by Chung

The format of the chapters varies somewhat, but each chapter includes an overview of its model, essential aspects of that model's hermeneutics, key historical developments and the author's critique.

This short book of 138 pages ends with a helpful bibliography, author index and scripture index.

4. Summary and critique

Introduction

In the co-authored introduction, *Models of Premillennialism* begins by presenting Revelation 20:4–6 as the central text for premillennial eschatology, and then provides a simple, clear way to classify one's eschatology: amillennialism interprets the millennium not as a future era but as a symbol of the present time between the two advents of Christ; postmillennialism regards the millennium as a still future 'golden age' that leads up to the return of Christ. Though premillennialists agree that the millennium is still in the future, they insist that it will only *begin* with the Second Coming.

Historical premillennialism

Chung begins chapter 1 by pointing out that historic premillennialism is the majority view of evangelical *theologians* (not *all* Evangelicals) today. Hermeneutically, historic premillennialism interprets the events of Revelation 20 literally and futuristically. Moreover, Revelation 19–20 flows chronologically: Christ's return in chapter 19 brings about the punishment of the beast and the false prophet; chapter 20 says that the devil follows them, being bound for a thousand years while those saints who attained the first resurrection reign with Christ on earth. After this comes the final rebellion, the judgment of the devil and of all people who were not previously resurrected. Maintaining this chronological hermeneutic in Revelation, the church is to experience the great tribulation before its deliverance at the *parousia* (appearance of Christ, i.e. the Second Coming), and the millennium itself is the time between the two resurrections.⁴

⁴ Rev. 20:5-6 refers explicitly to 'the first resurrection,' while vv. 12-13 speak of the dead 'standing before the throne' at their judgment.

The millennium is not the so-called eternal state but rather the penultimate state before it, because historic premillennialism foresees a restoration of the world before ‘the new earth’ of Revelation 21:1 (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13).

The authors regard historic premillennialism as the most scriptural position, but Chung offers little critical engagement, only mentioning that the duration of the millennium and its inhabitants are in question (i.e. whether it is literally one thousand years and whether unbelievers enter it). Chung continues with a brief history of historic premillennialism, from Polycarp (who was reportedly taught by the apostle John) to the present time. While the review is all too brief,⁵ Chung provides a helpful summary; he offers reasons for the decline in popularity of historic premillennialism from the late fourth century and details its revival under prominent modern theologians and biblical scholars, including Gundry, Carson, Moo, Blomberg, Osborne, Keener, Witherington, Erickson, Grudem and Demarest (among others!) In doing so, Chung justifies his claim that this is the eschatological model upheld by most of today’s evangelical theologians.

⁵ I should have liked to see mention of Clement, Hegesippus and Nepos, and the *Didache*.

Classical dispensational premillennialism

Classical dispensationalism, Chung explains, accounts for various means of salvation across seven dispensations of human existence, from its origins until its future final days on earth. On this timeline, the millennium is the last dispensation, the era when Christ will reign on earth. Moreover, classical dispensationalism regards Jews as having unique benefits in all ages, including the present, ‘church’ age and the coming millennial age—even a status of privilege above that of the church—as God fulfils his promises to Israel via its ancient prophets in a literal way. Thus Revelation 20 is interpreted as both literal and futurist, as opposed to symbolic or preterist, not least of all because Peter’s warning, that the devil is ‘looking for someone to devour’ (1 Pet 5:8), would seem to clash with the imprisonment of the devil during the millennium (Rev 20:1–3). Surprisingly, according to most classical dispensationalists, those who rule over the earth in Revelation 20:4–6 are not Christian martyrs, but ‘the Jews.’ Chung soon clarifies that this can mean either Jewish martyrs or resurrected Jews, but their relation to the witnesses for Jesus who were beheaded and resurrected, and also reign with Christ, is not spelled out. If one assumes the two groups are the same people, then one is left wondering about other Jewish martyrs as well as Christian martyrs from among the nations.

Significant to this eschatological model is that Revelation 19–20 are read *chronologically*, starting with the *parousia* and the condemnation of the beast and false prophet to the lake of fire, in chapter 19, then followed by the millennium and then the devil’s condemnation to join them there forever, in chapter 20.

Classical dispensationalism typically foresees the rapture of the church before the great tribulation⁶ which is characterised by the Antichrist’s persecution of ‘the Jews’. Finally, after seven years (based on Dan 9:24–27), the *parousia* of Jesus brings it to an end. Chung objects to a pretribulation rapture, appealing to Revelation 13:10 as evidence that the church must endure the tribulation; he argues that its reference to ‘God’s people’ must refer to the church, not to ‘the Jews’, because Revelation was given ‘for the churches’ (Rev 22:16). Chung’s argument is not watertight since it’s easy to counter that the Bible refers to the Jewish people as ‘God’s people’ and that their assemblies were also known as churches (*ekklēsiai*); moreover, adherents can argue that Revelation may have been written for those Jews who are ‘left behind’ after the rapture. I am not opposing Chung, but simply pointing out that his case needs further support. Similarly, Chung lacks a robust case against classical dispensationalism’s belief in three future resurrections (at the start of the great tribulation; after it at the start of the millennium; and after the millennium).

In his ‘critical engagement’ section, Chung raises three objections to classical dispensational premillennialism. Firstly, he objects to the notion of divine favour on ‘the Jews’ throughout redemptive history—especially now that Paul has spelled out the equality of Jews and gentiles in Christ (citing Eph 2:14–18 and Gal 3:28). Countering that, I am not persuaded that Paul intended unity to indicate that the Jewish people’s vocation has been revoked, nor that the one new humanity of Ephesians 2:15 is, as Chung claims, ‘totally different from the current humanity’ (p. 40). Moreover, he also finds replacement theology plausible, a notion I find unbiblical. Chung’s second objection is closely related to the first: it relates to the peculiarity of Israel, especially concerning the literal fulfilment of prophecy in the millennium, including nationhood, the land promise, the temple and priestly services. Again, Chung’s objection is too brief: just one sentence expressing the need to focus on the church (not the Jewish people) as central to God’s redemptive work. While his point is important, he offers no alternative approach to interpreting relevant biblical prophecies. Thirdly, Chung rejects classical dispensational premillennialism because it holds to a pretribulation rapture; he doesn’t attack the doctrine but simply notes that it has lost a lot of popularity in recent times.

6 Not presented by Chung, but refer to Rev 7:9-17, where the ‘great tribulation’ appears in verse 14.

In the historical review, Chung starts by noting that classical dispensational premillennialism is a revision of historic premillennialism, though with some significant differences.

In any case, he traces its development from John Nelson Darby (a founder of the Plymouth Brethren) in the nineteenth century, through a chain of proponents including his contemporary Dwight Moody (a leading evangelist in America's third Great Awakening), Cyrus Scofield (the reference Bible editor). Moving into the twentieth century, Chung continues with Arno Gaebelein (a Methodist biblical scholar, some of whose writings appear in readers on SATS courses), Lewis Sperry Chafer (founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, which thus became very influential for dispensationalism), John Walvoord (whose *The Rapture Question* I bought in the mid-1990s and was then persuaded by), Charles Ryrie (study Bible editor and publisher), John MacArthur (an influential Calvinist scholar and pastor over the past half century). The chapter's review also includes popular Christian writers Hal Lindsay, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, and church leaders of enormous influence in the far east, Watchman Nee (Chinese) and David Yonggi Cho (South Korean). Chung's list is longer, and his summaries provide a very valuable synopsis of the historical development and spread of classical dispensational premillennialism via influential leaders. The author's caution against reading biblical prophecy into current events is well-taken, especially in geographic locations that were entirely out of scope for the ancient prophets and their audiences. (I do not rule out literal fulfilment of prophecy in our times, but a lot of caution in doing so is warranted; headline news cannot drive an exegesis!)

Progressive dispensationalism

In chapter 3, Mathewson examines the eschatology of a different, contemporary, *progressive* form of dispensationalism. This model, led by Darrel Bock, Craig Blaising and Robert Saucy asserts that the biblical prophecies of a messianic kingdom were partly fulfilled during Jesus's earthly ministry; they continue in the present age through the church as his people, and will reach their ultimate fulfilment at the future return of Christ—a 'consummation' of creation in the form of the new heaven and new earth spoken of in Revelation 21–22. Thus, the fulfilment of the messianic era is not entirely in the future; it has begun and still continues to develop in stages until the new creation comes into being.

The hermeneutical principles of progressive dispensationalism, Mathewson explains, stress a 'unified redemptive plan' (p. 55) that includes physical, political, and spiritual dimensions for both Jews and gentiles in a single kingdom of God (not two separate kingdoms: physical and spiritual) that already enjoys partial fulfilment of the biblical kingdom prophecies.

Moreover, the church now fulfils those prophecies (seemingly in conjunction with Israel, if I read Mathewson correctly) and '[participates] in the same promises of salvation as the Jews' (p. 55). The author doesn't specify which Jews (i.e. Jews of which era) though I assume this unified scheme does not differentiate according to period, given that Paul's letter to the Roman assembly does not. In fact, Mathewson indicates that, unlike in classical dispensationalism, this model does not sharply distinguish between the church and Israel (at least in terms of God's unfolding redemption). Also attractive is the attention that progressive dispensationalism gives to the Davidic covenant, but here I find the author's explanation unclear. Apparently, the inclusion of both Israel and the church as God's people 'does not rule out a specific role for Israel in the future' (p. 55). However, the qualities of the complete fulfilment of kingdom prophecies appear to *require* such a role for Israel⁷ and Mathewson's quotation (p. 56) of Blaising and Bock stresses '*the national and political dimensions of that [Davidic] promise*' (1993, italics original). The final hermeneutical advance made in progressive dispensationalism is the moderation of how literally the biblical text is interpreted; since prophecy and apocalypse are symbolic, they should be interpreted symbolically. That does not mean their reading does not produce anticipation of a *real* or *true* fulfilment it does! However, proper literary interpretation goes according to the genre of the literature in question, and progressive dispensationalism does better at this than its classical predecessor which seeks literal interpretation of symbolic writings.

7 Indeed, Paul *insists* that the descendants of Israel are 'dearly loved because of God's love for the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, since the gifts and vocation of God *cannot* be revoked' (Rom 11:28-29 my paraphrase).

Moving from hermeneutics to interpretation, Mathewson explains in some detail how progressive dispensationalism interprets OT prophecies and Revelation 20. He leans heavily on the work of the aforementioned leading proponents, essentially highlighting the key points of their work. Noteworthy is the anticipation of the messianic kingdom on earth, focused on Jerusalem *and its cult* (i.e. the temple and priestly services, including the sacrificial system). These religious practices are accompanied by the worldwide political reign of Christ from David's throne in Zion. The church is already part of that kingdom, currently realized even while Christ's reign is from heaven and the other earthly elements await his return.

The progressive dispensational model of the millennium, therefore, depends on a much larger portion of biblical text than scripture's only snippet that refers explicitly to the millennium, Revelation 20:4–6. Mathewson lists some of those familiar texts found in Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah, as well as Paul's mention of a time of Christ's reign following the resurrection that will occur at his return until 'the end,' in 1 Corinthians 15:23–25. The theme of restoration is prominent and appealing.

Mathewson provides a summary of Saucy's rationale for a millennium, including the priority of Christ's validation on earth in history (not in another existence), the fulfilment of God's promises through Christ (earthly restoration being a key component) and to Israel (for which I would offer Jer 31:7 as an example: Israel is destined to become 'the chief of nations.')

Mathewson continues with a brief critique of progressive dispensationalism's premillennial eschatology, raising several important points. Revelation 20:4–6, for instance, is vague about what the millennium looks like (what happens then?), or even where it is (on earth or in heaven?) He notes that the affirmations of Israel's restoration in the OT, and promises of kingdom blessings, are not found in the millennial text of Revelation (20:4–6), but *after* it, in Revelation 21:1–22:5. He disfavours the distinction between Jews and gentiles in the model's millennium (though it is less pronounced than in classical dispensationalism), apparently because the puzzle pieces don't necessarily have to be joined that way. Finally, the author asks why the millennial expectations can't simply be realized in 'the new creation of Revelation 21–22 [which] is *this creation* renewed, restored, and vindicated' not an 'eternal state ... beyond history' (p. 68–69). Responses to Mathewson's objections must obviously be interrelated. While acknowledging the scant detail of Revelation 20:4–6, I would not be so quick to push the kingdom promises into the new creation, nor to downplay the need to sustain Jew–gentile distinction (vocationally, not soteriologically) throughout the millennium until the final judgment. Nevertheless, overcoming Mathewson's objections is no trivial task.

Thematic millennialism

In his chapter on thematic millennialism, Mathewson introduces quite a different interpretation of the millennium with some surprises.

Firstly, though thematic millennialism is like the three premillennial models discussed above in that it anticipates the Second Coming before the millennium, it is also unlike those models because it does not take the millennium as a literal time period between the return of Christ and the new creation (of Rev 21–22). Instead, the millennium of Revelation 20:4–6 is symbolic of key theological themes of that final biblical book. Mathewson presents this as his own eschatological outlook, and he is not alone. Prominent scholars such as Richard Bauckham, Gordon Fee and Craig Koester likewise subscribe to what Mathewson calls thematic millennialism.

First among the hermeneutical considerations presented is that of genre: symbols are fundamental to apocalypse and Revelation is full of symbolic imagery.

The idea is to create a picture that conveys the message instead of detailing it in literal terms, and Mathewson provides some good examples from the book of Revelation. This, then, raises the question of what the millennium as a symbol, not a time period represents. The author explains how numbers are used in Revelation and, most usefully for me, points out that the reference to three-and-a-half years ‘says more about the *character* of the time’ in which the church is battling than the length of that time (p. 72).

A second hermeneutical priority of this model is its attention to the immediate literary context of the millennial text, especially Revelation 19:11–22:5. Thematic millennialism is not beholden to fitting the millennium into a systematic theological doctrine nor into more ancient scriptures. It prefers to focus on the immediate context and ask the question: What is the *purpose* of the millennium *within* the apocalyptic vision recorded by John? At this point, Mathewson segues from hermeneutics into interpretation, using context as the lens for zooming in from the book of Revelation, to the literary section containing the millennium (Rev 19:11–22:5), to the events described in Revelation 20. Only then does he tease out the meaning of the millennium. The initial part of the review finds the millennium to be a divine answer to the theodicy question: if God is good and omnipotent, why do evil and suffering exist? By reference to the martyrs of Revelation 6:9–11 and 20:4, and more generally to God’s suffering people, Mathewson presents the millennium as a symbol of their vindication and reward—still future yet guaranteed.

The large number used to denote the millennium is not a calibration of its literal duration but serves to contrast it to the 'short time' (Rev 12:12) of oppression of God's people (11:2–3; 12:6, 14; 13:5): the future benefit (of faithful perseverance in suffering) far outweighs its present cost. As a response to Revelation 12–13, the millennium promises a reversal in fortunes: the saints, who were slaughtered by Satan, are vindicated, while he is condemned. Mathewson then presents Revelation 19:11–22:5 as a set of visions that each tell the same story: what will take place when Christ returns. They are not, therefore, a series of events that follow one-another sequentially, but a collection of several different 'takes' on the same scene that of judgment of the enemies of God, and vindication plus reward of those who opposed them.

As the author concentrates on Revelation 20, some questions arise in my mind. The millennium appears in-between the two stages of Satan's defeat. Mathewson argues that the importance is not the temporal sequence, but the meaning of the imagery: to encourage those still suffering for Christ to persevere, whatever the consequences.

Point taken, but the chronology does not seem incidental; indeed, the millennium is precisely that blessed *time* when Satan is bound, when those who qualified for the first resurrection reign with Christ, *before* 'the rest of the dead ... come to life' (Rev 20:5) and potentially face 'the second death' (v. 6). Mathewson's reference to other apocalyptic literature portraying a similar sequence of Satan's defeat (first imprisonment, then release, then judgment) is valuable but in no way undermines the reading of these as temporally sequential.⁸ In places, Mathewson borrows from Fee and McKelvey, but they both concluded that the millennium must take place on earth (not in heaven), yet without providing details on what takes place. Mathewson seems to see this as a weakness to their conclusion; I submit that a post-supersessionist interpretation of Revelation 20 can encompass *both* proper reading of a text in its literary genre, taking symbols symbolically (which is key to Mathewson's case), *and* reading the events of that text chronologically. To support this symbolic-yet-chronological interpretation as a biblical possibility, I appeal to Pharaoh's dreams (Gen 41:17–31) and to Daniel's apocalypses (Dan 7–8). Finally, the dreams Joseph shared with his brothers (Gen 37:5–9) have the similar vagueness in time and location to the millennium in Revelation 20:4–6, yet the first dream (of the sheaves) has a chronology and both dreams are fulfilled on earth.

⁸ Like Mathewson, Walter Kaiser Jr (2011:153) reads the 'many days' of punishment of God's enemies in Isa 24:23 as a reference to the millennium, yet for Kaiser this *proves* the millennium is a future time period since it takes place 'on that [metaphorical] day' (Isa 24:21), which is the same as the day of the LORD.

So, the lack of detail on the millennium provided in Revelation does not disqualify it from possessing a temporal, this-earthly fulfilment any more than symbolism does.

Mathewson points out some literature that stresses the contrast between the millennium and the new earth, the latter being the ultimate goal and the locus of God's fulfilment of his promises, including prophetic texts about the messianic kingdom. For Mathewson, this is legitimate because the new earth is actually a renewed earth—a work of restoration described in Revelation 21:1–22:5. So again, Revelation's sketch of the millennium does not need to be laden with expectations that belong in the new (renewed) earth.

Historic premillennialism in South Korea

In the fifth chapter of *Models of Premillennialism*, Chung discusses how historic premillennialism has developed in South Korea under leading figures (teachers, preachers and theologians) over the past century. Some of the historical developments have been influenced by teachings from abroad, initially through missionaries, while others emerged among South Korean preachers' own biblical interpretations and among those who studied in the West.

This chapter is valuable for Christian teachers working in South Korea, but since the key elements of the eschatological models considered are similar to those summarised above, I shall not review them here.

5. Final comments

Chung and Mathewson have produced a digestible review of premillennial eschatologies put forward since the second century, showing how each one developed and what its unique characteristics are. By restricting their scope to premillennialism, the authors avoided inundating the reader with too much information which is readily available elsewhere. I was particularly glad to discover that the majority view of evangelical theologians is premillennialism, where the impression I had was that it was a minority view among them (even if is evidently popular in the camp of dispensational laymen.) Even so, Chung and Mathewson are not polemical in their presentation, nor do they seek to persuade the reader to adopt any eschatological position.

Models of Premillennialism is not going to 'tick all the boxes' for all readers, even premillennialists. Both the brevity of the book and the separate authorship of each chapter make the compilation somewhat vulnerable. The book contains a considerable number of lengthy quotes, being more a review of models than new work. Indeed, the 'critical engagement' (especially of chapter 5) was more of a summary than a critique. I found some parts of the book repetitive and I had to wonder if the book was perhaps the product of a lecture series. Notwithstanding these factors, I would recommend the book for introductory reading in premillennial eschatology.

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A proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15, and how this interpretation speaks to issues of gender relationships and female leadership

Jillian Carole Gorven

Abstract

This paper proposes a reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 which holds to traditional principles of gender distinctiveness, while suggesting nuances of insight and application relevant to issues of female leadership: *Women should be free to learn about God. They should do so with a quiet and submissive spirit. Women shouldn't teach or have authority over men where this is exercised in a manner that is contrary to God's design for men and women's relationships and roles, as seen in creation and the Fall. Finally, women who persevere in honouring the God-ordained feminine role of bearing and nurturing children with godliness, will be working out their salvation as they partner with God to redeem the consequences of the Fall.* The place of gender in creation and the Fall reveals distinctions in the roles given to Adam and Eve. Paul exhorts women to honour these distinctions, not in terms of absolute behavioural restrictions, but rather with regard to principles of relative gender identity. The issue of how we apply Paul's broad principles about gender to the complexities of 21st century society is addressed by Paul's reference to the church as God's household and his teaching in chapter five of the same letter.

Keywords

Creation order gender distinctiveness, relative gender behaviour and roles, feminine role in childbearing, leadership in the household of God, transformed hearts seeking God's purposes in creation

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Here Paul teaches that godly behaviour in God's household or family, should honour the same relative distinctions of age and gender as played out in human families, made up of fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers. This is shown to be significant for the issue of female leadership. As fathers in human families are the most appropriate person to carry ultimate responsibility for family decisions and discipline, so it is fathers/mature men in God's family who are most appropriate to fill eldership roles. As this is a heart principle however, where godly men are absent, women can legitimately take this role.

1. Introduction

In 2010 Alan Johnson compiled twenty-one testimonies from prominent evangelicals about how they have changed from a traditional view about male leadership in churches to accepting female leadership as biblical.

Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 bring us face to face with the theological differences evidenced in this debate about God's will for Christian women. Through examining this and other key texts, with reference to the large body of scholarship on this topic, I will argue that the traditional understanding of Paul's teachings on gender is still sound in broad principle, but that our context requires deeper understanding of these principles to be able to apply them in a way that addresses the deep pain of how sin manifests in gender relations.

I have found that an examination of the two broad camps on God's will for gender roles and relationships reveals that the egalitarian and complementarian views would benefit from focusing on godly attitudes based on eternal principles rather than on culturally transient and legalistic applications of these precepts.

In Matthew 5² Jesus says, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law...' (v. 17) and 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (v. 20). Jesus then goes on in verses 21 to 48 to refer to Old Testament teachings with the words 'You have heard that it was said...But I tell you...' and tells us that it is the attitude behind these teachings that counts rather than heeding just the letter of the law as the scribes and Pharisees did. Jesus calls us to more than just respectable behaviour. He demands transforming of our hearts and minds to a place where we are 'perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48).

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version translation

I believe we should trust that God's word, through his apostle Paul, teaches us the 'perfect' way to be both women and men in this 'already-not-yet' time.

I also propose that dividing sacred and secular, or even Christian home- and church-based behaviour for men and women seeking to please the Lord, is not desirable or even possible. We will end up with endless complex rules, and possibly schizophrenic distress. Instead I will argue that women and men can only live fully and freely if we are willing to submit to and celebrate the gender distinctiveness which history, reason, experience and, arguably, God's Word reveals. As Abigail Dodds (2019;location 358) says, 'God doesn't create a human as anything but a man or a woman. I was not made a human mainly, with a side of a woman... I do not, cannot, exist except as a woman.' And I believe the same is true of men created according to God's 'very good' design.

2. Proposed Overarching tenets of Paul's message in 1 Timothy 2:11-15

The traditional understanding of the theological message in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 has become so offensive to egalitarians, that it is generally explained away as only a teaching meant to address the specific context of first-century Ephesus. However, this logic could be applied to almost all of Paul's letters, because they were often written to address specific problems in the early church. This logic is also problematic because it either necessitates a denial of Scripture's authority, as happens in the case of critical feminists, or it leads to very complex and often highly speculative exegesis as in the case of evangelical feminists (House 1979:45–9). Yes, it is sensible to avoid applying dress codes or hairstyle mores from two thousand years ago. But is it sensible to believe that God's creation of gender has a different intent according to what point in history one finds oneself? Keener (2012:location 2325–2326) represents many egalitarians who argue that gender relations are like slavery, which had a necessary lifetime. However, slavery unlike gender was never part of God's created order. Rather, I propose that Christians should accept the reality of gender in creation and earnestly strive to end the far-too-long lifespan of the perversion of God-ordained gender relations.

On the other hand, the complementarian position has problems of its own. In wanting to create definitive boundaries about the types of behaviour that are within God's will for women, traditionalists get tripped up when applying the significance of Paul's theology to

the myriad leadership structures in ecclesial and secular settings. They also go to great lengths to explain away female leaders in Scripture. For example, how it was that ‘Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel’ with God’s obvious consent (Judg 4:4). I believe that these complications arise when the letter rather than the spirit of Paul’s teaching becomes the focus.

After scrutinizing a number of possible understandings and interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 (Celoria 2013; Guthrie 2007:1294–1304; Larson 2000:167–177; Long Westfall 2016:279–312; Moss 1994; Oden 1989:92–102; Schreiner 2005:85–120; Stott 1996:72–88; Towner 1994) and reading scholarship across the egalitarian complementarian spectrum, the following is my understanding of what it was Paul was trying to say about Christian women in this passage.

I agree with Gorman (2004:551) that Paul clearly states his main purpose in writing his first letter to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:14–15... ‘I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God’. Cynthia Long Westfall (2016:298–303) bases much of her egalitarian interpretation of this passage on the premise that Paul’s main purpose is to oppose false teaching in the very specific context of 1st century Ephesus, and that he therefore overstates the need for relative behaviour of women and men. However, I propose that the specificity of Paul saying, I am writing so that you may know *how one ought to behave*, asserts positive teaching of truth, rather than an over-correction of error which is only relevant to a specific context.

This positive teaching of the truth is addressed specifically to women in 1 Timothy 2:9–15. Regarding this passage there is little disagreement about Paul’s teaching that Christian women should dress modestly (v. 9) and do good works (v. 10). However, verses 11–14, where Paul talks about women’s behaviour in relation to men, elicit much controversy. And verse 15, which addresses childbearing, is notoriously controversial.

My understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 falls somewhere between the traditional / complementarian / historic and progressive / egalitarian / feminist positions. I believe in the historic underlying principle that God created us with gender as a defining part of our identity, and consequently of our relationships and roles.

Moreover, I believe that Paul as a faithful student of the Torah, would have held to this principle of gender. However, I share the

feminist concern with how society, even Christian society, has applied this principle.

Yet with the new, soft, Spirit-filled hearts that Jesus won for us and deeper understanding of God's original purposes for gender, I propose that Christians can live out these purposes in a better way than either the Israelites under the Law or historical Christian society. Flowing from this position, I propose that the overarching message from Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 can be best summarised as follows:

Women should be free to learn about God. They should do so with a quiet and submissive spirit. Women shouldn't teach or have authority over men where this is exercised in a manner that is contrary to God's design for men and women's relationships and roles, as seen in creation and the Fall. Finally, women who persevere in honouring the God ordained feminine role of bearing and nurturing children with godliness, will be working out their salvation as they partner with God to redeem the consequences of the Fall.

This proposed interpretation of Paul's theology will be explained in more detail through an examination of possible strengths and weaknesses.

3. Proposed strengths of this interpretation of Paul's message

There are just two categories of strengths proposed for this interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: its offer of liberation and its agreement with other Scripture. I assert that they are both important. The discussion around true liberation is broad and speculative in nature, while the argument that this interpretation agrees with other Scripture will detail four significant ways it aligns with various biblical teachings about gender relationships.

3.1. The offer of true liberation

I believe it is ironically the very motive for doubting Paul's gender theology which is its greatest strength. While Christian feminists struggle against what they perceive to be his oppressive, even misogynist approach, I propose that Paul offers women (and men) freedom in the truest sense of the word. Not unbounded freedom which ends up being disappointingly governed by human desires and fears; but rather a freedom of godly dimensions where we are not dependent on our wishes but God's (Rom 6:22).

I believe that once we submit to the identities, relationships and roles which God has ordained, we are free to be fully ourselves,

fully in harmony with others and with our Creator. Psalm 119:45 says this in a nutshell, 'I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts' (NIV).

Since Jesus and the Holy Spirit enabled God's law to be written onto our hearts and minds (Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16), submitting to these distinctions of gender flows best from transformed hearts and minds rather than from detailed rules determined by ourselves at a point in history. It is perhaps because the traditional reading of 1 Timothy 2 has focused too intently on the detail of correct behaviour, that the liberation of godly attitudes has been lost, and that this Pharisee-type burden has encouraged rebellion. Perhaps Satan has again succeeded in overstating God's restrictions as a way of tempting human rebellion, as he did in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1b).

It is also essential to recognize the devastating effect of patriarchal abuses on women's experience of the freedoms we should have in Christ. And to recognize that feminism, womanism and egalitarianism are generally responses to this painful history and are seeking a better way forward for gender relations. Tragically the church has been slow to recognize the sin of men ruling over women in ungodly ways despite God's warning after the Fall. In many instances Christian leaders have even encouraged this oppression, denying women the fullness of their equal inheritance in Christ (Gal 3:28), as Spirit-filled servants of God. The church has also been slow to recognize the priesthood of all believers and the giving of the Great Commission to all Christ followers, regardless of gender. So, this proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 seeks to restore these truths to a passage that has been used alternatively to limit true freedom in Christ, or more recently to deny that this freedom can only be found within God's created order.

The joy of a bull's-eye life, neither to the left or right of the target, can only be found in God's Word; and so, we will now consider how my proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 correlates with other biblical texts.

3.2. Agreement with other Scripture

I will discuss this proposed strength with respect to four controversial aspects of a complementarian reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: the principle of relative rather than unilateral gender behaviour; quietness as a desirable trait in women; creation order and design as the foundation of gender distinctive roles and relationships; and women's role as mothers.

3.2.1 The principle of relative rather than unilateral gender behaviour

Paul's teaching in verses 11 and 12 for women to have a submissive attitude resounds in scriptures using identical and very similar vocabulary such as: 'submissive' (Titus 2:5), 'submit' (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18), 'submitting' (1 Pet 3:5) and 'subject to' (1 Pet 3:1). All these scriptures refer to wives in relation to their own husbands. Ephesians 5:23 and especially 1 Corinthians 11:1–16, talk about the situation from the man's point of view, with him being the 'head' of his wife. Although the meaning of the word head has been much debated, Grudem has defended his original comprehensive lexical study, which indicates the implication of 'head' is authority, rather than origin or source (2006:425–468). However, I would argue that even if 'head' does imply fountainhead or source, the teaching of relative authority between husband and wife is implicit, as Paul compares this relationship to Christ and the Church, two entities who necessarily have relative rather than equal authority (Eph 5:22–24).

Returning to 1 Timothy 2, in verse 11 Paul says, 'Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness'. Although this may point to a heart that is submissive to God's teaching, this is not explicit; and so I understand that it points to a more general spirit of submission. The thrust of the passage is not focused on general obedience to God's Word, but rather appropriate behaviour that is specific to women.

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, 'I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet'. Here, the teaching of submission of a wife to her own husband, has often been extended to understand this passage to be exhorting women to submit to men in general. I would argue that this understanding is not accurate. I propose that here, very significantly, the teaching is different to teachings about what women should do with respect to their husbands. Rather, this teaching is about what women shouldn't do with respect to men in general. I believe this nuance is very important to the debate on women's leadership.

On a number of occasions the instruction for a wife to submit to her husband is emphasized as being specific only to one man, that is, her 'own husband' (1 Pet 3:1; Eph 5:2; Titus 2:5). And here in 1 Timothy 2:12 the instruction is not to submit, but rather, not to be in authority over. It is perhaps not recognizing this subtle difference between appropriate gender behaviour within marriage and appropriate gender behaviour in general company, which has made this teaching of Paul's so problematic and open to abuse.

On the other hand, Long Westfall argues that the switch from plural to singular in verse 12 indicates that this instruction about relative authority is only relevant to the relationship between a wife and her husband (2016:289). However, this entire letter is focused on behaviour in God's household, as are the immediately preceding verses. Could the switch to singular not be simply a literary device used for emphasis? I imagine a schoolteacher saying, 'Girls, you must not pinch the boys. No girl may touch a boy in my classroom'.

A closer look at the original Greek of verse 12 will help to understand the nature of this authority that women shouldn't exercise with respect to men. The Greek word '*authenteo*' generally translated as 'exercise authority over' is a hapex legomena. Baldwin (2005:51) concludes that a study of over eighty usages of this word in ancient writings shows '*authenteo*' to have a neutral meaning of authority. However, he gives one of the possible specific meanings as 'to dominate', which would be a negative rather than neutral way of exercising authority. Davis (2009:5) says there are four or five instances of extra-biblical use around the time of Paul that gave this word a negative connotation, meaning to 'perpetuate a crime' or even 'murder'. He also names five 'pre-modern' (2nd to 17th century), and significantly prefeminist, versions of the bible which translate '*authenteo*' as undesirable authority. Long Westfall (2016:294) presents a detailed and convincing argument for '*authenteo*' to mean illegitimate, unauthorized and therefore inappropriate authority. However, this negative meaning is understood by her to imply that women may have positive authority over men, such as caring eldership. I partly sympathise with this interpretation but propose that, although many types of female authority are legitimate in God's eyes, it is the role-type of elder or overseer, as defined by Paul in 1 Timothy 3, which is inappropriate for women to exercise over men, even when exercised in a godly manner.

Paul immediately points to the reasons for this inappropriateness of women taking 'ultimate' authority from men (verses 13–14), by referring to God's establishment of a benevolent hierarchy through the primogeniture of a male human at creation. It can seem arbitrary to differentiate identity through mere chronology of creation. However, when the detail of the creation account of Genesis 2 is in view, this purposeful ordering of God's becomes clearer. Several responsibilities were given to Adam before Eve was created: he was given work (v. 15); he was given a command from God with a consequence should he disobey (vv. 16–17); and he was allowed to name the animals (vv. 19b–20a). After these events

it is recorded that Eve was made from Adam. Thus, Adam's primogeniture is shown to result in his being given much responsibility before Eve is created. This distinctive male responsibility is further evidenced by the fact that after the Fall, although Eve had taken the first bite of sin, it was Adam that God called to for first account. It is also significant that this godly ordering is disregarded by the crafty snake, Eve, and Adam in the act of original sin, when Satan bypasses Adam to tempt Eve, and they respond positively. So, I argue that in verse 12 Paul is pointing to God's will for men and women to act with regard to their relative differences to the opposite gender. Not doing so plays into the deception of Satan and the consequent painful results of sin.

As this section is examining correspondence between my reading of relative gender roles in 1 Timothy and other biblical teaching, I would like to propose that denying concepts of headship and submission in terms of gender, risks undermining these concepts within other topics addressed by Scripture. The words 'head' and 'submission' are often oversimplified into monolithic ideas of oppression and victimhood. Regarding the issue of gender relations this is understandable, given the terrible abuses of male power throughout history. Yet to swing the pendulum of sin to the other extreme of denying the reality of God's design, will only substitute one misery for another. Immediately after the Fall God warns Eve of the pain of a man ruling over her **and** of the sin of her desire to take possession of him (Gen 3:16b).

To conclude, I propose that Paul's address to women in 1 Timothy harmonises with other biblical texts which exhort women to behave in a way that considers rather than disregards gender distinctions. However, this comparison highlights the nuance in the guidance given regarding marital relationships versus more general gendered relationships.

The restriction on how women relate to men in general is not about submitting to all men as a wife to her husband, but about not being disrespectful of the distinction between men and women's roles. That is, having a balanced attitude that is submissive to God's will for the genders he created, without losing sight of men and women being equally valuable brothers and sisters in Christ.

3.2.2 Quietness as a desirable trait in women

Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12 that a woman 'is to remain quiet' can appear to contradict his teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:5 when

he gives guidance as to how women should pray and prophesy. However, when a literal interpretation of Paul's teaching on women being silent in church obviously contradicts passages confirming women prophesying, we need to seek further insight (Grudem 1987:11–23). Oden (1989:96–97) and Larson (2000:12) say the English translation of *'hesuchia'* as 'silence' or even 'to remain quiet' is too harsh, and that the Greek is better understood as the virtue of quietness. I propose that verse 11, 'Let a woman learn quietly', has this same implication of a quiet disposition rather than a restriction on speaking per se. This interpretation is supported, if we consider that at the beginning of this same chapter Paul uses the same word *'hesuchia'* when he exhorts prayer so 'that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life...' (1 Tim 2:2).

Upon an initial reading, Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35 seems even more restrictive when he says, 'As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. They are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says'.³ However, I propose it is significant that the restriction on the behaviour of speaking is linked to the attitude of submission. So although it is unclear and therefore speculative as to what exactly this restriction entails, given that, as previously mentioned, Paul gives guidance about how women should pray and prophesy a few chapters before (1 Cor 11:5), it is likely that the godly attitude or state of heart is most important, because it is to this that Jesus points in Matthew 5 when he reminds us of what 'the Law also says'. I propose this is also a case of discerning 'cultural transposition', helpfully explained by John Stott (1996:78), where the ethical principle of female quietness is eternal, while the application of the undefined restriction on speaking is specific to a particular context. The way a transformed quiet feminine heart manifests itself in the 21st century will generally be different to the manifestation of it being 'shameful for a woman to speak in church' as Paul writes in verse 35b.

Again, it is good to remember that God's ways are not the oppressive measures Satan would have us believe, but instead are the only way to experience the fullness that true freedom allows. May all Christian women be set free to experience 'the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious' (1 Pet 3:4).

3.2.3 Creation order and design as the foundation of gender distinctive roles and relationships

I have already argued for creation order underpinning gender distinctiveness. Here the focus is on how Paul's reference to

³ The ESV (2008: 2213) explains that "the Law" probably refers to patterns of male leadership in the Torah, including the creation order of Genesis

creation in 1 Timothy 2:13–14 corresponds with another Scriptural teaching on gender relative to creation. Leading theologians like deSilva (2004:750) and Long Westfall (2016:294) disagree that Paul draws on creation passages to teach transcendent norms. However, it is noteworthy that when Jesus is asked about divorce, he uses a Genesis passage to underpin teaching on normative relationships between men and women. In Mark 10:5–8 Jesus refers to ‘the beginning of creation’ to teach that although the Old Testament behaviour of writing a certificate of divorce was necessary because of ‘hardness of heart’, that God’s original purposes for us were not to separate what ‘God has joined together’. That is, that as New Testament people we can realise God’s transcendent normative purposes for making us men and women, rather than merely managing our sinful hearts through legally correct behaviour. The correlation between Jesus’ and Paul’s reference to creation when teaching about gender relations, suggests that Paul’s teaching should also be seen as one concerning God’s original will, rather than one only relevant to a specific time and circumstance.

3.2.4 Women’s role as mothers

Finally in this section concerning the strength of compatibility with other Scripture, I propose that the historically difficult verse 15 of 1 Timothy 2 is rendered more coherent when it is examined in the light of other biblical teachings on women, and in this case more particularly, women’s role in childbearing. There are many complicated and varied interpretations of this verse (Moss 1994). Upon considering them, I believe it is the legalistic and scripturally unsupported understanding that woman must bear children in order to be saved which has led to convoluted attempts to explain Paul’s theological principle away. Instead, the principle again follows the lead of God’s creation design. God created women as the bearers of children and condoned what he had made as good.

Here in Timothy Paul affirms this ongoing God-given role, which he qualifies as requiring godly attitudes and behaviours in order to be a role that facilitates redemption.

There are a couple of twists in the way this verse is written: the perplexing phrase ‘saved through childbearing’, and the change in tense from singular to plural. I cannot do them justice in this paper, but would like to offer a way of unravelling each of these puzzles. Regarding ‘saved through childbearing’, I propose that as the preceding verse talks of the woman becoming a transgressor, it is likely that the word ‘saved’ is referring to the consequences of this transgression. In Genesis 3:16 shortly after the transgression

God says to the woman, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children'. The use of the word 'childbearing' also links this consequence of sin for Eve to Paul's words. So, I propose a reading that godly perseverance through the struggles of motherhood in a fallen world will be a way of women 'working out their salvation', a concept which Paul teaches to the Philippians (Phil 2:12). The ESV footnotes assert that, 'the Philippians' continued obedience is an inherent part of "working out" their salvation' (2008:2284). As a role given to the female sex at creation, childbearing must be part of God's original purpose for women; and persevering to fulfill God's purpose is obedience. I realise that within this explanation I have assumed that the word 'childbearing' is not limited to the singular act of childbirth. This will be discussed further in section 3.1. Now I would like to suggest a brief freehand proposal to unravel the second twist in this verse, that is, the puzzling switch to plural in the second line. Could it simply be Paul's way of shifting focus back to women in general after having shifted to the singular in verse 12 for emphatic effect, and then continuing in the singular as he discussed Eve?

Both testaments of Scripture bear witness to God's desire for women to focus on nurturing their children and more broadly managing their resulting 'households' (Prov 31:10–31; Titus 2:4–5). The Proverbs passage talks of the strength, dignity and joy (v. 25) that this God-given role can bring when exercised in a godly way. This contrasts the zeitgeist of our day which often assumes restriction or drudgery when it comes to traditional female roles. However, on the other hand Jesus himself demonstrates that childbearing (Luke 11:27–28; Doriani 2003:46–47) and household management (Luke 10:38–42; Doriani 2003:44–46) are not the source of a woman's primary worth or blessing. And common sense tells us that not all women bear children. Again, it is not the behaviour but the attitude that Scripture teaches.

May all Christians, whether mothers or not, find great joy and freedom in attributing great value to this God-given female role.

4. A response to alleged weaknesses of this message

My proposed interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 that women shouldn't exercise inappropriate authority over men and that the feminine role of motherhood should be prioritized, is not a politically correct one in our times. Similar complementarian interpretations have received much academic criticism over the last few decades. This section seeks to respond to five of these criticisms.

4.1. A correct understanding of original context changes the traditional complementarian reading or application of this reading

Contextual criticism of complementarian positions follows two lines of argument. First, that the peculiarity of Paul's context means his teachings are not relevant to other contexts, such as the 21st century. And second, that the traditional complementarian understanding of his message was faulty, because the original context was missed or misunderstood.

Regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15 specifically, the historical reality of the Artemisian cult in mid-1st century Ephesus suggests a context with a zeitgeist of perverted gender relations. There is also historical evidence that false proto-gnostic and over-realised eschatological teachings were encouraging Christian women to discard their womanly roles of marriage and childbearing and assert themselves in a socially inappropriate masculine manner (Celoria 2013:21). These historical factors seem to fit with the forbidding of marriage and legalistic abstinence from certain foods that Paul refers to in 1 Timothy 4:3. However, there are counterclaims that there is no factual certainty about either the specific historical context (Baugh 2005:36–38) or the false teaching (Schreiner 2005:88–90) that Paul refers to in the introduction to this pastoral epistle (1 Tim 1:3–7; 18–20). My rationale is, however, that Paul would not teach false principles or behaviour in his efforts to correct false teaching. Thus, I propose that although it is helpful to know as much as possible about the context for the original audience in order to interpret the teaching accurately, Biblical teaching will not be against God's design because of contextual specificity.

Long Westfall (2016:308–310) supports the egalitarian reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 with two thought-provoking arguments based on numerous historical factors.

Her first argument is that Paul's reference to Adam and Eve was not to assert normative roles based on primogeniture and relative authority, but rather only to correct the specific myths and false teachings of this context. Her second argument is based on the reality of the significant physical danger of giving birth in the ancient world and the tendency in Ephesus to turn to the goddess Artemis for protection. She argues, therefore, that Paul was correcting avoidance of childbirth or the use of syncretic practices in trying to survive it, rather than teaching that women should prioritise motherhood as a godly feminine role.

I have already addressed the argument that Paul's reference to Genesis does not imply that his teaching on gender distinctiveness is normative (Section 2.2.3). Here I would like to focus on the

contextual criticism which concludes that his teaching on childbearing is also only applicable to the original audience. As previously mentioned, I propose that when Paul uses the word 'childbearing' he is not just talking about being kept physically safe through a single event. Instead I believe he is referring to the role of mother given to 'the mother of all living' (Gen 3:20) at creation. To support this interpretation, I assert that God addressing Adam and Eve separately after the Fall is very significant, because it indicates that they would be impacted in distinctive ways through the new reality of sin, and this supports the interpretation that they had been created with distinctive ongoing identities and roles. Women would be particularly vulnerable in giving birth and caring for children (Gen 3:16a); and men would be particularly vulnerable in needing to provide sustenance for their families (Gen 3:17–19a). Furthermore, it is possible that God addressed Eve about the sinful effect on gender relationships (Gen 3:16b), because pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and other mothering roles, as well as her generally smaller feminine physique, means she is more dependent, and therefore any relational sin is likely to make her the more vulnerable party (Gen 3:16b).

Complementarians also wrestle with context, as they battle to apply legalistic behavioural restrictions to our contemporary realities. This leads to attempts to restrict the teaching about appropriate behaviour for women to ecclesial settings. I believe this is problematic. Perhaps Paul's teaching about modest dress and doing good works just a couple of verses before, or any other 'difficult to apply outside of church' teaching, could then be restricted to only being required at church gatherings. This artificial dividing up of appropriate church and secular behaviour is not necessary when godly principles of the heart are applied in contextually appropriate manners.

4.2. Traditional readings disregard the personal nature of this letter to Timothy

Long Westfall (2016:282–285) has emphasized this issue of context by arguing that traditional interpretations have missed the significance of 1 Timothy being a personal letter. She explains that because Paul is writing to his co-worker who shares an understanding of the false teaching in Ephesus, he doesn't need to elaborate on the context and thus context has traditionally been missed as a consideration in exegesis of this passage. Long Westfall highlights this by contrasting Paul's personal and problem-focused corrective teaching in 1 Timothy with the proclamatory teachings of Romans. Therefore, she argues that

these instructions to Ephesian women via Timothy are a 'highly occasional' teaching peculiar to the shared context that Paul and Timothy had as co-workers, and are not intended to be 'read primarily as theology' or taught as normative theological principles.

My response to this alleged weakness is threefold. First, Paul also writes to Timothy saying, '*All Scripture* is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.' (2 Tim 3:16; italics mine). So, although the letters to Timothy are from one person to another, they have the authority to teach as they are included in the canon of 'all Scripture'. Moreover, Paul is instructing Timothy to apply this interpersonal teaching to the church (1 Tim 4:6). And then in terms of Romans' obvious proclamatory teaching being contrasted with the correction of specific errors in 1 Timothy, it may also be helpful to consider that correction of error is usually only given when a specific error has occurred, but this does not mean that because the correction is specific to the error, that the teaching is not itself also a general truth. Second, in his opening sentence of this personal letter, Paul asserts his apostolic identity and that this teaching is a 'command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus'. As discussed in the introduction, Jesus' first teaching in the Sermon on the Mount repeatedly tightened requirements of the Law in terms of godly attitudes. Why then wouldn't this command of the Lord in 1 Timothy have taught positively that men and women should now relate without respect to gender, if this was God's original design for attitudes of men and women regarding each other. Third, I believe that human history and experience suggest that the myths and false teachings in Ephesus in terms of gender roles are not unique to that context, but have persisted since the snake reversed the relative gender roles and deceived the women into taking command, and the man into following suit.

4.3. Examples of women in Scripture contradict traditional readings of Paul's teaching

Feminist scholarship uses examples of women in both the Old and New Testaments to prove that godly women can occupy all positions of authority in Christian ministry (Croft 2013:26–29). Unfortunately for them, they are trawling through many examples of women of great ministry and influence, but almost none of official leadership. This is simply because they are looking at the annals of 2000 years ago, a time when society seldom allowed for official appointments of women to public positions.

More traditional interpreters of 1 Timothy 2 also resort to complicated logic to escape some inconvenient biblical evidence

and support a moratorium on certain roles for women. But Cunningham (2000: 60) notes that a quarter of the 39 co-workers Paul mentions were women, and that 886 verses of the Bible are written by women. How, then, can denying women ministry roles and voices be supported biblically?

Furthermore, when the Old Testament unashamedly records Deborah as being one of the judges of Israel, the argument that she never asserted her authority in public comes across as very legalistic. Moreover Davis (2009:8) argues that her leadership was public in both civil and spiritual arenas and blessed by God. Richter and Wiseman (1966:627) describe a judge at this point in Israel's history as 'a leader in battle and a ruler in peace'. Thus, it is inescapable that a woman led Israel when God ordained it. This supports the view that Paul is teaching principles rather than detailed and rigid application of those principles.

4.4. Genesis 3:16 and Galatians 3:28 discount gender differentiation

Egalitarians refer to Genesis 3:16b and Galatians 3:28 as proof that God's original design for gender was one of equal authority and interchangeable roles, rather than Paul's teaching about women needing to respect male primogeniture and gender-specific roles. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he said to the woman, 'Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you'. A common progressive interpretation of this passage is that husbands' having authority over their wives was a result of sin and not God's intended plan. Alongside this, the passage in Galatians becomes the proof text for an egalitarian view. Paul's words, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus', is interpreted as Jesus setting us free from the curse of male dominion and even gender distinctiveness.

These interpretations are theologically problematic. Alternative interpretations will now be explored in an attempt to further grapple with what Scripture says about gender, and so cast more light on 1 Timothy 2:11–15. It is most helpful to look at Galatians 3, first, and then the passage from Genesis 3.

With reference to the ESV Study Bible footnotes (2008:2249–2251) it is apparent that the key to interpreting Galatians 3:28 is succinctly described in what follows directly in verse 29, 'And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise'. Paul was explaining how God's promise to Abraham that 'I will be their God' to his and Sarah's offspring (Gen 17:8) was no longer limited to those defined as Jews by the Mosaic law

but was extended to Gentiles. Furthermore Paul explains, ‘but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian [the Mosaic Law], for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith’ (Gal 3:26; brackets mine). This helps us to understand that not only is Paul addressing the problem of some being completely outside of this promise of having God as Father, as the Gentiles were, but also the problem that within Jewish society, there was a hierarchical structure of access to God. Paul is teaching about the old divisions under Mosaic Law, which restricted access to God according to one’s position within Judaism, also being taken away by the direct access to God that faith in Jesus and the concomitant indwelling of his Spirit provide. So, Paul is trying to explain how all, no matter their previous restrictions under the Law, could now by faith in Jesus and spiritual baptism become equally sons of God, that is, heirs who could now access the glorious inheritance that God planned for us all from creation.

Thus, Galatians 3:28 is not proof that gender roles and relationships ordained by God at creation are no longer relevant, but rather that the ‘image of God’ (Gen 1:27) in both male and female be fully recognized. The curse of sin and the necessary ‘curse of the law’ that separated us all from our heavenly father, to varying degrees, is now fully resolved in Christ Jesus ‘becoming a curse for us’ (Gal 3:13).

Here it is helpful to go back to an examination of God’s description of the curse of sin to Eve in Genesis 3:16b. As previously said, feminists interpret this curse of male dominion as proving it was never God’s plan for a gender difference in roles of authority. However, a closer look at this verse will show that, in accordance with the nature of evil, it was perversion rather than the reversal of God’s will that was the result and curse of sin.

The phrase God uses to Eve, ‘Your desire shall be for your husband’ is the same phrase God uses to Cain one chapter later, ‘...sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you...’ (Gen 4:7). The role of being a husband’s companion and helper (Gen 2:18) is resisted because of a sinful desire to possess or to oppose him. Likewise, when God goes on to say, ‘and he shall rule over you’, the Greek word for ‘rule’ does not translate as the beneficent authority described by Paul’s teaching about the servant leadership of husbands to their wives being modelled after Jesus’ sacrificial relationship with the church (Eph 5:25). Rather, this ‘rule over’ speaks of the reality of wife abuse that has plagued humanity throughout the ages, again a perversion rather than reversal of God’s created order.

Thus, Genesis 3:16b does not imply that God never planned different roles for men and women, but rather that these God-ordained distinctions had been damaged by sin. It is this damage that leads to the need to re-examine how Christian men and women live out their relationship to each other. The severity of these disrupted relationships has led to the theological feminism that is performing surgery on the wrong part of the body. We shouldn't be performing plastic surgery to try and make men and women look alike, but rather open-heart surgery to restore the core of our being to God's original purpose of being fully male and female.

4.5. Jesus role-models an egalitarian approach

Finally, egalitarians will ask in response to the above arguments, why is it then that Jesus broke with convention in the way he related to women. He spoke to the Samaritan women at the well and socialized with prostitutes, demonstrating a radical break with the Jewish laws around appropriate gender relations? I would say it is exactly this behaviour of Jesus' which supports my proposed interpretation of Paul's gender theology in 1 Timothy 2. Jesus is not under the curse of sin or law. He understands his Father's original will of a harmonious relationship between men and women. He does not desire to dominate women, but rather to serve their best interests in love. Neither then is he constrained by the curse of the law which serves to contain our sin. Rather he is free to ignore the behavioural restrictions of Mosaic law in the same way that Peter and Paul came to understand that physical circumcision was no longer necessary, because circumcision of the heart was now possible, ... 'circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter' (Rom 2:29).

5. Application of the proposed principles underlying 1 Timothy 2:11-15 with reference to 1 Timothy 5, and with special consideration of female leadership

How can women apply these 1 Timothy principles of consideration for relative gender distinctiveness? In terms of women's unique role in mothering, it seems apparent that women should persevere in honouring this role with 'faith and love and holiness, with self-control'. However, how to apply the principle of relative rather than unilateral behaviour with respect to the opposite gender is less clear, especially when the question of church leadership is in view.

In terms of inter-gender relationships I have argued that the positive commands of submission and authority taught regarding marriage, do not apply in the same way to general society. Rather, here Paul gives a negative command, describing what women should not do when interacting with men in general, when he says not 'to teach or exercise authority over a man'. It is difficult to know how to apply these very general 1st century restrictions to the many different scenarios of the relationships between men and women in 21st century society. However, I believe the sufficiency of Scripture is proved when it provides simple yet comprehensive guidance within the very same letter that perplexes us so. In chapter 3 verse 15 Paul refers to the church as 'the household of God'. And then in the opening verse of chapter 5 he tells Timothy to treat an older man as 'a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters'. Therefore, I propose that Paul points to family relationships, that are determined by relative age and gender, as a model for godly mixed behaviour in general. I propose the following implication for this in terms of Christian female leadership: that in the same way women take many different roles including roles of leadership in a family, but stop short of taking authority over, and from, the father of the family; so too women in the church and broader society should refrain from leading in ways that do not respect the father-like authority of the older men in that particular church or community.

There is the complexity of what Paul meant by including the restriction of a woman not teaching a man. However, I believe that if we hold to the principle of women not exerting inappropriate authority over men, we can determine what manner of teaching Paul is referring to.

I propose it is significant that it is the ability to teach which distinguishes Paul's list of requirements for an elder, versus his list for deacons (1 Tim 3:2). Foh (1979:248) notes, 'Teaching and exercising authority are inseparable for the elder; that is, the elder has the authority to teach and to 'enforce' his teaching by means of church discipline'. Thus, where these two roles are combined, as in the case of an elder, an ultimate authority figure corresponding to the father figure in a family is in view. And so it is this role that is not appropriate for women in the 'household of God'.

To conclude this discussion on application, I would like to point to a real-life example to illustrate how I believe this proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 is a matter of the heart rather than the letter of the law.

A colleague of mine leads a group of churches in South Africa and pastors a church in the Queensburgh area of KwaZulu Natal. The other day he mentioned that some of the smaller churches were struggling with various issues, one of which was leadership. The problem was that in these smaller churches most members are women and sometimes the few men there are not suitable, willing or called candidates. We agreed that in instances like these, a suitable and willing woman whom God calls should be appointed to serve as a church leader. In the same way that circumstances sometimes require a woman (or man) to be both mother and father in a family, so too in God's household. But what joy when there are two parents who embrace their God-given identities, relationships and roles.

I believe this principle of relative suitability rather than ultimate restriction applies in the biblical case of Deborah, a judge of Israel. Applying this principle of the Christian heart valuing the relative distinctiveness of gender is also helpful in negotiating the even more complex space of the marketplace (Piper 2019: audio).

My prayer is that those who have moved away from the often harmfully-applied historic views about church leadership, will find that there is a middle path between the historic and progressive views. One where we recognise and turn away from the legalistic application of an overstatement of the restrictions on women in God's household; while at the same time having soft hearts that are eager to submit to God's purposes evidenced in his creation of both sons and daughters.

6. Conclusion

This paper has proposed that Paul wrote 1 Timothy to let his coworker in the troubled Ephesian church know 'how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church' (1 Tim 3:15). In chapter 2 verses 11–15 of this letter Paul focuses his instructions specifically on women's attitudes and behaviours in the church. He bases this teaching on the primogeniture of Adam. This appeal to God's ordering of creation seems to tighten gender restrictions in an unbearable way. However, akin to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, this tightening of the Law actually moves away from the legalistic behavioural restrictions that were necessary post-Fall and pre-Christ and moves towards the freedom of God-aligned attitudes of the heart pre-Fall and post-Christ.

In this new Christian era of spiritual freedom, Paul urges a church community within a context of oppressive patriarchy, to let women

learn. Sadly, it has taken the Church almost two millennia to apply this teaching, so it's no wonder that the freedom of Paul calling us to God's original purposes for gender has been missed. Given this historical injustice to women, it is also not surprising that Paul's qualification of women learning 'quietly with all submissiveness' is often viewed as negative, rather than in the light of other positive biblical teachings regarding a submissive and quiet spirit. Another reason the liberating tone of Paul's message is often missed, is because biblical teachings about headship and submission within individual marriages have often been misapplied to general male/female relationships. Moreover, the too-frequent perversion of Christlike leadership into abusive dominance has increased the desire to escape the traditional interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:11–15.

Yet Yahweh God is not an unloving husband nor an oppressive father. Paul reminds us of God the Father's gentle and loving nature when he talks of the church as 'God's household'. Paul draws on this metaphor of church to family in chapter 5 of this same letter. Here his instructions about how to treat others in the church, are based on the same principles of relative age and gender which determine relationships and roles in a human family, that is, categories of fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers. If respecting each other as family members of different ages and genders is kept in view when reading 1 Timothy:11-15, instead of seeing the restrictive oppression of women, we will be able to see the freedom of living within God's original purposes for men and women.

Women with quiet submissive hearts will welcome godly men assuming leadership where it entails Adam-like responsibility for knowing God's commands and the nature of the creation he formed, including the nature of the one Adam named 'snake'. Church members will be glad to hold to God's ordering within his family, because it will protect them against the 'false teachers' who sneakily ply their deception first to women, all the while encouraging men to let women take the lead. Children will flourish having mothers who welcome their feminine role as child-bearers and nurturers. And there will be overflowing blessing from women in general who, by persevering in honouring mothering with godliness, will be able to increasingly overcome the consequences of sin and work redemptively with God to fulfil his purposes for his family.

I believe that Paul's teaching about relative gender authority in 1 Timothy 2 means that elder-type leadership is a role that God has

given to the men in his family. It is the role that fathers carry in human families, where the combination of authority to discern truth and to enforce it, is unique. The fact that this role is given to men is not because women cannot lead—they can and do in significant and powerfully influential ways—but rather because women lead best when the distinctiveness of the two genders God made is valued and honoured. And proclaiming this in our churches today will help ‘the church of the living God’ to remain ‘a pillar and buttress of the truth’ (1 Tim 3:15).

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Editorial Policy

Positioning Statement

Since *Conspectus* is a scholarly publication that is evangelical in its theological orientation (i.e. predominantly classical and historically orthodox in its interpretive approach), submissions entirely void of a theological component (i.e. engagement with the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures), along with submissions that deny, either directly or indirectly, the key tenets put forward in the SATS statement of faith, will not be considered for publication. It is at the discretion of the editorial board to make the decision, and their decision is final. *Conspectus* is a refereed evangelical theological e-journal published biannually by the South African Theological Seminary (www.satsonline.org). The journal is a publication for scholarly articles in any of the major theological disciplines.

Purpose

The purpose of *Conspectus* is to provide a forum for scholarly, Bible-based theological research and debate. The journal is committed to operate within an evangelical framework, namely, one that is predominantly classical and historically orthodox in its interpretive approach, and that affirms the inspiration and authority of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The journal seeks to publish well-researched essays and reviews on a broad range of suitable biblical and theological topics that are as clear and accessible as possible for the benefit of both specialist and non-specialist readers.

Standard

Conspectus aims to combine sound scholarship with a practical and readable approach. Submissions must present the results of sound research into a biblical, theological, or practical problem in a way that would be valuable to scholars, pastors, students, missionaries, or other Christian workers.

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Conspectus publishes three kinds of theological research:

- *Scholarly essays* of 3000–10000 words on biblical, theological, or ministerial topics, which should demonstrate mastery of the current scholarship on the topic.
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In doctrine, the South African Theological Seminary is broadly evangelical. We believe in the inspiration of Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the sinfulness of man, the need for salvation through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through believers, and the centrality of the local church to the mission of God. SATS stands on the triune doctrinal foundation—Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-led. *Conspectus* reinforces these three core theological tenets by means of scholarly research that deliberates their meaning and application for the modern church.

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The author of an article that is submitted for review is required to submit the names and contact details of three potential referees. The entire review process is completely anonymous from the perspective of both the reviewers and authors.

The Review Process

The article is provisionally evaluated by the senior editor or assistant editor of the journal to determine whether it is in line with the type of articles the journal publishes, and is of sufficient academic quality to merit formal review. If in the opinion of the editor the submission is not suitable, the author is notified and the article is not sent to reviewers. If the editor sees some potential in the article, he proceeds with the remainder of the review process.

The senior editor advances the submission to two referees with appropriate expertise on the particular topic. The editor removes the name of the author from the submission.

The potential reviewer receives an electronic copy of the submission, together with a Conspectus Review Form, which contains three sections: (a) the review criteria, (b) the recommendation, (c) developmental feedback (i.e. comments).

Each reviewer is required to make a recommendation, which must be one of the following four options: (a) publish without changes, (b) publish with minor changes, (c) publish with major changes, and (d) do not publish. The reviewer is also expected to provide qualitative comment on aspects of the article that he/she believes could be improved.

The review process is developmental in nature; reviewers provide in-depth assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of the article. If they recommend 'publish with minor changes' or 'publish with major changes', they are expected to explain the perceived deficiencies and offer possible remedies.

Based on the recommendations made by the reviewers, the editor compiles the feedback for the author, indicating any changes that are required prior to publication. The final decision as to which changes are required lies with the senior editor. When the required changes are substantial, the revised submission is returned to the reviewers so that they can confirm that the deficiencies which they raised have been adequately addressed.

In the case of conflicting reviews, the decision to publish or not publish lies with the senior editor. If the senior editor sees merit in the recommendations of both reviewers, he may forward the article to a third referee.

Before publication, the author receives a proof copy of the article in PDF format for final inspection and approval.

Closing dates for submissions:

- 28/29th of February for the March issue
- 31st of August for the September issue