Conspectus

The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary

Volume 5

March 2008

ISSN 1996-8167

Contents

Panel of Referees

Vincent Atterbury	DTh	University of Johannesburg
Bill Domeris	PhD	University of the Witwatersrand
Frank Jabini	DTh	University of Zululand
Sam Kunhiyop	PhD	Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Dan Lioy	PhD	University of the North-West
Elijah Mahlangu	PhD	University of Pretoria
Leonard Marè	PhD	University of Johannesburg
Christopher Peppler	DTh	University of Zululand
Kevin Smith	DLitt	University of Stellenbosch
Arthur Song	DPhil	University of Natal
Noel Woodbridge	DTh	University of Zululand
Peter Wyngaard	PhD	University of the Witwatersrand

Editors

Senior editor	Kevin Smith
Assistant editor	Zoltan Erdey

Powers of Darkness: An Evaluation of Three Hermeneutical Approaches to the Evil Powers in Ephesians[1]

Annang Asumang[2]

Abstract

The Book of Ephesians remains one of the main sources for understanding Paul's doctrine of the nature, influence and conquest of the evil powers. Yet, the process of applying this teaching into the contemporary setting has been fraught with difficulties. The continental differences in worldviews significantly affect the hermeneutical process. This article aims to review a number of current hermeneutical approaches to understanding the nature and influence of the evil powers in Ephesians. Though Paul's teaching is timeless, it is salutary that he refrained from over systematizing the doctrine. The interpretation in the African, Asian and Southern American contexts therefore require a modest appreciation of the shared understanding with the biblical worldview of spirits. Yet, it also necessitates cautious discernment against reinventing superstition.

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Annang Asumang is a medical doctor practising medicine in England. He holds an MTh in Biblical Studies from the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

In the introduction to his classic *Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis (1962:3) makes the astute observation that, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist and a magician with the same delight". This timeless caution is particularly true when interpreting the nature and influence of the evil powers in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. The most important factor, it appears, is the presuppositions and worldviews[3] with which an interpreter approaches the biblical data. Yet, as we shall discover, no worldview is immune to either error.

In this article, I aim to illustrate Lewis' point by evaluating three contemporary hermeneutical approaches to the interpretation of the evil powers. Beyond illustration, another objective is to highlight the need for careful discernment and constant re-evaluation in evangelical understanding of Scripture, regardless of one's location.

2. The Evil Powers in Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians[4] is matched only by his letter to the Colossians for its emphasis on the comprehensive victory of Christ over the powers. Words such as *dunamis,* (power), *exousiai* (authorities), *kosmokratōr* (rulers), *archai* (principalities), *kuriotēs* (dominion), *endunamoō* (strength or strong), *pneumatika* (spiritual forces) and *energia* (inward energy) are regularly used. There are also references to the spirit world, evil powers, darkness and secrets of the underworld. Arnold (1989:41) is therefore right when he concludes that

[3] I adopt Sire's (1971:17) definition of a worldview as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconscious, consistently or inconsistently) about the makeup of our world".

[4] Pauline authorship of Ephesians is taken for granted (Eph 1:1 & 3:1). It is also assumed that Ephesians was an encyclical from the apostle to a number of churches in Asia Minor, including that in Ephesus.

"Ephesians has much more to say about the powers than any other NT epistle".

The whole epistle is shot through with references to these powers in such a way that it may be supposed that the apostle was keen to remind the believers about the doctrine. If this was one of his main purposes for his epistle (see Arnold 1989:167, who argues precisely for this view), Paul would have had good reasons for doing so.[5] His inaugural mission to Ephesus (Acts 18-20) demonstrates the tangible effects of the battle of the powers. In the synagogue, the opponents of Paul "refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way" (Acts 19:9). With the weapon of faithful preaching of the truth of the gospel, the Word of God advanced in triumph as "extraordinary miracles" were performed.

It was also in Ephesus that the seven sons of Sceva failed in their attempt to exorcize a demon-possessed man. This otherwise humorous event illustrates an important social and cultural background of Ephesus. With the temple of the goddess Diana looming high over the city, the idolatry mingled effortlessly with superstition, magic, astrological speculations and occultism (Thomas 2001:160; cf. Arnold 1989:20-40). The fear which gripped the city as a result of the failed exorcism in Acts 19:17 demonstrates the reality of the experience of the evil powers. The large volume of magical papyri which were burnt as a result of the success of Paul's ministry exemplifies the degree to which sorcery and magic was practiced by the ancient Ephesians. The violent response of the silversmiths to the loss of their business underscores the common collusion between these forces and business, culture and religion (Acts 19:27).

[5] Martin Dibelius (1909:183) has cogently argued that the powers in Paul functioned as an interpretive framework for the development of his Christology, soteriology, and ethics.

With this background in mind, a study of the evil powers in Ephesians[6] is instructive. Firstly, Paul was at pains to emphasize the spiritual and wicked nature of these powers. In Ephesians 1:21, he states that the resurrected and enthroned Christ is seated above all *archē kai exousia kai dunamis kai kuriotētos kai pantos onomatos* ("rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given", NIV). And this elevation to the highest place of honour applies "not only in the present age but also in the one to come". The supreme exaltation of Christ is therefore complete in both time and space, both vertically and horizontally. *Archē*, which is translated by the NIV as "rule" and by the KJV as "principality", means the beginner or first person, chief, the original or active cause of something in a place. It occurs only once in the Septuagint, in Jeremiah 13:18 where it is associated with the king, queen mother, greatness and glory. In this sense, *archē* is related to political rule and authority, which influences human events, actions and belief systems.

The term is however used in the pseudepigraphic book of 2 Enoch 20-22 for angelic beings. 2 Enoch 20:1, for example, lists four of the terms used by Paul in Ephesians 1:21 among ten ranks of angels in the seventh heaven. Similarly, 1 Enoch 61:10 describes how "the Lord of Spirits" will "summon all the host of the heavens, and all the holy ones above, and the host of God, the Cherubic, Seraphim and Ophannim, and all the angels of power, and all the angels of *principalities*" (cf. 2 Mac 3:24, *Testament of Levi* 3). Hendrik Berkhof is therefore also right when he concludes that in the inter-testamental apocalyptic literature, *archē* is used for the "classes of angels located in the lower and higher heavens" (1977:16-17).

It is in this sense that Paul uses *archai* for superhuman forces, which are antagonistic to Christ and his people (e.g. Rom 8:38; Col 2:15). Certainly, in Ephesians 3:10, where the apostle again refers to these powers, they are in the

[6] Elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, the apostle refers to Satan on ten occasions—Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 1:20; 5:15. Five times, he calls him the devil (Eph 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim 3:6, 7; 2 Tim 2:26.) and on four occasions with other designations ("Belial"—2 Cor 6:15; "Evil one"—Eph 6:16; 2 Thess 3:3; "god of this age"— 2 Cor 4:4 and "ruler of the power of the air"— Eph 2:2. He also refers to demons on five occasions (1 Cor 10:20-21 & 1 Tim 4:1). In addition, the believer's victory is emphasized in Rom 16:23, 1 Cor 15:24, Gal 4:3-9, Col 1:16, 2:10-15 etc. The influence of the devil on unbelievers also described by Paul in 2 Cor 4:4, etc.

"heavenly realms"—a phrase used by Paul on five occasions in this epistle for "the realm to which Christ has been raised" (Bruce 1984:254). In this sense, *archē* does not only refer to the beings that rule the spiritual realms, but also their rulership—their authority to exert changes in the spiritual realm that affect natural events. Christ has triumphed over all of it.

The association of angelic beings with principalities or regions of rule echoes a notion in Jewish tradition reflected in Daniel 10:13 and 20, where angels are linked with national names (see also 1 Enoch 60:11-12; Jub 2:2). Indeed, it is crucial to appreciate a common theme in the Bible describing the evil influence of spiritual beings on various forms of political authority (e.g. 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1). Yet, as we shall shortly find, Paul, like his New Testament counterparts, was reticent in his characterisations and does not systematize this doctrine.

Exousia, which is translated by the NIV as "authority" and the KJV as "power", refers to liberty of choice, the power of rule or government, authority, absolute power and ruler. It describes "the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others" (Vine 1996:86). It is thus similar to *archē* and indeed Paul often uses the two terms together as a common phrase (see Rom 3:38; Col 1:16, 2:10; Eph 3:10, 6:12; Col 2:15; Tit 3:1). Like *archē, exousia* is also used in the sense of earthly political systems as well as the spiritual angelic authorities that influence human events (Dan 7:27). In Ephesians 1:21, Paul no doubt had the latter sense in mind.

Paul's reference to *dunamis*, translated as "might" by the KJV and "power" by the NIV, in Ephesians 1:21, also describes spirit beings. The Septuagint frequently translated the Hebrew word "host", as in the phrase "the Lord of hosts", as *dunamis*. The term describes the military prowess and might of angels. *Kuriotētos* means lordship, dominion and power and is again mostly used in reference to evil angelic powers.

To cover all other powers that may be imagined or "named", Paul stresses that Christ rules over "every title that can be given". It is clear by this final statement in Ephesians 1:21 that Paul is not attempting to systematize the ranks or categories of evil demonic and spiritual powers over whom Christ has triumphed. He is naming any title that may be identified as an opponent of

Christ. Though Paul stresses that it is *all* powers that have been made subject to the enthroned Christ, much of his interest is particularly on the evil powers. For Psalm 110, from which the theology of enthronement is derived, focuses on the subjection of *enemies* under his feet.

The spiritual and malevolent nature of the evil powers is emphasized further in Ephesians 6, where the apostle describes the spiritual warfare in which believers are involved. The enemy is not "flesh and blood" but the spiritual beings—"the powers of this dark world" and "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". The term *kosmokratores* was an astrological term describing the influence of the planetary system on world affairs. It shares similar meaning with *stoichea* or elemental spirits (Arnold 1996:55-76). The other phrase in Ephesians 6:12, "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms", is used as a summarative term for all the opposing forces. It is therefore clear that the powers that Paul has in mind in Ephesians are spiritual and malicious.

Secondly, Paul emphasizes the effects of the evil powers in Ephesians. On four occasions in the epistle, Paul directly refers to the devil and shows that his influence extends to both unbelievers and believers. He is the spirit which is at work in the disobedient (Eph 2:2), the "ruler of the kingdom of the air". He is also called "devil" in Ephesians 4:27 and 6:11 and "evil one" in Ephesians 6:16. The term "kingdom of the air" parallels the heavenly realms in Ephesians and describes the sphere of operation and authority of the evil forces (cf. 2 Enoch 29:4-5). The devil, according to Paul, energizes the acts of disobedience, characterized by "cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" (Eph 2:3). In contrast to the "incomparably great power" released by Christ which works in believers (Eph 1:19), the devil's power causes spiritual death, sinful desires and evil cravings. Consequently, the devil is portrayed in Ephesians 2 as influencing the will, emotions and intellect of those who do not believe (Eph 2:1-3).

Yet, the devil does have some effects on believers. Clarifying further the influence of the devil, Paul, in Ephesians 4:27, warns believers against giving him a foothold. Bitterness, pride and the lack of self-control during anger give the devil a half open door through which he attacks. Though the believer's enemies are spiritual, the effect of their influence may appear in daily

experiences. This imagery of the devil as lurking around the corner, seeking to exploit any foothold that is offered is echoed by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:7 and 2 Timothy 2:26 and by Peter in 1 Peter 5:8. It is interesting that this reference to the devil is set in the centre of Paul's description of Christian ethical behaviour in this epistle. Even in the midst of living truthfully in obedience to Christ, the believer is to guard against an enemy who would seek to frustrate his efforts.

These malevolent powers aim at causing believers to fall by employing the "devil's schemes" (Eph 6:11) and attack them with "flaming arrows" (Eph 6:16). In Ephesians 4:14, Paul describes the work of false teachers who use "cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" to destabilize the faith of the immature. In Ephesians 6:11, he shows that the devil is behind the activities of such deceitful scheming. This emphasizes the deceptive character of the enemy, who does not always use obvious and easily discernible strategies in his "struggle" with believers. Though the struggle is spiritual, one ought to be careful not to assume that there are no material effects.

Thirdly, Paul highlights the complete victory of Christ over the evil powers. This is the overwhelming emphasis of the epistle. His reference to the powers in Ephesians 1 was occasioned by his prayer for the believers to come to an experiential knowledge of the power of Christ in their lives (Eph 1:15-19). He then proceeded to enumerate the powers in Ephesians 1:20-22 as a way of assuring the believers of the complete victory that they share with Jesus as they sit with him in the heavenly realms.

Similarly, the apostle's reference to the devil in Ephesians 2, coming immediately after he had emphasized the triumph of Christ, is exactly to portray this victory. As persuasively demonstrated by Timothy Gombis , the theology of Ephesians 2 is woven together by the Divine Warfare motif which shows the victory of Christ. Gombis (2004:405) notes, "This is the purpose of ch. 2: the vindication of the exalted Christ—the enumeration of the triumphs of God in Christ demonstrating that the powers ruling the present evil age are indeed subject to the Lord Christ". Consequently, despite the fact that the devil is active in Ephesians, Paul argues that Christ has triumphed over his powers.

Then, in Ephesians 3:10, the apostle portrays the primary functions of the church with regard to these powers. He notes that through the church, "the manifold wisdom of God" will be made known to the principalities and powers. As she extends the gospel, the very presence of the church is a declaration of the manifold wisdom of God to these evil powers. John Stott's (1979:123) explanation of this verse is not just poetic, "The multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. . . . History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and the church members in every land are the actors".[7]

This triumph of the church of Christ is only inaugurated and not yet fully consummated. For, in contrast to the triumph in Ephesians 1-3, Paul stresses in Ephesians 4-6 that that though these evil powers have been defeated by Christ, the victory procession has not yet begun. Like bull dogs bound on long leashes, evil powers may yet hurt those who come within their ranges. An enemy may be defeated, yet, "mopping up" exercises continue till the final victory procession.

Victory has been won, but the believer must continue to stand in that victory (Eph 6:11, 13-14). He must put on God's full armour for this purpose—armour that God himself shares with his people (Isa 59)[8]. Citing examples of these weapons of warfare, Paul includes the truth of the gospel, the righteousness of God, faith, the word of God, the hope of salvation and prayer. Believers must also be filled with his Spirit, because he strengthens them "with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Eph 3:16). In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul describes the believer's weapons with a different imagery —"siege engines with which he intends to "demolish arguments . . ." (Bruce 1984:404). Hence it is inadequate to regard the believer's spiritual weapons as a narrow bunch of arsenals. It is also noteworthy that Paul's language in this passage may correctly be described as "defensive". Believers are to stand in the triumph that has been secured for them, holding their ground until the victory procession begins.

---

[7] G B Caird, perhaps with a tinge of exaggeration, claims that "any interpretation of Ephesians stands or falls by this verse" (1976:67)

[8] For a discussion of the theology of the Divine Warrior, see Neufeld 1997.

In a summary, Paul's language describing the nature of the powers in Ephesians is not systematized. His aim was not to describe the specific nature of the malicious enemies of Christ and his church in fullest detail. Yet, he wants the reader to appreciate their reality within the scheme of God's plan. He characterizes them as malevolent personal beings, using descriptions associated with angelic spirits. His emphasis throughout is on the victory of Christ which believers share with him. Paul's key prayer for the Ephesians was for them to be "enlightened in order that you may know" (Eph 1:18)—that is, discern, understand, appreciate and appropriate the full implications of these facts.

It will be instructive to evaluate how this "knowledge" is being played out in the process of interpretation of these facts into today's world. Three hermeneutical approaches, which we shall label, demythologization, mythologization and hypermythologization[9] will now be evaluated. It is clear that the primary underlying issue regards the presuppositions with which interpreters approach the data.

3. The Demythologization of the Evil Powers

One hermeneutical approach to the biblical data on the evil powers in Ephesians is demythologization. The term "demythologization" refers to the idea of restating Christian beliefs in categories that the "modern" person would understand. It is best associated with Rudolf Bultmann, whose work was paradoxically aimed at refuting the "liberal" approaches of his time. Bultmann argued that the content of the gospel was preconditioned by a pre-scientific cosmology and myth that made it difficult for the modern person to understand. The gospel preached in such pre-scientific terms only becomes "a stumbling block" (Bultmann 1958:17) to the modern man. The task of the biblical scholar was to remove the myths in the Bible and make the message suited to the scientific age.

Consequently, Bultmann's efforts were an attempt to make the message of the Bible fit a European enlightenment paradigm that, he reckoned, did not share the spirit world paradigm of the first century Mediterranean. To him,

[9] I have coined this term for want of a short hand way of describing this approach.

demythologization was therefore unavoidable. For, those who accept the worldview of evil spirits espoused in the New Testament or insist on adopting and teaching it have "not grasped the hiddenness and transcendence of divine action and . . . seek God's act in the sphere of what is worldly" (Bultmann 1984:122).

Bultmann's scientific worldview maintains that supernatural powers cannot interrupt the natural realms of cause and effect. He therefore argued that the biblical language on the spirit world and the miraculous has merely objectified the transcendent into the immanent. Biblical language, he surmised, was a human way of speaking about God and not describing what was happening in actuality. In this sense, the Holy Spirit is not an expression for a Personal Being, but rather a way of describing "authentic Christian living". To Bultmann, living "according to the Spirit" does not refer to any supernatural influence. Rather, it describes "a genuine human life" that lives out "of what is invisible and non-disposable and, therefore, surrenders all self-contrived security" (Bultmann 1958:17).

As a result of this approach, the miraculous in the New Testament was explained as myths or apocalyptic explanations of natural phenomena. In particular, demonic activities in the gospels were in reality psychological and psychiatric ailments. Bultmann further argued that these ailments occur at periods of time and in places where inhabitants are faced with immense socio-political upheavals such as oppression under colonial rule. The people possessed by demons in Jesus' time were, therefore, psychologically disturbed —suffering from the brutalities meted out by the Roman occupiers of Palestine.

With regard to Paul, Bultmann insisted that the paucity of references to demons in his ministry (only two occasions, Acts 17 and 19) shows that the apostle had already begun demythologizing the stories about demon possession that preceded him. Paul, he argued, employed a Gnostic mythological paradigm to achieve this process. The cosmic powers described by the apostle were other ways of describing human anxieties such as death, diseases and other cares of the world.

Bultmann's demythologization, though publicly disclaimed by scholars today, is still influential in subtle ways in many circles of biblical scholarship. There are those who reject his views as an anachronistic imposition of enlightenment philosophy on the New Testament data. Yet, they proceed to endorse the "modern" application in practice. Thus, for example, according to Lincoln (1990:64, emphasis added), "The popular demythologizing of these powers in current theology . . . *may well be a valid reinterpretation* of a NT concept but it is reinterpretation". Similarly, Barth (1959:90) asserts that the evil powers are "the world of axioms and principles of politics and religion, of economics and society, of moral and biology, of history and culture".

By overly subscribing to a rather overoptimistic view of the "scientific approach", such scholars are left with no choice but to doubt, or at best allegorize, the biblical record on evil spirits. Surprisingly, the absurd nature of this stance, believing that God and angels exist and yet rejecting the existence of evil spirits, is lost on them. In the end, demythologization turns its proponents into "partial supernaturalists" who may accept that Jesus is the Messiah, but nevertheless insinuate that his victory on the cross is over nothing substantial.

4. The Mythologization of the Evil Powers

In contrast to the dismissive approach of demythologization, a number of interpretations accept the presence of these forces. However, these scholars deny their personal nature or diminish their primary malevolent influence. A representative example of this approach is Wesley Carr's (1981) *Angels and Principalities*. Carr's main argument was that unlike the tumultuous upheavals of Palestine during the time of Jesus, the Gentile world in which Paul ministered was peaceful and prosperous. In his estimation, such a serene condition would not have been conducive to an apocalyptic belief in demons and evil forces. He therefore posits that the powers of the Pauline corpus were not hostile demonic spirits but rather good angelic powers. Paul's language in Ephesians about these forces was aimed at extolling the higher honour of Christ who is exalted to God's throne over the angels.

Based on his examination of the socio-political climates of the era, Carr (1981:43) concludes that "the concept of mighty forces that are hostile to man,

from which he sought relief, was not prevalent in the thought world of the first century AD". In order to support this thesis, Carr argues that Ephesians 6:12, in which Paul specifically describes the powers as malicious, was a later interpolation into the original epistle by a second century Pauline enthusiast. Carr's views have been flatly rejected by most scholars for their lack of evidence and methodological inconsistencies (for an example of rebuttal of Carr, see Arnold 1987:71-87).

A less negative yet still inadequate evaluation of the evil powers in Paul was provided by Walter Wink in his trilogy on the "powers" (1984; 1986; 1992). Wink argued that Paul's language of the powers in Ephesians and elsewhere was an attempt by the first century person to describe real social, economic, psychological and political structures that affected their everyday lives. Rather than personal evil spirits, these forces are the inner or spiritual principles of an institution or nation—the culture, ethos and *gestalt* that affect how things run. The evil powers refer to "the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power ... the *spirituality* of institutions" (Wink 1984:5). Wink also denies the existence of a personal being called the devil, insisting that it is a "collective symbolization of evil" and "the collective of weight of human fallenness" (Wink 1986;43). Accordingly, though he does not deny that the powers in Ephesians are evil, Wink identifies them with the socio-political environment rather than with personal spirit beings.

There are specific advantages of Wink's approach. It highlights the effect of human socio-political systems in opposing God. Throughout history, overtly evil socio-political systems like the idolatry of the Roman Caesars, the anti-Semitism of Hitler's Nazism, the evil of chattel slavery, the atheism of the Communists, the dehumanization of Apartheid, the wickedness of the ethnic cleansing in parts of Africa, racism and terrorism of all forms, and the greed of capitalism have all demonstrated the extent to which the evil powers may go to influence the world systems and seek to thwart the blessings of humanity.

In covert forms, evil powers continue to influence humanity in the addiction of young people in the drugs culture, in postmodern hedonism, in the tyranny of secularism which denies people their true liberty to serve God, the disdain for the sanctity of human life, etc. It is indeed important to be reminded that Paul adds the phrase to the list of the evil powers in Ephesians 1:21—"every name

that is named" (KJV), thus making the list of evil powers an open ended possibility. Any enemy of Christ and his cause is made subject to him. Wink's interpretation, therefore, reminds Christians not to forget how the world system operates against the advance of God's kingdom in his world.

It also highlights the need for the "full armour" of God in the struggle with these powers. As we shall shortly see, there is a strand of evangelical interpretation which focuses purely on "prayer and deliverance" as the main weapons of spiritual warfare. In so doing, the need to exhibit righteous behaviour as a weapon, the proclamation of the gospel, the life of faith, hope and love, obedience to God's word and constant filling with the Holy Spirit are seemingly neglected.

Where Wink erred was to deny any particular influence of personal spirits in implementing the stratagems of the evil powers. In so doing, not only is the teaching in Ephesians undermined, the negative effects of increased spiritism, witchcraft and occultism in some societies are ignored. Consequently, Wink more-or-less creates a new myth of the existence of impersonal spirits whose effects are corporate and not personal. He commits a not infrequent mistake of the Cartesian enlightenment philosophy that regards any other worldview as "primitive and unscientific".

Perhaps Oscar Cullman's preceding correction to this attitude would have helped avoid this error. Regarding evil spirits, Cullman (1962:192, emphasis added) noted, "Whatever our personal attitude toward this view may be, we must conclude from this fact that these powers, in the faith of primitive Christianity, *did not belong merely to the framework 'conditioned by the contemporary situation'*. It is these invisible beings who in some way . . . stand behind what occurs in the world".

5. The Hyper-Mythologization of the Evil Powers

A third category of error is an over-exuberant interpretation that goes beyond what the apostle teaches concerning the evil powers. Two examples of this error will be cited—a North American and an African variety.

Perhaps taking a cue from C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness* is a fictional story that represents a particular understanding of the way evil spirits operate today. First released in 1986, this novel sold over a million and a half copies in its first few years. It is set in a small American college town at the centre of the spiritual warfare being waged on its behalf by assigned good angels and bad demons. What was at stake in this warfare was to "establish still another foothold for the coming New World Order and the New Age Christ" (Peretti 1986:257).

In riveting storytelling, Peretti manages to excite imaginations on how evil spirits may operate to influence the daily happenings in villages and towns across the country and in the world at large. Though a novel, Peretti's creative account has quickly influenced a theological worldview in some evangelical circles that sees demons underneath almost every mug in the kitchen or table in the study. Without intending to do so, he has facilitated a systemization of the evil powers in the world, beyond what Paul intended to do.

The error in this understanding is that it produces a determinism that removes the responsibility of the human agent from the equation. Events in the world are regarded as purely subject to the outcome of the battle between good and evil spirits. Human beings become pawns in this battle of the spirits for which their responsibility is limited to prayer and deliverance (see Guelich 1991:33-64 for analysis of Peretti). Another effect of this emphasis is the fear and paranoia that this pervasive awareness produces. Rather than emphasizing the victory of Christ, such over exuberant interpretation may rather produce a "paralysed" Christian witness. Superstition can easily replace belief in the supernatural.

In significant parts of African biblical circles, there is no difficulty at all in accepting the existence and reality of the influence of evil spirits. The African and the first century Mediterranean share similar beliefs about the spirit world (Loubster 2003:225).[10] It is therefore not surprising that any demythologization of the teaching on evil spirits from Ephesians proves hollow on the continent. Neither will attempts at relegating the nature and influence of evil spirits in the life of the average African be successful.

[10] This is also true for Asia, Southern America and possibly the Middle East.

Consequently, in their examination of the application of the Ephesian concept of evil powers into the context of the Tonga people of Zambia, for example, Westland and Hachibamba (2003:342) have rejected Wink's interpretation as "problematic . . . a major transformation (or transculturation) of the intended meaning of the biblical text".

On the contrary, any first time visitor to an average church service in any of the cities of West, Central and Southern Africa will be most impressed by the frequent reference to the devil and his demons. There are prayers for exorcising demons, binding Satan and delivering the oppressed in the congregation. Not only are the worshippers conscious of the battle against evil spirits, many church members and preachers specialize as "prayer warriors" who wage spiritual warfare against evil spirits.

A number of African scholars have argued that the situational context of Africa demands a contextualization that regards specific teachings as special cases for Africans. As eloquently put by Emmanuel Asante (2001:358), "Understood as deliverance not only from one's sinful selfhood but also from evil forces, salvation must address the concepts of evil and sin in the African context". It makes no sense to the African, and perhaps also the Asian or South American, to deny the presence of evil powers, or to have a Saviour who could not provide a complete and decisive victory over the powers. Asante further explains, "The African reality demands a Saviour who has the power not only to deliver the believer from evil powers but also transform the lives of the bewitched and the dehumanized, enabling them to live actively in the community" (p. 359).

Though this is very true, I now humbly argue that, in its details, a number of emerging teachings indicate that the "special cases" being made for aspects of Christianity in Africa may inadvertently result in an over systemization of the data from Scripture. The possible danger could be a Christianized form of animism that merely adds the Lord Jesus Christ to the list of powers in the African context. Contextualization needs a crucial nuance.

Two of these "special cases" that have evolved in discussions on evil powers in the African context are the emphases on ancestral curses (or spirits) and territorial spirits. Though not restricted to the African continent, the

interpretation of these two doctrines has acquired special significance for several regions of West, Central and Southern Africa since it does resonate with particular cultural and anthropological presuppositions.

The concept of generational curses is an endemic worldview of parts of Africa, that the "sins of the fathers" are visited upon the generations after them (Exod 20:4-6). It is defined by Marilyn Hickey (2000:13) as "an un-cleansed iniquity that increases in strength from generation to generation affecting the members of that family and all who come into relationship with that family". In parts of Africa, this is believed to include clan curses and spirits that are effortlessly inherited, even by those who marry into the family.[11] Whereas this may be so, a failure to emphasize the complete victory of Christ over such generational spirits only fosters a mentality that paralyses believers.

With regard to the concept of territorial spirits, Opoku Onyinah (2004:337) points out that it is "the notion that the demons assume a hierarchy with powers of greater and lesser ranks, and having specific geographical assignments". Derived from Daniel 10, the teaching emphasizes that territorial spirits wield their influence over particular geographical regions. Peter Wagner (1990:77) elaborates that they are "high ranking members of the hierarchy of evil spirits [delegated by Satan] to control nations, regions, cities, tribes, people groups, neighborhoods and other significant social networks of human beings throughout the world". The result of their influence is to change the course of the social, economic and political situations in the world. Consequently, it has been argued that their power and influence should be considered in formulating strategies for world evangelization and missions (Lowe 1998).

Systematizing this teaching further, some interpreters on the continent have speculated that these demonic powers have specific names that are required to be known if spiritual warfare is to be successful. In yet a further interpretation, the concepts of ancestral spirits are merged with territorial spirits to produce a doctrine that requires nations to exorcize the demons of economic mismanagement and corruption before the African continent may begin to prosper (Asamoah-Gyadu 2004:389-406).

[11] For a review of this teaching, see Asamoah-Gyadu 2004:389-406.

Undoubtedly, there is scriptural evidence from Daniel 7 and 10 that evil powers do seek to influence human politics.[12] Yet, there is no particular systematization of this teaching in Paul. Certainly, the apostle did not demand knowledge of the specific names of evil spirits assigned to particular cities before the invasion of the gospel. To Paul, any "name that may be named" is conquered by the enthroned Christ. David Stevens (2000:411) has also shown that the influence of the "territorial spirits" of Daniel 10, was largely personal and socio-political and not geographic.

In attributing political mismanagement, ethnic hatred, and even laziness to evil spirits, this teaching is in danger of providing some African politicians excuses for incompetence. Equally, it fails to address the socio-political issues such as the unfair global trade system that contributes to poverty. At a personal level, the teaching on inherited ancestral spirits could result in the physical and emotional abuse of women and children who are purported to be possessed by demons and accused of being witches. The harrowing case in the UK in February 2000 of the systematic abuse and eventual death of nine year old Victoria Climbie by her "Christian" guardians is one such example.[13] These guardians, among other things, believed that the child was possessed by an ancestral spirit.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Paul emphasized the existence of evil spirits not just as a peculiar worldview for his environment but an expression of a reality that believers of all worldviews neglect to their peril. His focus in Ephesians was to show the victory that Christ wrought through his death and resurrection. Yet, he also reminds them that there is "mopping" up to do after this victory. The devil, though defeated, is active in influencing those who do not believe and in attacking those who believe. Paul's aim was not to produce a systematic picture of evil spirits that puts undue emphasis on them. His aim was to raise the awareness of the spiritual realities of their Christian existence.

[12] David's disastrous census instigated by the devil (1 Chr 21:1) and Satan's opposition of the high priest in Zech 3:1 are two other Old Testament examples.

[13] See The Climbie Inquiry, accessed from http://www.victoria-climbie-inquiry.org.uk/ on 18th February 2008

The errors of demythologization, mythologization and hyper-mythologization that are eloquently described by C. S. Lewis should be borne in mind in the hermeneutical application of Paul's teaching.

Works Cited

Arnold CE 1987. The "exorcism" of Ephesians 6:12 in recent research: a critique of Wesley Carr's view on the role of the evil powers in the first century AD belief. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30: 71-87.

_____ 1989. *Power and magic: the concept of power in Ephesians.* Wipf and Stock

_____ 1996. Returning to the domain of the powers: *stoichea* as evil spirits in Gal 4:3, 9. *Novum Testamentum* 38(1):55-76.

Asamoah-Gyadu KJ 2004. Mission to "set the captives free": healing, deliverance, and generational curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. *International Review of Mission* 93:370-371, 389-406.

Asante E 2001. The gospel in context: an African perspective. *Interpretation* 55(4):355-366.

Barth 1959. *The broken wall: a study of the Epistle to the Ephesians*. Judson Press.

Berkhof 1977. *Christ and the powers*. Translated by JH Yonder. Herald Press.

Bultmann R 1984. *New Testament and mythology and other basic writings*. Translated by SM Ogden. Augsburg Fortress.

Bultmann R 1958. *Jesus Christ and mythology*. Scribner.

Caird GB, 1976. *Paul's letters from prison.* Clarendon Bible

Carr W 1981. *Angels and principalities: the background, meaning and development of the Pauline phrase "hai achai kai hai exousiai"*. SNTSMS 42. Cambridge University Press.

Cullman O 1962. *Christ and time*. SCM.

Dibelius M 1909. *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*. Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

Gombis 2004. Ephesians 2 as a narrative of Divine Warfare. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26:403-418.

Guelich RA 1991. Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti. *Pneuma* 13:33-64.

Hickey M 2000. *Breaking generational curses: overcoming the legacy of win in your family*. Harrison House.

Lewis CS 1962. *The Screwtape Letters*. MacMillan.

Lincoln AT 1990. *Ephesians.* WBC. Thomas Nelson.

Loubster JA 2003. Possession and sacrifice in the New Testament and African Traditional Religion: the oral forms and conventions behind literary genre. *Neotestamentica* 37: 221-245.

Lowe CF 1998. *Territorial spirits in world evangelization: a biblical, historical and missiological critique of strategic level spiritual warfare*. Christian Focus Publications.

Neufeld TY 1997. *"Put on the armour of God": the Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians* JSNTSup 140. Sheffield Academic.

Onyinah O 2004. Contemporary "witchdemonology" in Africa. *International Review of Mission* 93:330-345.

Peretti F 1986. *This present darkness*. Crossway Books.

Sire JW 1997. *The universe next door* (3rd ed.). InterVarsity.

Stevens DE 2000. Daniel 10 and the notion of territorial spirits. *BibSac* 157:410-431.

Stott J 1979. *The message of Ephesians: God's new society*. BST Commentary Series. InterVarsity.

Thomas R 2001. The seal of the Holy Spirit and the religious climate of Ephesus. *Restoration Quarterly* 43:155-166.

Vine WE 1996. Exousia. In *W E Vine's complete expository dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words* (1996 ed.). Thomas Nelson.

Wagner PC 1990. Territorial spirits. In PC Wagner and D Pennoyer (eds), *Wrestling With Dark Angels*, 73-91. Regal Books.

Westland ER & Hachibamba S 2000. A central African perspective on contextualizing the Ephesian potentates, principalities and powers. *Missiology* 3:341-363.

Wink W 1992. *Engaging the powers: discernment and resistance in a world of domination*. Fortress Press.

_____ 1986. *Unmasking the powers: the invisible forces that determine human existence*. Fortress Press.

_____ 1984. *Naming the powers: the language of power in the New Testament*. Fortress Press.

Be Filled With the Spirit and Not with Wine: Echoes of the Messianic Banquet in the Antithesis of Ephesians 5:18[1]

Annang Asumang[2]

Abstract

Ephesians 5:18 contrasts wine drinking with being filled with the Holy Spirit. There are a number of reasons, both in the text and the socio-cultural context, to suggest that Paul is not primarily addressing an ongoing problem of alcohol abuse in the congregation. Instead, this article will suggest that he is using the antithesis as a double-edged theological foil to describe the practical inauguration of the Messianic Banquet in the life of the church. Collaborating evidence for this interpretation, which highlights the celebratory mood of the passage, will also be found in Ephesians 2 & 4. Christian worship and mutual submission that is fuelled by the liberating power of the Holy Spirit is a practical foretaste of the forthcoming Messianic Banquet.

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Annang Asumang is a medical doctor practising medicine in England. He holds an MTh in Biblical Studies from the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Problem

It is widely acknowledged that Paul's[3] injunction against the drinking of wine to destructive excess in Ephesians 5:18 was not primarily aimed at addressing a particular problem of alcohol abuse in the Ephesian congregation. There are several reasons for this view. The instruction is abruptly introduced and is stated in a brief and fleeting manner. If Paul was therefore attempting to rebuke a particular problem, he appears not to have expended sufficient effort to do so. This is very much unlike the situation in Corinth, where the apostle devoted extended parts of his first epistle to address a similar issue.

The linguistic and grammatical features of the verse also indicate that Paul is using the reference to wine drinking for his theological purposes. He employs the word *alla* (instead) to create a contrastive parallelism. This suggests an effort to generate a lesson from the first part of the parallelism to serve the purpose of the second part. In addition, the two datives and imperatives have the same instrumental function of agency suggesting an attempt to relate meanings between the two parts.

Despite the possible allusion to Proverbs 23:31 (Bruce 1984:379), the juxtaposition of drinking alcohol with being filling with God's Holy Spirit leaves one with a "sour" aftertaste. Although in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul describes the Holy Spirit as given to believers to drink, he does not contrast this with drunkenness as vividly as he does in Ephesians 5:18. Lincoln explains the contrast as part of the three series of antitheses between "folly and wisdom" in Ephesians 5:15-18 (1990:338). Yet, this does not sufficiently

[3] Every one of the extant manuscripts of the epistle state Pauline authorship, and all external evidence have collaborated this. Other questions that have been raised about Pauline authorship of Ephesians are not convincing. For example, the epistle does not contain the characteristic features of contemporary pseudepigraphas. In addition, the theology of the epistle is thoroughly Pauline, even though; they are much more philosophically reflective. The difference in style, compared to the other Pauline epistles, is well explained by Paul's likely use of a different amanuensis. For discussions on Pauline authorship, see Guthrie 1975: 400-404.

explain why Paul would create the particular parallelism between drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Bruce (1984:380) has helpfully pointed out that the metaphorical sense of the antithesis "does not suggest that the Spirit is a sort of fluid". All the same, Paul's juxtaposition of the two requires further explanation. The verse no doubt points to the destructive effects of excessive wine. Yet, in addition to emphasizing its negative inhibitory effects, the apostle also depicts a celebratory mood of singing and thanksgiving and making melodious music that parallels the "liberating" or disinhibitory effects of wine drinking.[4] Such a deliberate allusion would have limited the effect of an instruction aimed at addressing an on-going problem of alcoholism.

Furthermore, there are indications that the epistle may have been an encyclical from Paul to one of the churches in Ephesus (or a number of churches in its immediate surroundings).[5] The apostle did not know this particular Ephesian congregation (in contrast to another Ephesian congregation with whom he spent three years – Acts 20:31). The tone of the letter, like that to the Romans, is very much reflective and theologically crafted. He had *heard* about their faith (Eph 1:15) but had had no previous personal dealings with them. And the various accounts that he had received about them were praiseworthy. Equally, the recipients had not yet met him but only *heard* about "the administration of God's grace" that Paul had received (Eph 3:2). This lack of intimate acquaintance suggests that the instruction in Ephesians 5:18 is crafted to serve an additional exhortational purpose. What is this additional purpose?

---

[4] Martin Lloyd-Jones, the late physician pastor, drew attention to the depiction in the passage of both depressant and stimulant pharmacological effects of alcohol. He notes, "If it were possible to put the Holy Spirit into a textbook of Pharmacology, I would put Him under the stimulants…He stimulates our every faculty…the mind and the intellect…the heart…and the will" (1975:21).

[5] The possible encyclical nature of Ephesians was mooted as far back as the second century by Tertullian (155-230 AD) and Origen (185-254 AD). This was largely because two of the oldest extant manuscripts omit the phrase "in Ephesus" in Eph 1:1. Marcion, the heretic (110-160 AD) also regarded it to have been a letter to Laodicea. Not all scholars agree with this encyclical theory however. For discussions on this, see Black 1981:73, Guthrie 1975:400-404 & Metzger 1965:235.

1.2. The Festival and Banquet Theories

Two likely scenarios in the socio-cultural milieu of Ephesus have been recommended to explain this double-edged exhortation by Paul. Almost three decades ago, Cleon Rogers Jr. described a number of corresponding parallels between the passage and the wine drinking festivals of the cult of Dionysus (also called Bacchus), the Greek god of wine. This festival was so popular and widespread throughout the Mediterranean region that conversations about grapes, wine or even ivy were almost always assumed to be related to the cult. The pleasures and creative inspiration of poetry and song resulting from wine drinking were regarded by many Greeks as gifts from Dionysus (Henrichs 1980:140-43). Plato, in *the Republic* 2.363c-d, even suggested that the Dionysian festivals were symbolic of the joys of the afterlife.

According to Rogers, the popularity of the wine festival resulted in many pagans mistaking "the Jews of worshiping Dionysus, simply because certain things in Judaism appeared to have Dionysian motifs. To talk of wine and drinking immediately brought Dionysian expressions in the conversation, and to live a riotous, wanton, debauched, drunken life was characterized as a 'Dionysian mode of life'" (1979:253). Rogers therefore suggested that Paul was contrasting the wild excesses of the cult with the "wisdom and power, the intellectual and artistic ability, the freedom from the drudgery of daily life, as well as a prophetic message from the true God" (p. 257) that is released by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Peter Gosnell (1993:363-371) has, on the other hand, examined the passage from the perspective of the catalogues of mealtime etiquettes published in the Greco-Roman writings of antiquity. Food in the Mediterranean region, according to Mary Douglas (1972:61), "was treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed". Most social and religious meetings of antiquity were conducted in the mealtime setting. And these meetings were often organized as banquets and structured according to specific rules and regulations on how best to behave at the table. Many of the rules encoded cultural norms which ranked the diners in a hierarchy according to their statuses.

The banquet setting served as occasions for socialization and religions instructions (Reinhartz 1999:228). Indeed, ancient people made very little distinctions between what modern people now dichotomize into sacred and secular meals. Every meal gathering in ancient times was for that matter a religious one (Smith 2003:6). In Gosnell's view, therefore, Paul in Ephesians 5:18 was describing the appropriate behaviour expected of believers when they gathered together under the power of the Holy Spirit. Simply put, they should never get drunk. As a countercultural community, they should instead be filled with the Holy Spirit and so mutually submit to each other. In this sense Paul's teaching parallels his emphasis in 1 Corinthians 11-14 in which he stressed the need for the Spirit filled life to show itself through love, self-control and prophetic edification of one another.

To a large extent, these two theories are compatible with each other and do mostly provide us with the additional purpose of Ephesians 5:18. As expertly demonstrated by Smith (2003), the Mediterranean table symposia, and food and drink festivals, were significantly imbued with religious significance. The Jewish Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles festivals demonstrate the close relationships between food, celebrations and religion. Themes from these festivals invariably influenced many of the religious teachings of the time.

Accordingly, several of the parables of Jesus contain descriptions of eating and drinking. For instance, Robert Karris has identified as many as fifty-one passages in Luke's gospel alone in which Jesus is linked with food. He quips that in Luke's gospel, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal" (1985:47; cf. Poon 2003:224-230). Similarly, Paul's preoccupations with table motifs in his other letters, especially Galatians, Romans and 1 Corinthians, support the suggestion that he may have been thinking of the banquet and festival setting in Ephesians 5.

What is left unaccounted for by the festival and banquet theories however, is the pervasive eschatological tone of the passage. The whole of Ephesians 5:3-21[6] is indeed draped in eschatological language. The apostle begins by referring to the final exclusion of evildoers from inheritance in the kingdom

[6] There is a definite change of subject and tone in Eph 5:3, but it is disputed among commentators whether the section ends at Eph 5:21 or the theme of mutual submission continues to Eph 6:9 (See Lincoln 1993:xxxv-xlv).

(Eph 5:5). He then warns about the wrath of God's judgment on such people (Eph 5:6) and challenges his readers to wake up from sleep as heralds of the coming resurrection (Eph 5:14). Even though the source of the quotation in Ephesians 5:14 is unknown, whether from an earlier Christian hymn, or a paraphrase of Isaiah 26:19 or 60:1-3; its reference to the great day when the Lord will appear and believers will be gathered to Him is unmistakable. The apostle goes on to appeal for wisdom in discerning that "the days are evil" and in "making most of every opportunity" (Eph 5:16; see Anderson 1989:64). It is within this eschatological context that Paul gives the warning about drinking wine to excess. The command to be filled with the Holy Spirit should therefore be interpreted from this eschatological perspective.

1.3. The Messianic Banquet as a Solution

One festive background that may account for the antithesis in Ephesians 5:18 from an eschatological perspective is the Messianic banquet. Several New Testament passages interweave eschatological themes with motifs of food/wine and being drunk.[7] For example, Jesus promised to drink wine with His disciples at a banquet in His coming Kingdom (Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18) and yet also warned them against being "drunk" on the day that He returns to judge the living and the dead (Lk 21:34). Similarly, Paul elsewhere warns against callous living and debauch drinking as the Lord's coming draws near (Rom 13:13; 1 Thes 5:7). In 1 Corinthians 10:21, he juxtaposes drinking at the "table of the Lord" with drinking at the "table of demons". The book of Revelation also depicts God's righteous anger as wine that is given to make "the beast" drunk, at the same time as the redeemed of the Lord worshipped the Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-10). I hypothesize therefore that these antithetical depictions of meals within an eschatological framework echoes in the background of Ephesians 5:18.

In what follows, I shall make a three stage argument to support the hypothesis that the reference to debauched wine drinking and filling with the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 echoes the Bible's teaching that the Messianic banquet has already been inaugurated in the church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

[7] E.g., Mt 11:18-19; 20:22; 26:29; Lk 12:45; 22:30; Jn 4:14; Rom 13:13, 1Th 5:7; Rev 14:10 & 17:2

To begin, I shall argue that by the time of Paul, the Messianic banquet was regarded as inaugurated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the church. Secondly, I shall demonstrate that Paul's antithesis in Ephesians 5:18 echo this motif. I shall then seek collaboration for this interpretation by briefly examining two other passages in Ephesians (Eph 2 and 4) in which Paul's description of the eschatological ministry of God's Spirit in the church also echo themes associated with the banquet.[8]

2. The Messianic Banquet and the Holy Spirit

Dennis E. Smith (2003:166) has defined the Messianic banquet (also called eschatological or apocalyptic banquet) as a prevalent mealtime motif found in various stages and descriptions in Jewish literature. It contained "the general symbolism of food and/or a festive meal to signify immortality and/or the joys of the end-time or afterlife". Though there are variations in the way the banquet is portrayed, some characteristics are constant. The motif describes metaphorical consumption of large amount of food and/or drink associated with the celebration of the victorious presence of God. The banquet tends to combine two separate meals together. One meal describes the celebratory meal of God's people and the other describes the destruction or feasting of His enemies. The food is usually bread and fish, whereas the drink is usually wine,[9] water, milk or honey (Webster 2003:40).

Isaiah 25:6-8 is one example of the description of Messianic banquet. As in that passage, the motif is often depicted as a victory banquet with themes of jubilation and triumph over enemies. There is also description of the

[8] Intertextual echoes constitute the metaleptic use of previously existing scripture or tradition in another text. They are unstated or sometimes suppressed remodelling of a previous text or textual tradition that resonates in the background of another text. Due to their unstated nature, one cannot be absolutely certain that Paul has intentionally used the Messianic banquet motif in his exhortation in Eph 5:18. My present interpretation is therefore fallible. To reduce the margin of error, the methodology of this investigation has followed the seven criteria for testing the validity of echoes of Scripture as set out by Richard Hays (1989:29-32). I hope that, at least, I have arrived at an understanding that is faithful to Paul's "evocative use of Scripture".

[9] The greater significance of wine among the drinks is derived from its prominent image in Jacob's blessing of Judah in Gen 49:8-12.

vindication of the righteous and the strong bond of fellowship among them. Not infrequently, while believers enjoy the sumptuous blessings of God, unbelievers are depicted as suffering and sometimes given "harmful" food to eat in a divine reversal of fortunes (Isa 54:5-55:5).[10] Ezekiel 37-39 for instance depicts the Messianic age as one everlasting banquet in which the destruction of God's enemies will be used as sacrifice.

On occasions, the Messianic banquet is also depicted as a sacred marriage or a wedding banquet (Collins 1976:223-224).[11] In Isaiah 54, for example, Israel is described as God's "wife of youth" (Isa 54:6). Revelation 21 is another example of a Messianic banquet in which the church as the New Jerusalem is depicted as the bride adorned for Christ the Bridegroom. As we shall shortly see, in Ephesians 5, the church is also depicted as a bride being prepared for a marriage banquet.

During the later period of Old Testament history, the major Jewish festivals became prototypes for describing the Messianic banquet. By the first century, the annual agricultural festival of Pentecost had been transformed to celebrate God's showering of gifts and covenantal blessings on His people.[12] Special among these covenants was the new covenant in which God gave His Holy Spirit to renew His people at the beginning of the Messianic age (Ezek 36:27 & Jer 31). Joel 2:21-32 & 3:16-21 also link the feast of Pentecost with the eschatological outpouring of God's Spirit "on all flesh" (VanderKam 2002:239-254). The connection between excessive "new" wine, the filling of the Holy Spirit and the Jewish festival of Pentecost in Acts 2:13 are therefore evocative of Paul's contrast between drunkenness and the Spirit's filling in Ephesians 5:18.

Another major Jewish festival associated with the Messianic banquet was the Feast of Tabernacles. Though this feast begun as a celebration of the migration of the Israelites through the wilderness (Ex 23:16 & Deut 16:13-15), it later became associated with the worship of God's people in His presence in the

[10] E.g., Isa 6:13, 25:6-8, Joel 2:24-26 & 3:18. 2 Bar 29:1-4 describes the dish at the meal as made from the giant mythical sea monster called Leviathan, representing the meat of God's enemies.

[11] Also Hos 2:1-23, Is 54:4-8; Song 2:4, 5:1 Ezek 16:7-8.

[12] For example, in Jubilees 1:5; 6:11,17; 15:1-24; IQS1:7-2:19

temple. Its main themes were God's triumphal enthronement, His dwelling presence among His people, His gathering together of all nations to worship Him, pilgrimage into His sanctuary and later, its association with water (MacRae 1960:275). These themes made it a suitable prototype to describe the Messianic banquet. Thus Zechariah 14:16 depicts the eschatological Feast of Tabernacles in which the nations of the world will join God's people to worship Him. Similarly, in Revelation 7:9-17, the depiction of multitudes of the redeemed worshipping the Lamb of God is filled with motifs from the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Ulfgard 1989).

In the Old Testament, the Messianic banquet was regarded as yet to be fulfilled in the future Messianic age.[13] In the New Testament however, the banquet was portrayed as inaugurated in the church by the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus described the banquet on several occasions.[14] In Matthew 9:14-17, He intimated that wine drinking and the pouring of "new wine into new wineskins" occurs while, He, the "Bridegroom", is with His guests. The miracle of Cana (John 2:1-11) and Jesus' feast of tabernacles "streams of living water" (John 7:38-39) declaration also signify the inauguration of the Messianic banquet. It is therefore unsurprising that Luke's description of the life of the early church in Acts 4:31-35 contain themes from the Messianic banquet (see Sterling 1994:679-696 who argues that Luke's description in Acts 4 parallels the literary motifs of idealized or utopian communities). Luke was in no doubt that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was part of the inauguration of the Messianic banquet.

Paul's teaching about community meals in Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians also reflect his belief that the church is the inaugurated eschatological community. When God's people gather at meals, the rules that operate in the Messianic banquet were to be the norm. The worship,

---

[13] There is limited evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the sectaries of Qumran regarded their community meals as enacting the Messianic banquet. In IQS28a 2:11-22, for example, they expected the "messiah priest" to join them at their regular community meals. Cross has therefore pointed to the tendency for members of the Qumran community to regard their common eating together as a "liturgical anticipation of the Messianic banquet" (1961:77). Other inter-testamental references to the banquet are in Sibylline Oracles, Book 3; 1 Enoch 60, 4 Ezra 6 and Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 29.

[14] Matt 22:1-14, 25:1-13, Mark 2:19-20, Luke 5:34-35; 14:7-11 & 22:28-30

fellowship, and teaching ministry of the church, fuelled by God's Holy Spirit, should be seen as anticipating or enacting the banquet. Thus in 1 Corinthians, he emphasized that the Lord Jesus was the Host at their banquets - they were eating at "the Lord's table" (1 Cor 10:21). Though Paul linked the institution of the Lord's Supper with both the death and second coming of Christ (1 Cor 11:23-26), he also emphasized that in all of their communal meals, they were feasting in the presence of God's Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, he reminds the believers that they have all been given the same Holy Spirit to drink. As pointed out by Talbert, this alludes beyond the Lord's Supper imagery to Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit as Living water (Talbert 1984:95-108).

Consequently, in 1 Corinthians 11-14, Paul argues that the spiritual realities of oneness, love and mutual submission of the body of Christ must be evident. In contrast to their pagan neighbours, believers were to behave as befitting the eschatological community among whom God's Spirit is at work. Those who eat and drink at the Lord's Table in an "unworthy manner" (1 Cor 11:27) are condemned as guilty because they have dishonoured the Lord at His banquet. Paul's vehement opposition of Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 and his strident rebuke of the mealtime inconsideration in 1 Corinthians 11 were based on this theology of the Messianic banquet (see Smith 2003:173-217). It is these motifs that are also reflected in his exhortation in Ephesians 5:18, and to which we now turn.

3. The Messianic Banquet in Ephesians 5:18

Scholars who have questioned the Pauline authorship of Ephesians have pointed, among other things, to the epistle's realized Hellenistic and spatial eschatology (Robinson 1922:96; Lincoln 1993:lx-lxxiii).[15] As we now

[15] They stress that Paul's usual teaching on the fast movement of time to its apocalyptic end is not emphasized as much as the growth and expansion of the church into a temple for God's dwelling. They also argue that in contrast to the horizontal eschatology of his other letters, Paul depicts the Lord Jesus Christ, in Eph 1:20-21, as now seated in the heavenly realms above all dominion and authority. And God has now raised believers up with Christ and seated us with Him in this same heavenly realm (Eph 2:6). They point to the peculiar presence of the phrase "heavenly realms" in this epistle as a reflection of the spatial emphases of its eschatology. As we shall find in the subsequent discussion, this argument has many flaws. In

demonstrate, though there are spatial eschatological themes, these are nevertheless closely interwoven with Jewish temporal and futurist apocalyptic motifs. In his prayer at the beginning of the letter, Paul refers to the fulfilment of time when God will bring "all things in heaven and on earth together" under Christ (Eph 1:10). In addition, believers have a glorious hope in the future, which is full of God's rich inheritance (Eph 1:18). Paul however reminds the Ephesians that though "in the coming ages", God will demonstrate His incomparable riches of grace towards them; they now already share this heavenly inheritance with Jesus (Eph 2:6-7). The eschatology of Ephesians is therefore both realized and yet to be consummated—it is an inaugurated eschatology.

As in Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians, the gathering of believers in Ephesians is also regarded by Paul as the earthly counterpart of the heavenly assembly of God's holy ones (Eph 3:15). Even now, the incomparably great power, the same power that resurrected the Lord Jesus (Eph 1:19-20), is at work within believers. They have received a new self that is "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). Believers are God's holy people, among whom no hint of sexual immorality should ever be heard (Eph 5:3). The church, in Ephesians, in Smalley's words is therefore "the instrument of God's cosmic purpose—although the final consummation is of course to be beyond the mere unity of the church" (1956:153).

One fundamental element of this "already and not yet" eschatology in Ephesians is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers. The Holy Spirit who revealed the mystery of the Christian hope to the apostles (Eph 3:5) also seals believers "for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30). He is the "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption" (Eph 1:14). He grants us access to God the Father (Eph 2:18) to enable us fulfil His purposes on earth. Paul specifically links the giving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for accomplishing these purposes to the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:8). He emphasizes that these gifts have been given to bring the Body of Christ to maturity (Eph 4:13). The goal of the Spirit's work, Paul notes, is to prepare the church for the consummation of its marriage to Christ (Eph 5:27).

Ephesians, just as in his other letters, Paul mixed his Jewish apocalyptic eschatology with Hellenistic themes (See Bruce, 1990:229-240 & Guthrie, 1975:404).

Ephesians 5:18 should therefore be understood in this context of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inaugurated eschatological community.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul warns the believers not to "get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery". This reference to the drinking of wine to dissipation echoes the destruction of God's enemies that is characteristic of the Messianic banquet motif. Paul uses of the word *asōtia* to describe the effects of drinking wine to excess. According to *The New Testament Greek Lexicon* (n.d.), this word means "an abandoned, dissolute life; profligacy and prodigality". The most literal meaning of the word is "unsavedness". Thus, in Ephesians 5:18, Paul is echoing the situation of those who drink wine to debauched excess as people heading for destruction. In the context of the eschatological banquet, this refers to the plight of the unsaved.

There are other indications in Ephesians 5 to support this understanding of the first part of the parallelism. The contrast between being drunk and being filled with the Holy Spirit is only one of several contrasting pairs between those who will inherit the kingdom of Christ and those upon whom the wrath of God will come (Eph 5:5-6). The other contrasts are darkness and light (Eph 5:8-14), wise and unwise (Eph 5:15), and folly and those who understand God's will (Eph 5:15). In all these contrasts, Paul is describing the difference between the saved and unsaved person.

These contrasts have their roots in the Jewish wisdom tradition of the "two ways" (e.g., Prov 4:10-14; 10:8-14). They echo themes that contrast "sons of light" with "sons of darkness", which were common among the Qumran sectaries (e.g., in IQS 3:19-25; 4:24). In 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 and Romans 13, Paul also describes drunkenness as a characteristic feature of life of "darkness". Indeed almost all references in the New Testament to drunkenness or drunkards typically described the life of the unsaved (e.g. Matt 24:49; Luke 12:45; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:10). The contrast between drunkenness and the filling of God's Spirit therefore serves the function of distinguishing the unsaved from the saved within an eschatological context. Just as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:21 Paul warns that drunkards would not inherit the kingdom of God, so here, in Ephesians 5:18, he uses drunkenness as a dividing line between those who enjoy the superabundance of the Messianic banquet and those who do not.

As in some of the depictions of the Messianic banquet motif, the destruction of God's enemies in Ephesians 5:18 occurs through drinking. In Revelation 14, those who have the "mark of the beast" drink the wine of God's anger; while "the redeemed from among men" sing new songs of praise before God's throne.

Paul then commands the Ephesians that they should instead be "filled" with the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in the epistle, believers are filled with Christ (Eph 1:23; 4:13), and with God (Eph 3:19). The word *plerousthe* (be filled) means "to make full, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally . . . to consummate" (*New Testament Greek Lexicon*, n.d.; cf. Woodcock 2000:68-87). In the Old Testament, the term is associated with the filling of the temple by the Spirit of God[16] and is previously alluded to in Ephesians 2:22. At the individual level, it describes allowing the Holy Spirit to operate in such a way as to produce a constant and overabundant result. There should be no room for anything else when the believer is filled with God's Spirit. As put by Kostenberger (1997:231), "being filled with the Spirit" should be understood in a metaphorical sense of someone being "full" of a given substance, be it material (wine) or spiritual (the Holy Spirit)". Thus, in Ephesians 5:18, Paul is describing the extravagant effect of the operation of the Spirit of God in the yielded believer and in the life of the church. This extravagance is a characteristic feature of the Messianic banquet.

The present continuous tense of the command, which therefore may be rendered as "be continuously filled with the Spirit", also echoes the Messianic banquet motif. The wine in the messianic banquet never runs out. In Joel's vision of the banquet, for example, "the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house" (Joel 3:18). Jesus spoke of the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit as "streams" of living water which flows from the believer. And in the miracle at Cana, Jesus turned water into large amount of "choice wine", just when the old wine had run out. Though there could be "excess" in drinking wine, believers on the other hand can never be over-filled with the Holy Spirit.

[16] E.g. Exod 40 34-35, 1 Kgs 8 10-11, 2 Chr 5 13-14, 7 1-2, Hag 2 7, Ezek 10 4, 43 5 & 44 4.

In addition, the sense of the command, *plerousthe*, is plural; it is in the sense of a community being filled with the Holy Spirit rather than just individuals. Though each individual must apply this command and continuously yield to the presence of God's Spirit, Paul's command is for the whole church as a community of believers. Certainly, the result of being filled operates in the context of the church as an eschatological community. This also echoes the Messianic banquet motif which is always presented as a community meal, to which as many people as possible are invited to "Come! And let him who hears say, Come" and drink (Rev 22:17).

Paul's description of the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit also echo the celebratory mood associated with the Messianic banquet. He points out that those filled with the Holy Spirit would edify one another with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs and melodious music. They would be filled with thanksgiving to God the Father and submit to each other out of reverence to Christ. The picture that is depicted here is a life of continuous Spirit-filled worship in the presence of the enthroned Christ. This is another characteristic feature of the Messianic banquet. Of course, in the final Messianic banquet, the focus is totally on Christ. In the inaugurated but yet to be consummated eschatological community, edification of one another as well as thanksgiving to God features in the worship.

The mutual submission to one another in Ephesians 5:21 depict the image of believers at God's table with no concerns about their ranks and statuses. They are willing to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ, the Host of the banquet. Just as in 1 Corinthians 11-14; Paul describes the love and mutual submission of the church at the Lord's Table, so also in Ephesians 5, the eschatological community should show reverence to their Host by not being obsessed with their ranks.

This mutual submission fuelled by the work of the Holy Spirit provides Paul with the platform to discuss the household rules in Ephesians 5:23-6:9. These practical rules of how human relationships at home and work should honour God are also influenced by some themes from the Messianic banquet. He uses the comparatives, *hōs* ("as", Eph 5:23-24), *houto* ("so also", Eph 5:24, 28) and *kathōs* ("even as", Eph 5:25, 29) to compare Christian marriage with the marriage relationship between Christ and the church. In Ephesians 5:25-27, he

paints the picture of Christ as the marital suitor, who expresses His love through His death and "thereby privately and publicly, decently and legally, binds Himself to her and her to Him" (Barth 1974:691). As has been noted this concept of divine marriage is typical of the Messianic banquet. To Paul, the husband and wife relationship is more or less a parable of the marriage between the church and Christ.

4. The Holy Spirit in Epesians 2 and 4, and the Messianic Banquet

A remaining question needs to be answered, albeit briefly. Is there any evidence in the rest of Ephesians to suggest that Paul's eschatology of the Spirit may be understood from such a Jewish apocalyptic perspective? The answer to this question is, yes indeed. Two other passages in the epistle in which Paul links the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church also allude to concepts related to the messianic banquet. Specifically, his teaching in Ephesians 2 and 4 regarding the outpouring of God's Spirit is shaped by motifs from Jewish festivals.[17] Though the allusions in these two passages do not directly echo the messianic banquet; their relationship to the Jewish festive traditions demonstrates Paul's hermeneutic in Ephesians 5.

In Ephesians 2:22, Paul depicts the church as a temple in which God dwells by His Spirit. This theme is not uncommon in Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 3:10; 6:19). However, it also has a festive background that should inform the interpretation of the passage. This is because the imagery is one of the characteristic features of the feast of tabernacle.[18] Indeed, Jonathan Draper (1983:133) has argued

[17] The mixture of Hellenistic and Jewish eschatological themes in Ephesians is not surprising when we consider that the congregation may well have had both Jews and Gentiles within their midst. The city itself was well known for its large number of Jews. The apostle wanted to engender cordial fellowship and unity between the two groups. Hence he insists that Christ has destroyed the dividing walls between Jews and Gentile to create "one new man out of two" (Eph 2:15). The Gentiles are heirs together with Israel (Eph 3:6) in this single temple of God of which Christ is its cornerstone. It has therefore been suggested that "a Hellenistic Judaism should prove the most plausible background of Ephesians" (Lincoln & Wedderburn 1993:90). For a recent discussion on the preponderance of Jewish themes in Ephesians, see Yee, 2005.

[18] The festive occasions associated with Solomon's dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 18 & 2 Chronicles 5 were interpreted as part of the celebration of the feast of tabernacles by Josephus

that by the first century, the Feast of Tabernacles "came to be associated with the temple and with the theophany in the Jerusalem temple".

It is not surprising therefore that the same feast became a prototype to describe the Messianic banquet. Just as in Ephesians 2, Gentiles who were far off have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel to be built into God's temple for His dwelling (Eph 2:13), so also does Zechariah 14:16 depict an eschatological Feast of Tabernacles with the ingathering of Gentiles to the city of Jerusalem to worship Jehovah. Timothy Gombis has also shown that the whole of Ephesians 2 follows the pattern of divine warfare ideology characterized by conflict, victory, kingship, temple building and celebration (2004:406). Just as in Revelation 21:1-27, in Ephesians 2, the church (or the New Jerusalem) is God's eschatological temple in which His people celebrate the exalted and triumphant Christ.

Another passage which links the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church with a Jewish festival is Ephesians 4:1-11. Psalm 68:18 that Paul quotes in Eph 4:8 describes the triumphant ascension of Jehovah on Mount Zion while showering His people with blessings and gifts. Though this Psalm was composed to commemorate the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam 15), by Paul's time, it had taken on eschatological significance depicting the victory of God (Gombis 2005:367). It is therefore not a mere coincidence that Ps 68 became linked with Pentecost (Kirby 1968: 138-139).[19] Lindars has consequently argued that the theme of the Jewish feast of Pentecost influences Paul's description of the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Eph 4 and Luke's in Acts 2:33 (1961:51-59). In Ephesians 4, Paul is interpreting Psalm 68 as a "Christian Pentecostal psalm, celebrating the ascension of Christ and His subsequent descent at Pentecost to bestow spiritual gifts upon the church" (Caird 1964:541).

These two examples do not conclusively show that the Messianic banquet echoes in Ephesians 5:18. What they prove however is that Paul consistently linked the eschatological ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church with motifs

---

in *the Antiquities of the Jews* 8:4.1. See also *Leviticus Rabba* 30:7.

[19] The synagogue readings at Pentecost during the time of Jesus included Ps 68 and Num 17 & 18 (Van Goudoever 1959:201).

affiliated to Jewish festive celebrations. Since the most extensive biblical depiction of an eschatological festival is the Messianic banquet, these two examples together provide some indirect evidence. They support the hypothesis that in Ephesians 5:18 Paul's warning against drinking wine to destructive excess and his command to be filled with the Spirit may be understood in reference to the Messianic banquet motif. At least they indicate a high probability that Paul would have applied the Messianic banquet motif in Ephesians 5:18.

5. Conclusion

The church is the eschatological community in which the promised Messianic banquet has been inaugurated. When it gathers, it should be celebrating the triumphant and enthroned Christ at the same time as it edifies His Bride. Out of reverence for the exalted Christ, believers should mutually submit to each other. This is the vision of the church that Paul espouses in Ephesians 5:18 and the Holy Spirit is the Mediator, whose fullness makes it a constant reality. In continually being filled with God's Spirit, believers and the church alike are enacting the Messianic banquet, and so hastening the Lord's return to consummate His marriage with the church.

Works Cited

Anderson C 1989. Rethinking "be filled with the Holy Spirit" and the purpose of Ephesians. *Evangelical Journal* 7:57-67.

Barth M 1974. *Ephesians*. Anchor Bible. Doubleday.

Black DA 1981. The peculiarities of Ephesians and the Ephesian address. *GTJ* 2(1):59-73.

Bruce FF 1984. *The epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. Eerdmanns.

Caird GB 1964. The descent of Christ in Eph 4:7-11. In FL Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica, vol 2: Papers presented to the Second International Congress on Biblical Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1961,* 535-545. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

Collins AY 1976. *The combat myth in the book of Revelation*. HDR 9. Scholars Press.

Cross FM 1961. *The ancient library of Qumran and modern biblical studies*. Doubleday.

Douglas M 1972. Deciphering a meal. *Daedalus* 101:61-81.

Draper J 1983. The heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17. *JSNT* 19:133-147.

Gombis TG 2005. Cosmic Lordship and divine gift-giving: Psalm 68 in Eph 4:8. *Novum Testamentum* 47:367-380.

_____ 2004. Ephesians 2 as a narrative of divine warfare. *JSNT* 26:403-4i8.

Gosnell PW 1993. Ephesians 5:18 and mealtime propriety. *Tyndale Bulletin* 44: 363-371.

Guthrie D 1975. *New Testament introduction*. InterVarsity Press.

Hays RB 1989. *Echoes of Scripture in the letters of Paul*. Yale University Press.

Henrichs,A 1980. Changing Dionysiac identities. In B Meyer and EP Stander (eds), *Jewish and Christian Self Definition. Vol 3: Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World*, 140-43. Fortress Press.

Karris RJ 1985. *Luke: artist and theologian*. Paulist

Kirby JC 1968. *Ephesians, baptism and Pentecost*. McGill.

Kostenberger A 1997. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? A biblical investigation. *JETS* 40:229-240.

Lincoln AT 1990. *Ephesians. WBC*. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Lincoln AT and Wedderburn AJM 1993. *The theology of the later Pauline letters*. Cambridge University Press.

Lindars 1961. *New Testament apologetic: the doctrinal significance of the Old Testament quotations*. SCM.

Lloyd-Jones M 1975. *Life in the Spirit in marriage, home and work*. Baker.

MacRae GW 1960. Meaning and evolution of the Feast of Tabernacles. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22:257-276.

Metzger B 1965. *The New Testament: its background, growth and content*. Abingdon.

Poon WCK 2003. Superabundant table fellowship in the kingdom: the feeding of the five thousand and the meal motif in Luke. *Expository Times* 114:224-230.

Reinhartz A 1999. Reflections on table fellowship and community identity. *Semeia* 86:227-233.

Robinson AJ 1922. *St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians*. MacMillan.

Rogers CL Jr. 1979. The Dionysian background of Eph 5:18. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:249-256.

Smalley S 1956. The eschatology of Ephesians. *The Evangelical Quarterly* 28:152-157.

Smith DE 2003. *From symposium to Eucharist: the banquet in the early Christian world*. Fortress Press.

Sterling GE 1994. Athletes of virtue: an analysis of the summaries in Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16. *JBL* 113(4):679-696.

Talbert CH 1984. Paul's understanding of the Holy Spirit: the evidence of 1 Corinthians 12-14. *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11:95-108

New Testament Greek Lexicon. Accessed from http://www.studylight.org/lex/grk/, 2007-12-03

Ulfgard H 1989. *Feast and future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles*. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Van Goudoever J 1959. *Biblical calendars*. Brill.

VanderKam JC 2002. Covenant and Pentecost. *Calvin Theological Journal* 37:239-254.

Webster JS 2003. *Ingesting Jesus: eating and drinking in the gospel of John*. Academia Biblica 6.

Woodcock E 2000. The filling of the Holy Spirit. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:68-87.

Yee T-LN 2005. *Jews, Gentiles and ethnic reconciliation: Paul's Jewish identity and Ephesians*. Cambridge University Press.

Retaining an Apostolic Approach to Church Life[1]

Malcolm M Black[3]
Christopher L Peppler[3]

Abstract

This article briefly examines the current return to apostolic Christianity in various parts of the world and references three earlier Christian movements that came into existence at approximately 100-year intervals, beginning with the Methodist movement in the 1700s, culminating with observations of a current apostolic movement that began in the early 1980s, known as New Covenant Ministries International, in an attempt to ascertain how they embraced early apostolic principles.

The article highlights the strengths of several movements but also makes observations about how these movements lost their initial effectiveness by becoming institutional and, in many cases, forfeited their initial vision of impacting the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We examine possible reasons why these movements lost their fervour and discuss possible ways

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[3] Malcolm graduated with a Master of Theology from the South African Theological Seminary in 2007. This article emanates from his MTh thesis, entitled "Sustained church planting as a primary means of fulfilling the Great Commission, with special reference to New Covenant Ministries International", supervised by Dr CL Peppler.

[3] Chris is the founder and chairman of the South African Theological Seminary. He holds doctorates in different fields of Christian studies. He has also served as the senior pastor of the Lonehill Village Church for the past 20 years.

of how current movements could learn from their mistakes not only maintain their spiritual fervency but sustain their vision and momentum of reaching the nations with the gospel to succeeding generations.

1. Introduction

There is currently a re-emergence of apostolic Christianity[4] throughout the world. A number of movements are reaffirming and committing to live out New Testament principles as faithfully as the early church did. These movements are also devoted to being an effective witness to the world and to fulfilling the mandate of Jesus Christ to His church to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19).

Among the many groupings, the following are a sample of current 'apostolic' movements: New Frontiers International, led by Terry Virgo in England; New Foundation Ministries, led by John Crumpton in South Africa; Pioneer Ministries led by Gerald Coates in England; Christ for the Nations led by Tony Fitzgerald in England; Ichthus Fellowship of churches led by Roger Forster in England. In America, Miller (1997:19) cites the following as a sample of some of the movements: Calvary chapel, led by Chuck Smith, The Vineyard led by the late John Wimber, and Hope Chapel, led by Ralph Moore, all of which represent hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of churches who are working into many nations of the world. These movements, in varying degrees, have a desire to return to Apostolic Christianity as exemplified in the New Testament. Peter Wagner (1999:5) calls it "the New Apostolic Reformation" and says that it is the fastest growing movement in six continents.

In the past twenty-five years or so, many churches have been established outside of mainline denominational churches in an attempt to be more relevant to what the Scriptures teach about the function and calling of the church.

[4] By apostolic I refer to the Christianity of the New Testament which finds its full expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ which was emulated in the life of the early apostles. At the heart of apostolic Christianity is the desire to fulfil the great commission of discipling the nations (Matt 28:19).

Broadbent (1931:395) lists many movements throughout the history of the church that have sought to embrace apostolic Christianity, such as the Cathars, Novatians, Paulicians, Bogomils, Albigenses, Waldenses, Lollards, Anabaptists, Mennonites, and the Stundists. Each in its own way desired to follow the example of the New Testament church in its life and practice. They desired to be free of the bureaucracy and institutionalism that had crept in and return to apostolic Christianity.

This article will examine three such movements: the Methodists, the Brethren and the Pentecostals, each emerging at roughly 100-year intervals. We have also chosen a current apostolic movement known as New Covenant Ministries International as a representative example of the movements mentioned above.

Although the three earlier movements may not fit a full 'profile' of early apostolic Christianity, it can be shown that, by embracing New Testament principles, they had a desire to emulate early apostolic Christianity in a number of ways. Each movement was able to impact the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ and played a major role in the expansion of the church throughout the world. In the life, practice and mission of each of these movements, one can discern a clear pattern of early apostolic Christianity.

Of special interest is the reason these great movements lost their initial impetus and their vision of embracing apostolic Christianity? In studying these movements, several common reasons emerge as to why they struggled to maintain their spiritual fervour and vision.

An examination of how these movements lost their effectiveness will lead to a proposal regarding how present and future movements can not only sustain their impetus and vision, but also go on to make a valuable contribution to the mission of the church: to reach all nations for Christ.

2. What is Apostolic Christianity?

True apostolic Christianity is first and foremost a desire to discover and embrace the 'brand' of Christianity found in the New Testament. It is not a new set of principles or a formula for an effective church. Instead, it is a

journey of discovering an apostolic lifestyle that seeks to align itself with the practices of Jesus and the early apostles.

An apostolic church has a mandate to see the church advancing in its witness to the world by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), by planting churches in every town and village, making disciples of all nations (Daniel 2001:65).

3. A brief overview of four Christian movements

3.1. Methodism

The Methodist movement was birthed in the eighteenth-century revival in England as a result of a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (Wood 1988:448). The most influential channels were the Moravians, the Calvinistic mission of George Whitefield and the evangelism of the Wesley brothers, John and Charles.

Wood (1967:74) claims that John Wesley felt that he had been raised up to reform the nation, and to spread Scriptural holiness over the land. He died with the satisfaction that primitive (apostolic) Christianity was being restored in his day (cf. Keefer 2005).

The hallmark of Methodism was a belief in instant conversion and a radical commitment to the Bible as 'the only rule of faith', echoing the words of the great reformer, Martin Luther.

Without wanting to start another church or denomination, Wesley nevertheless had to provide care for the thousands of converts. These he gathered into societies which, in reality, were congregations of believers.

Wesley formed a number of societies and acquired a piece of property where he built his 'New Room' as a central meeting place. "The Wesleys preached, the crowds responded and Methodism as a mass movement was born" (Snyder 1980:33).

In America, the growth was even more spectacular. Finke and Stark (2005:57) state that

> in 1776 the Methodists were a tiny religious society with only 65 churches scattered through the colonies. Seven decades later they towered over the nation. In 1850 there were 13,302 Methodist congregations, enrolling more than 2.6 million members – the largest single denomination, accounting for more than a third of all American church members. For such growth to occur in eighty years seems nearly miraculous.

Wesley and his early helpers were amazed that thousands upon thousands were coming to Christ, not only in their native England, but far across the shores in America. Wesley did want to establish another denomination but a major movement was nevertheless established. In administering, they made ample provision for new converts to be assimilated into communities. These would in turn continue the work of evangelising the lost and playing a major role in fulfilling the Great Commission.

3.2. The Brethren

The Brethren movement originated around 1825 emerging out of a longing to be free from denominational restrictions. Their desire was to return to Biblical roots and a New Testament way of life. The Brethren insisted that their roots were really in the apostolic age, and their aim was to maintain the simple and flexible church order of New Testament times (Bruce 2005). The founders of the Brethren movement

> were a group of young men, mostly associated with Trinity College, Dublin, who tried to find a way in which they could come together for worship and communion simply as fellow-Christians, disregarding denominational barriers. They had no idea that they were starting a movement; still less had they any thought of founding a new denomination, for that would have defeated the very purpose for which they came together (Bruce 2005).

From humble beginnings, a significant church movement was born that became a worldwide group of churches. Similar to the Methodist movement in many ways, they sincerely desired to emulate New Testament Christianity.

They were strongly missionary-minded and made a significant contribution to fulfilling the great commission by planting churches throughout the world.

3.3. The Pentecostal movement

Unlike the Methodist and Brethren movements, the Pentecostal movement was not birthed by a central figure or group. Dunn (1988:683) believes, however, that the most important figure within that stream in previous centuries was John Wesley. He emphasised the 'witness of the Spirit' and so, in some way, paved the way for a new work of the Holy Spirit in America.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a growing restlessness among the restrictive holiness movements and a growing interest in the gifts of the Spirit, specifically those of speaking in tongues and healing. Dunn's (1988:618) opinion is that the revival in Azusa Street, Los Angeles in 1906 really forged the link between Spirit-baptism and speaking in tongues. This was the launching pad for twentieth-century Pentecostalism.

The movement continued to grow by staggering proportions. Synan (2005) says that

> the Pentecostal movement is by far the largest and most important religious movement to originate in the United States. . . . By 1993 they had become the largest family of Protestants in the world. With over 200,000,000 members designated as denominational Pentecostals, this group surpassed the Orthodox churches as the second largest denominational family of Christians, surpassed only by the Roman Catholics.

Pentecostalism was similar to the Methodist and Brethren movements in their zeal for returning to the essence of early apostolic Christianity. What set them apart as a movement was the sustained move of the Holy Spirit and the demonstration of signs and wonders that propelled them forward into the exceptional world-wide expansion mentioned by Synan above.

3.4. New Covenant Ministries International

We turn our attention now to a current apostolic movement known as New Covenant Ministries International. In the short space of just over twenty-five years, NCMI has developed into a significant movement that forms part of a wider apostolic movement that is growing throughout the earth. NCMI's vision is to embrace a New Testament pattern of ministry that will enable it to accomplish the mission of making disciples of all nations.

Their founder, Dudley Daniel (2004:47) believes that in order to enjoy New Testament results, the church must embrace the whole Bible as God's pattern of ministry for the way the church is structured and the way it ministers into the nations.

NCMI believes that the most effective way of fulfilling the Great Commission is to plant churches throughout the world, wherever God opens doors. To achieve these goals, healthy churches need to be producing 'healthy' disciples, who in turn will play their role in helping the church reach its desired objective (Daniel 2001:65).

4. Strengths of the various movements

Each of the earlier movements discussed had tremendous strengths and made a significant impact on the church and the world. Each movement embraced the Great Commission and was motivated to extend God's Kingdom throughout the earth by planting churches wherever they were able. All groups pursued an apostolic lifestyle, in one way or another. All believed in the need for a flexible church structure to contain the life-flow of the Holy Spirit that was being poured out upon them, bringing them more into harmony with a New Testament understanding of the church. All sought to practise the priesthood of all believers and, without exception, sought to honour the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church (Eph 4:15).

4.1. Methodism

The outstanding feature of the early Methodist movement was that they were a people who believed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Wesley's preaching was

often accompanied by a demonstration of God's power where countless numbers of people were radically converted to Christ.

Alongside this powerful move of the Spirit was the fact that the early Methodists had a high view of Scripture and regarded it as the only rule of faith. Wood (1967:209) says that Wesley saw the Bible as the only standard of truth and the only model for 'pure religion'. Wesley strove to base all that he did on his understanding of God's Word.

As the revival spread, the Methodists experienced unprecedented growth. Not only was Wesley an outstanding evangelist, he was also a genius at organisation. He gathered the new converts into what he called societies, which in effect became churches. The converts were, in most instances, placed in these societies where they were established in the Christian faith. Although not intending to be church planters as such, almost by default, the Methodists became prolific church planters. Snyder's (1980:54) statistics provide clear evidence of this:

> After thirty years, in 1768, Methodism [in England] had 40 circuits and 27,341 members. Ten years later the numbers had grown to 60 circuits and 66,375 members. By 1798, Seven years after Wesley's death, the totals had jumped to 149 circuits with 101,712 members… by the turn of the century about one in every thirty adult Englishmen were Methodists.

The societies in turn were divided into class meetings, which became one of the Methodist's strongest features. Here the members were cared for and were able to enjoy the fellowship of smaller groups. Each class was supervised by a class leader, who, in turn, was accountable to the local minister. Snyder's (1980:54) observation is that the class meetings were the cornerstone of the movement and were, in effect, house churches meeting in various neighbourhoods. The class leaders functioned as pastors and disciplers. Wood (1967:191) describes the class meeting as "a system of pastoral care, especially for the newly-converted".

Probably one of the most outstanding strengths of the early Methodists was the high priority Wesley gave to the training of his people. Wesley put one in

ten (perhaps even one in five) of his people to work in significant ministry and leadership. Snyder (1980:63) describes the process:

> The extensive system of bands, classes, societies and preachers, together with other offices and functions, opened the doors wide for leadership and discipleship in early Methodism. By the time Methodism had reached 100,000 members at the end of the century, the movement must have had over 10,000 class and band leaders.

Very early on the Methodists were zealous to reach the world with the gospel. As early as 1760 (which was only 20 years after the movement started in England), Methodism spread to America, which was a direct result of the preaching and organising activities of John Wesley. The first Methodist societies in America were founded by immigrants from Ireland, who were converted under John Wesley (Davies 1963:158).

Methodism grew by staggering proportions. By Finke and Stark's (2005:57) estimation, Methodism in America had grown to 2.6 million members in seventy years—the largest single denomination, accounting for more than a third of all American church members. This astounding growth was in part due to the mobility of the circuit riders who travelled the country tirelessly, preaching the gospel.

The Methodists purposed to be free from any man-made laws and constitutions. Their life and practice was a reflection of their endeavour to be a people whose way of life was based on New Testament principles. According to Littell (1961:113),

> Wesley shifted by steady steps from the developmental and sacramental view of the institutions of Christendom to normative use of the New Testament and reference to the early church. He justified field preaching and the itinerancy, class meetings and their disciplinary structure . . . on the argument that he was following 'apostolic' practice.

4.2. The Brethren Movement

The primary strength of the Brethren was their strong desire to return to a more 'simplistic' way of being the church. They were strongly motivated to ensure that their gatherings were patterned on New Testament principles. Their name bares testimony to the fact that they simply wanted to be the 'brethren' of the Lord, gathering together in His name to worship, study the scriptures and evangelise the lost. They believed implicitly in the priesthood of all believers. Because of this, their meetings were open to all believers to share communion and live out Paul's encouragement: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" (1 Cor 14:26).

Their passion was for Jesus Christ (Lineham 2003). They had an intense belief in the Lordship of Christ, were deeply committed to Him and sought to glorify Him above all else. Along with this passion for Jesus, their greatest strength was their commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith, as it was for the Methodists. Their motto was, "every person to be a Bible student" (Lineham (2003). "[T]he place of the Bible in the early Brethren movement was . . . essentially the same as in the great traditions of Protestant renewal" (Coad 1968:250).

Although the early Brethren did not use the term "church planting", the establishing of assemblies amounts to churches planted. Tatford (2005) describes their impact in the mission field:

> The Lord blessed them, and the number of assemblies (people) and halls (places of meeting were not regarded as sanctuaries) multiplied. Missionaries in their thousands went abroad without human ordination…new assemblies were formed, and the movement reached to the uttermost parts of the earth even to the most inaccessible, remotest, and perilous jungle and mountain fastnesses. The impact which has been made has been out of all proportion to their number or to the size and importance of the assemblies from which they went.

The Brethren penetrated nations around the world, which included Spain, Portugal, Italy, America and Canada. The work later spread to Australia and New Zealand. Works in India, Malaysia and Singapore were also established. Much of the work established in the China Inland Mission sprang from the Brethren movement (Coad 1968:190). Lineham (2003) says that they had the highest level of missionary service of any denomination and became the backbone to Christian mission.

4.3. The Pentecostal movement

The outstanding strength of the Pentecostal movement was that they consistently experienced the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in their meetings. The initial manifestation of the power of the Spirit was the widespread baptism of the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues as the chief evidence of that baptism. Their experience was, however, much wider than merely speaking in tongues. They experienced the power of God with signs and wonders. Wagner (1986:128) says that the greatest contribution Pentecostalism has made to Christianity in general was the restoration of signs and wonders experienced in the New Testament.

Another strength, according to Wagner (1986:168), was that the "Scriptures [were] final". Coupled with this, they believed in conversion that was a radical, life-changing experience, much the same as John Wesley.

Like the Methodists and Brethren, the Pentecostals were strongly missionary-minded. "This first wave of Pentecostal pioneer missionaries produced what has become known as the 'Classical Pentecostal Movement' with over 11,000 Pentecostal denominations throughout the world" (Synan 2005).

4.4. Summary

To sum up, each group was strongly Word-based and enjoyed strong demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's power. Although the movements did not use the term 'church planting', they nevertheless became prolific church planters. Each group was free from institutional restraints and had a strong belief in practising the priesthood of all believers. By their own understanding, they were pursuing early apostolic Christianity. However, in its own way each

movement gradually moved away from the pursuit of expressing apostolic Christianity and lost some of its initial fervour to emulate the principles of New Testament Christianity.

5. How did these early movements move away from an apostolic pattern of church?

When studying the various earlier movements the question must be asked**:** What caused such powerful movements to lose their initial fervour and momentum and settle down into an institutionalised way of life, often forfeiting or diminishing their vision and effectiveness?

Each of the earlier movements discussed started out with the desire to be strongly Word-based and made a tremendous impact on the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each movement had a desire to emulate apostolic Christianity, but allowed itself to fall prey to becoming over-organised, institutional, 'professional' and traditional in its thinking and practice. In the end, this caused them to lose much of their effectiveness as movements.

Jackson (1999:370) asserts that "it is rare in church history for a movement to sustain vitality for more than one generation". By the movement's own criteria, its people lost their initial vision and focus. Bosch (2001:94) explains it like this: "Where the institutional aspect begins to eclipse the dynamic aspect of the movement, the creative tension disappears and petrifaction sets in."

Phillips (1989) offers a helpful insight in this regard when he says: "In the first generation a perceived truth is a conviction; in the second generation it settles down to a belief; in the third generation it becomes merely an opinion".

Evidence from the three historical movements surveyed would suggest that when apostolic Christianity is embraced, there will be an increased effectiveness in the life and witness of its people. If this could be sustained and affect every generation, it would bring greater glory to God. Paul saw that apostolic Christianity would result in God having the glory "in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever" (Eph 3:21). A

study of the Methodists, Brethren and Pentecostals reveals, however, that, for various reasons, they lost their initial momentum and effectiveness.

According to several Christian sociologists (e.g., Finke and Stark 2005; Poloma n.d.; Wagner 1999), it appears that there are several factors that caused this loss of momentum and effectiveness.

5.1. The problem of institutionalism

One of the greatest problems that movements face is institutionalism. *The Oxford Dictionary* (1986:281) describes an institute as: "an organised body for promotion of scientific or other aim". The church on the other hand is by design a living organism which Paul refers to as the Body of Christ (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12, 27). It was never meant to become institutionalised. Whenever this happened, it negated the organic life and power of God. Institutionalism is often at the heart of stifling the life and work of the Holy Spirit.

The most telling sign of the onset of institutionalism is in fact a diminished reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit. This causes man to depend on organisation, man-made structures, and hierarchical authorities and programmes to carry the work forward. Perhaps a key indicator of institutionalism is when spirituality becomes routine and mundane, often causing the initial passion and drive of the movement to diminish. A good example is Paul's interaction with the church in Galatia. They had started out well in the Spirit (Gal 3:3) but had fallen back into old forms of religion, which according to Paul, was tantamount to embracing another gospel (Gal 1:6). Paul exhorts the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19).

Speaking from a Pentecostal view, McClung (1986:143) says, "though consolidation, structures, and organisations were necessary (and Biblically founded), they were never intended to drift toward the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation which plague Pentecostal denominations today".

Warnings abound in the New Testament for churches not to lose their fervency (Rom 12:11), not to put out the fire of the Spirit (1 Thes 5:19) and

not to get bogged down in the traditions of men that take the focus off the essence of faith in Christ (Col 2:8).

Institutionalism manifests itself in many ways. One of the strongest elements of institutionalism is bureaucracy. *The Oxford Dictionary* (1986:67) defines bureaucracy as: "government by central administration; *officialism*; set of dominant officials".

Organisation is vital as long as it serves the essential purpose of a movement. One of the elements of bureaucracy, however, is an unhealthy form of organisation. Jackson (1999:103) says that true organisation allows the organism to continue to grow. Even Jesus had some form of organisation in His 'movement'. The fact that he gathered to Himself a group of disciples can be seen as a form of organisation. That He organised ministry trips could be seen as a form of organisation. That they had times together for teaching and instruction is a form of organisation. But organisation was always the servant of the goals of the team leader and the team. If organisation is not the servant of the organic life of the group, it will end up being the master and will destroy it. When form and structure becomes more important than the people who make up the organisation, the mission of the movement suffers (Getz 1974:193).

According to Eberle (quoted in Wagner 1999:13), when a leader of a movement is no longer able to lead, control invariably ends up in the hands of those with gifts of administration, with pastors serving under them. He elaborates as follows:

> The Apostolic anointing is replaced by superintendents, district representatives, overseers, bishops, and others with various titles, but all of whom have administrative hearts. . . . [T]he Holy Spirit is restricted through well-meant rules and programs. Administrators become a 'lid' on the people involved under them.

Speaking of the problems that the wrong form of organisation can cause, Snyder (1977:67) remarks,

> an institutional or organisational model is based on hierarchy, delegation of authority, impersonal relationships and formality. This is a legitimate form of human organisation admirably suited to some kinds of endeavours, but it is not a proper model for church structure.

Very early on in the Methodists' history, presidents, conferences and constitutions formed the fabric of the movement. These would later stifle its initial vision of being Word-based, Spirit-empowered, and having a strong motivation to see the gospel preached to all nations.

Observing the Assemblies of God in America, Poloma (2005:44) says that the AOG has become a well-structured bureaucracy with a proliferation of programmes to mobilise groups and resources. It has become a complex organisation, which attempts to maintain the vision and carry out the mission of the Assemblies of God. Her conclusion is that institutionalism and over-organisation has stifled the initial power and charisma of much of the Pentecostal movement.

5.2. The Problem of Professionalism

One of the pitfalls for young vibrant movements is the drift toward professionalism, where the movement begins to rely on human expertise rather than on the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word. This inevitably leads to a loss of spiritual effectiveness.

Early Methodism in America is a good example of a movement falling into the trap of professionalism. Although the Methodists said that they would never 'manufacture' preachers (Fink and Stark's 2005:77), research shows that this happened. Within seven decades, a professional class of ministers had been established.

Finke and Stark (2005:116) found that local class-leaders and exhorters no longer led most congregations. The 'amateurs' had been replaced with professional clergy. The trained ministers now ran the Methodist church in a fully realised Episcopal fashion. Many Methodist clergy had begun to read

their sermons, and many of the younger ministers now came to the pulpit from Methodist seminaries.

The Pentecostals suffered a similar fate. Writing in the 1980s, Wagner observed that Pentecostal ministers were considered more respectable if they went to college. This developed into a two-tiered ministry of clergy and laity, which in turn promoted a form of professionalism. This compromised some of the initial passion and zeal and fundamentals of the movement (McClung 1986:131).

5.3. A desire for acceptance by other denominations

For the Pentecostals, a desire for acceptance and respectability from other denominations would cause a similar effect to take a grip on the movement. McClung (1986:130) explains that Pentecostals were lumped along with the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons and were persecuted for their beliefs. However, from around 1945, they rapidly became more "respectable" and were accepted as a fully-fledged denomination. But, as he points out, respectability came with a heavy price of compromise:

> One price of respectability is that you will continue to be accepted so long as you do not stress your doctrinal distinctiveness. For Pentecostals this meant keeping a low profile on Baptism in the Holy Spirit…miraculous healings and exorcisms, prophecies . . . and many more.

This led to a compromise of some of the movement's core values, previously held so dear by the Pentecostals.

5.4. The problem of traditionalism

Another dynamic that causes movements to lose their effectiveness is traditionalism. Tradition, in itself, is not a bad thing. Paul uses the term "tradition" both positively and negatively. To the Colossians, he warns the Christians of being taken in by the deceit of "human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). In this sense, Paul is referring to practices of human origin that would nullify the

work of Christ. On the other hand, Paul uses tradition in a positive sense, warning the brethren to keep away from the idle and from that which is "not in accord with the tradition that you received from us" (2 Thes 3:6).

Any tradition or pattern that originates in man's thinking and not by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ends up stifling the work of the Holy Spirit. When this takes place, the danger of humanistic tradition setting into the movement is very real. As a result, unbiblical traditions and structures limit the growth of the church until they are either corrected or (more often) burst open as new wine bursts old wineskins (Snyder 1977:119). Therefore, a challenge of any movement is to be continually renewing and refreshing itself in the Word and the Holy Spirit. Addressing the Corinthian church, Paul reminds them that they did not receive "the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). Because the Corinthians had the Holy Spirit, who is not of this world, they should desist thinking like this world (Fee 1987:113).

When the traditions of men take the place of the Word and the work of the Spirit, the movement is robbed of its essential life, power and momentum as well as its essential mission. When man leans on his own understanding, he negates the Word of God and gradually extinguishes the fire of the Holy Spirit (Prov 3:5).

5.5. Routinisation of charisma

Another factor that causes a movement to lose its impetus and effectiveness is what sociologist Weber (2005) called *the routinization of charisma*. Any movement, be it secular or sacred, can move from being a dynamic expression of the initial life of the movement to becoming something that is merely routine and machine-like. *Routinization* sets in when the church relies on its own intuition and not on the Word and the Spirit. *Routinization* ends up changing that which is holy and sacred into something that is mundane and worldly. As a result, it loses the impact of the life of God.

John Wimber felt that routinization normally sets in within a generation of the genesis of an organisation (Jackson 1999:349). A challenge that faces every movement is to maintain the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in all its endeavours.

This is the danger that we continually face when we formalise that which is meant to be alive and dynamic. For this reason, the church is in need of constant spiritual renewal. It must avoid the trap of becoming mundane and routine-like in its life and witness.

Commenting in this present era on the 'new apostolic' groups, Donald Miller (quoted by Wagner 1999:132), warns that there could be an inevitable evolution of the new paradigm [his term for 'new apostolic'] groups toward denominationalism. The danger, according to Miller, is that, "In time, they will start centralising authority, insisting on uniform practices, and creating bureaucratic layers of approval for acts that previously were spontaneous and Spirit-led".

This is a challenge that faces any movement. The challenge is to keep the vision alive and to 'walk in step' with the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:25). Jackson (1999:353), speaking on behalf of the Vineyard movement, declared its determination to resist the *routinisation* of charisma by maintaining a radical dependence upon the presence and power of God and the administration of the Holy Spirit.

6. What is required to keep the current apostolic movement effective?

Because we have a tendency to slip back into patterns of thinking that are more humanistic than Christ-centred, it is important for the apostolic movement to maintain its focus on Christ and continually be renewed in our way of thinking that will enable us to keep an upward momentum of spiritual health and effectiveness. Fee (1996:17) argues convincingly that, in Pauline thinking, the Spirit dwells in and among God's people (1 Thes 4:8; 1 Cor 6:19; 14:24-25; Eph 5:18; 1 Cor 14:24-25; 2 Cor 6:16). It is therefore imperative that a movement avails itself to the on-going ministry of the Holy Spirit for refreshing and renewal of vision.

There are many injunctions in the New Testament, especially those made by Paul for the church to live in a place of spiritual health and vitality. Although a number of his exhortations to the church to live in a place of spiritual health seem to be for the individual, they have a corporate application as well. Fee

(1996:64) argues that Paul's focus and concern are always on the people as a whole. "Though entered individually, salvation is seldom if ever thought of simply as a one-to-one-relationship with God. . . . God is saving a people for his name, not a miscellaneous, unconnected set of individuals".

Paul consistently cautioned the Christian community not to slip into mundane patterns of thinking that would rob the church of its rich spiritual life. The key to avoid the trap of allowing the church to slip into the realm of the mundane is the Spirit. According to Fee (1996:105), "Rather than give them [the church] Christian rules to live by Paul gives them the Spirit." He prays for the Colossian believers that they might "be filled with the knowledge of God's will by means of the spirit's wisdom and insight" (Col 1:9-11). Further on he exhorts the Colossians to "set their minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:2). In a similar way, Jesus challenges Peter at a critical point in his ministry not to be a hindrance to him because he was "not setting his mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matt 16:23).

In light of this, a number of Paul's exhortations to the church have a direct bearing on the community as a whole. For example, when he speaks to the Corinthians, he is speaking to a representation of the corporate body of Christ. "*And we all,* with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are *being transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18, emphasis added). Transformation should be a constant dynamic in the life of a movement. When the church and its leaders stay in a place of "beholding the glory of the Lord", it allows the Spirit to continue the process of transformation in God's community.

In the parable of the wine and wineskins (Luke 5:37), Jesus speaks of the new dispensation of the Spirit that He would usher in. The Messianic community is likened to a wineskin that would receive and contain the new wine of the Spirit. The use of Christ's analogy of the wineskin is very pertinent. The believing community, as the wineskin, would need to remain flexible in order to contain the continual flow of the wine of the Spirit. The inference of Jesus is that there will always be the 'new wine of the Spirit', requiring the wineskin to be flexible to accommodate the new wine.

Commenting on this parable, Geldenhuys (1950:196) says that "it is fatal to attempt to preserve the vigorous, new form of divine worship, which Jesus brought, in the old, obsolete forms of religions". The fact that Jesus chooses to compare the messianic community with a wineskin, indicates that this is not a once-off event in the life of the Christian community, but an on-going process of renewal in the Spirit.

Bruce (1980:303) has a similar view on this parable and sees in it the on-going dynamic of the Holy Spirit's work in keeping the church in a place of perpetual renewal. The new wine of the kingdom is spontaneous and continually responds to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

This constant flow of the Spirit into the life of the believing community is further confirmed by the declaration of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7. Here Jesus infers that out of His belly will flow rivers of living water as a constant supply of His life to all who would come and drink. Similarly, Paul encourages the Ephesians to "keep on being filled with the Spirit" in order to be effective in their Christian walk (Eph 5:18).

For a movement to sustain its vision and momentum, it must continually position itself to receive the new wine of the Spirit. This will in turn allow the Lord to bring the shape and form to the church that will not only glorify God, but be an instrument for extending His kingdom.

Daniel (2001:34) believes that the church must position itself to receive the new wine in such a way that it both 'contains and sustains' the fresh flow of the Spirit. In other words, the wine is 'handled' in such a way that it does not fall away, but is 'contained' in a way that the church is able to sustain what God is doing in the constant fresh flow of His Spirit. Many movements tried to contain what God was doing but ended up stifling the on-going, dynamic move of the Spirit.

Jackson (1999:349) quotes a provocative question once posed by John Wimber: "Would it be possible to build a perpetually self-renewing organisation?" Not only is it possible but absolutely necessary for movements to be in this cycle of perpetual renewal, keeping the vision alive and passing a vibrant faith on to the next generation.

According to Wilson (quoted by Poloma 2005), although a movement can trace its pedigree and can show the relationship of each successive generation to its predecessor, each new generation still has to "be born in reproductive passion". He says that revivals last, not because the movement had an impressive beginning, but rather because periodic renewal keeps the enthusiasm of its people vibrant despite energy sapping generational, organisational and circumstantial changes.

6.1. The importance of the apostolic/prophetic

A vital key to the on-going health and vitality of the church is the five-fold ministry (Eph 4). Of the five gift ministries, the apostle and prophet are the spearhead of ministry to and for the church (Eph 2:20). The apostolic ministry is of paramount importance in the process of keeping the church focussed on its essential calling and mission and to ensure that the church grows to maturity (Eph 4:13) and lives in spiritual health.

It is vital that the two gifts work hand in hand to steer the church into the unfolding purposes of God. Daniel (2001:75, 77) combines the two offices and talks of an "apostolic/prophetic" model for the church. "The Apostolic and prophetic gifts are designed to work together in establishing churches. The Apostolic is designed to work with the prophetic, and the prophetic is designed to work with the Apostolic".

In order for the church to keep in step with what God is doing, the prophetic ministry, working in conjunction with the apostolic ministry, is able to take the church into the future. This enables the church to see and taste, in a measure, the presence of the future in the present. The prophetic ministry is like a compass to the church. It is constantly used by God to break carnal mindsets and helps guard the church from leaning to its own understanding to ensure that the church stays on its Biblical course.

6.2. The need for strong working relationships

The heart of vibrant Christianity is based on relationship. So much of what Jesus did was based on healthy relationships. This was the key to the training of His disciples. The early church was founded on relationship before function

and organisation. Churches and movements often forfeit their organic life which is essential to sustain them. They become institutionalised when relationships are compromised, when organisation and structures take prominence of place over meaningful, accountable relationships. When vital relationships are in place the organic life of the church is nurtured. When the fellowship among leaders is based on transparency, accountability and vulnerability, the church or movement is in a state of health.

Commenting on how institutionalism stifles healthy, functional relationships in the church, Getz (1974:193) lists eleven factors. We have chosen seven to illustrate the point:

1. When organisation (the form and structure) become more important than the people who make up the organisation
2. When individuals begin to function in the organisation more like cogs in a machine
3. When individuality and creativity are lost in the structural mass
4. When the atmosphere becomes threatening, rather than open and free; people are often afraid to ask uncomfortable questions
5. Communication often breaks down, particularly because of a repressive atmosphere and lots of red tape
6. People become prisoners of their procedures. The 'policy manual' and the 'rule book' get bigger, and fresh ideas are few and far between
7. In order to survive in a cold structure, people develop their own special interests within the organisation, creating competitive departments and divisions. The corporate objective gives way to a multitude of unrelated objectives which, inevitably, results in lack of unity in the organisation

Speaking as a member of the United Methodist church, Schaller (1999:74) says that the polity of the United Methodist church is organised around distrust of individuals. The outcome, according to Schaller, has the following result:

> The number one responsibility of a denominational system is to regulate the role, behaviour, and beliefs of individuals, congregations, and regional judicatories. This normally calls

for a legalist polity designed to facilitate permission withholding.

6.3. The need for servant leadership

Hierarchical structures have invariably been a factor in causing movements to become institutionalised. The pattern that Jesus set before His disciples was one of servant leadership. Although he was Lord and master, He treated His team of disciples as friends (John 15:15). His admonishment to them was that they were not to lord it over one another, but to be servants to all (Matt 20:26). He then gave His life as the example: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45). Paul emulated this way of life when he said, "follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor 1:11).

Many of the current apostolic movements have re-discovered the value of team ministry and in most cases have developed apostolic teams who provide guidance and direction for the particular movement. Their purpose is to serve the churches in the movement by giving apostolic guidance and direction. An apostolic team was never meant to be an executive group, elevated above the rest of the church. Its purpose and calling is to serve the church and help facilitate the fulfilment of the Great Commission.

In order to ensure sustained momentum and growth in a movement, several elements need to be in place.

- **Keeping the prophetic voice alive**

Listening to the prophetic voice of God for vision and direction is of paramount importance for the health and effectiveness of the movement. According to Wallis (1981:184), "wherever God is moving freely the prophetic voice will always be heard bringing correction, wisdom, insight and direction". Leaders in the apostolic movement will need to be constantly listening for the voice of God in order to move forward into His unfolding plans for the on-going effectiveness of the movement. The leader, together with the churches that relate to them, will need courage to walk in obedience to the 'prophetic voice', constantly allowing the Holy Spirit to give life and

direction to the movement. “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint” (Prov 29:18, NIV).

In many movements of the past, the danger has been for the movement to ‘settle down’. Its people stopped listening for the prophetic voice of God required to take them on to another level of spiritual growth and development. A key in this process, according to Daniel (2004:27), is for the movement to remain flexible and to embrace the God-inspired, Spirit-directed adjustments that will keep the movement focussed on its essential calling.

- **Being committed to the Word of God as the ‘only rule of faith’**

For apostolic movements to stay free of the above-mentioned traps and to continue their effective ministry, it is imperative for leaders to stay committed to the Scriptures as the plumbline of truth. Everything must be measured by that rule. Coupled with this is the necessity for leaders to remain open to the Holy Spirit in order to live in the truth (John 16:13). An ongoing challenge that leaders face is to have the courage and conviction to reject practices that do not measure up to scripture. Such practices hamper the church in its witness to the world. Leaders need to embrace the admonishment of Christ to listen constantly to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 3:6).

- **The importance of meaningful relationships**

Relationships based on genuine friendship and not merely function are a key to maintaining the spiritual health of a movement. It is vital that apostolic teams function in their task of establishing and strengthening churches on strong relationships. The process for facilitating healthy, meaningful relationships between the apostolic teams and pastors of churches needs to be a priority. The challenge is to maintain those structures that promote regular contact amongst relating pastors and the apostolic teams of the movement.

7. Conclusion

In our examination of three earlier movements, namely, the Methodists, Brethren, and Pentecostals, we have observed that each movement, in its own way, returned to an expression of apostolic Christianity. Each movement

enjoyed a refreshing of the Holy Spirit that empowered and ignited it with a passion to glorify Jesus Christ by advancing the kingdom of God through the preaching of the Word. This in turn motivated each group to preach the gospel "to the ends of the earth". Each movement had a high regard for scripture and sought to emulate biblical patterns in their life and ministry.

We have further observed that there is a current trend among many movements around the world that are seeking to emulate apostolic Christianity. Among these movements, we have made observations regarding the vision and values of New Covenant Ministries International.

Although each of the earlier movements had its own unique strengths, there were a number of common factors that stood out in each. Each had a desire to glorify Jesus in all that it did. Each was strongly missionary minded. Each had a renewed reverence for the Word of God and desired, to the best of its ability, to pattern their life and ministry on the Word of God. Each experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in various ways. All experienced significant growth in numbers and impacted the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Methodists, the Brethren and the Pentecostals each lost their initial fervour, impetuous and effectiveness. This was due to a number of factors. These included becoming institutional, bureaucratic, over organised, 'professional' and allowing tradition to rob them of their spiritual vitality.

A number of measures can be implemented to prevent current apostolic movements, such as New Covenant Ministries International, losing their initial passion and zeal. First, they must allow the Holy Spirit to renew and refresh the leaders and their people. Second, leaders need to ensure that the movement has flexible structures that do not inhibit the fresh outpouring of the "new wine of the Spirit". It is vital that leaders ensure they have strong, dependable friendships among themselves and their people. To be effective and relevant, they need to stay committed to the scriptures as the only rule of faith. They must stay focussed on the main calling of the church, namely, to be an agent of advancing the kingdom of God in the world and seek to fulfil the great commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19) by planting New Testament churches throughout the world. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that the apostolic movements face is to posture themselves

to listen to the prophetic leading of the Holy Spirit, making known the mind of Christ as it charts it way into the future of being an effective instrument in the hands of God to reach all nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Works Cited

Bosch A 2001. An overview of the structure and operation of the "Christian Brethren" movement with a particular emphasis on an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats facing them in the 21st century. Unpublished Bachelor of Theology thesis. South African Theological Seminary.

Broadbent EH 1931. *The Pilgrim church*. Marshall Pickering.

Bruce AB 1908. *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ*. Hodder and Stoughton,.

Bruce FF *Who are the Brethren?* Accessed from www.brethrenassembly.org/articles/who_are_the_brethren.htm, 2005-06-23.

Coad R 1968. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. Paternoster.

Daniel D 2001. *Building on Apostolic Foundations*. Every Tribe Resources.

_____ 2004. *Biblical Leadership*. Every Tribe Resources.

Davies R E 1963. *Methodism*. Penguin Books.

Dunn J 1988. *The Pentecostals*. The History of Christianity. Struik Christian Books.

Fee GD 1996. *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*. Hodder and Stoughton.

_____ 1987. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament. The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Eerdmans.

Finke F and Stark R 2005. *The churching of America*. Rutgers University Press.

Getz GA 1974. *Sharpening the focus of the church*. Moody Press.

Jackson B 1999. *The quest for the radical middle: a history of the Vineyard*. Vineyard International Publishing.

Keefer LL Jr. n.d. *John Wesley: disciple of early Christianity*. Accessed from http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/16-20/19-02.htm, 2005-07-06

Lineham PJ n.d. *Who were the early Brethren?* Accessed from www.brethren.org.nz/aboutthebrethrencharacteristics.htm, 2003-10-03.

Littell FH 1961. Discipline and discipleship in the Free Church Tradition. *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35.

McClung LG 1986. *Azusa Street and Beyond*. Bridge Publishing.

Miller DE 1997. *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*. University of California Press.

Phillips J 1989. *Exploring the gospels – John*. Loizeaux Brothers.

Poloma MM n.d. *Charisma and structure in the Assemblies of God: revisiting O'Dea's five dilemmas*. Accessed from www.3.uakron.edu/sociology, 2005-07-18.

Simson W 1999. *Houses that change the World*. C & P Publishing.

Snyder HA 1977. *The community of the King*. IVP.

_____ 1980. *The radical Wesley and patterns for church renewal*. IVP.

Synan V n.d. The origins of the Pentecostal movement. Accessed from www.oru.edu/university/library/holyspirit/pentorg1.html, 2005-10-01.

Tatford FA n.d. *That the world may know*. An 8 volume study of the expansion of Brethren missions. Accessed from www.biblebeliever.co.za, 2005-06-04.

The Little Oxford Dictionary (6th ed.). 1986. Oxford University Press.

Wagner PC 1999. C*hurchquake*. Regal.

Wallis A 1981. *The radical Christian*. Kingsway Publications.

Weber M n.d. Max Weber*: Basic Terms (The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology)*. Online article. Accessed from http://ssr1.uchicago.edu/PRELIMS/Theory/weber.html, 2005-07-18.

Wood S A 1967. *The burning heart. John Wesley, evangelist*. Paternoster Press.

Wood S 1988. *John and Charles Wesley*. The History of Christianity. Struik Christian Books.

A Review and Evaluation of Diverse Christological Opinions among American Evangelicals: Part 1: The eternal generation of the Son[1]

William Grover[2]

Abstract

The writer, himself an American evangelical, intends to discuss, in three articles, areas in which American evangelicals disagree about how God the Son relates to God the Father and the meaning and effects of the true humanity and the true deity in Christ. Each position will be defined and exemplified. The rationale offered by proponents of each position is provided. Evaluations are made. This first article focuses primarily on the ancient doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son as held by some American evangelicals but denied by others. The second article will be used to discuss the issue, within the perimeters of evangelicalism in America, of whether God the Son is eternally or temporally only relationally subordinate to God the Father. The final article will be used to address several different understandings within American Evangelicalism regarding incarnational Christology. That article will include meanings

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Bill Grover holds an MA in Religion (Point Loma Nazarene University), ThM in Biblical Studies (Western Seminary) and a DTh in Systematic Theology (University of Zululand). He is presently co-authoring a book with H. Wayne House, to be called *Does God Feel Your Pain?* Bill fellowships and teaches Sunday school at Grace Baptist Church in Salem, Oregon. He presently serves as postgraduate supervisor for the South African Theological Seminary.

> given the Kenosis, views about what it means to say that Christ is true Man and true God, and how the two natures in the one Person of Christ relate to each other. Therefore, while this series is certainly connected to more general Trinitarian thought, the articles will be written especially to focus on Christ. Aside from just exposing, perhaps for the first time to some readers, a number of the considerable differences regarding the doctrines of God and Christ held by Trinitarians, it is hoped by the writer that these articles might also provide material useful to some to better understand the blessed Person of Jesus Christ our God, our Lord, and our Savior to Whom be glory forever.

1. Introduction

James R. White (1998:14) writes: ". . . the Trinity is the highest revelation God has made of Himself to His people. It is the capstone, the summit, the brightest star in the firmament of divine truths." If this is so, and if "the things revealed belong to us" (Deut 29:29), then Christians have a mandate to understand, within our human limitations, the meaning of the Trinity including how the divine Persons relate to each other. These are Scriptural doctrines given to us and, therefore, are proper subjects of study.

Despite that mandate, the particulars of how the Trinal Persons interact is much argued in the literature of American evangelicals. By "evangelical" the writer means, as described by Pierard (1996:379-382) and McIntire (1999:433-435), that movement in modern Protestant Christianity which conforms to the essential elements of the Christian faith while avoiding what some, wrongly or rightly, perceive as anti-intellectualism and a suspicious nature in the older Fundamentalism in America. While some American theologians discussed below wrote before the development of modern evangelicalism, they are included among evangelicals as the tenets and attitudes expressed in their writings put them ideationally in that later group.

One of the organizations representing evangelicals is the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). This requires of its members adherence to two doctrines. In addition to an affirmation on the inerrancy of the autographa of

Scripture, the ETS requires its members to affirm annually in writing that "God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated Person, one in essence, equal in power and glory." One might suppose that such an affirmation made by Trinitarians on the doctrine of the Trinity would effect a uniformity of belief in regard to intra-trinal relationships.

However, as this article and the next will show, despite there being an agreement among evangelicals referenced, many of whom are ETS members, over the tenet that God is three equal Persons each having the identical, undivided essence, there definitely is not a uniformity among these evangelicals about how the Trinal Persons eternally relate to each other or even, as a secondary question, whether economic Trinal relationships are equivalents of ontological ones.

Thesis: It is the opinion of this writer that God the Son is not eternally generated or begotten of God the Father.

2. Some American Evangelicals Assert That The Son Is Eternally Generated.

Many evangelicals in America have argued for the position that God the Son receives His personhood, and/or essence, and/or deity eternally from God the Father. This tenet was widely affirmed in Patristic Theology in ecumenical creeds, personal belief statements, personal correspondence, and treatises. In this article, despite it being about modern theologians, the writer will be obliged to comment on historical theology, in the evaluation section, because historical viewpoints are made an argument for modern Christological opining.

Williams (1996:93) asserts that God would not be God were the Son not to receive personal subsistence timelessly from the Father. The Son is eternally begotten or generated by the Father. The only evidence which Williams offers his readers for his teaching is lexical as found in the article by Buchsel (1981:739-741).

To clarify the view of Williams, it is noted that Buchsel in that Dictionary concludes that *monogenēs* in the New Testament means "only begotten" and

"denotes the origin of Jesus." To be the Son of God, Buchsel suggests, means to be the only begotten of God. That understanding of the Greek adjective is also the view of some of those below referenced. These see *monogenēs* as an evidence of the eternal generation doctrine.

Berkhof (1996:88-95) believes that the Trinal Persons are distinguished by personal attributes which are works within the divine being. These works imply a subordination of subsistence. The distinctive property of the Father is that of generating. The property of the Son is being generated. Berkhof explains that generation is a timeless act which is always continuing, and by it the Father communicates to the Son the divine essence in its entirety. The Son is still being begotten! Berkhof's evidence is John 5:26 and the names "Father" and "Son." A parallel to the essentiation of the Son by the Father, Berkhof believes, is the eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit by which to that Person is communicated the entirety of the divine essence. So one supposed relationship in God is made corollary and evidential to another.

Shedd (1980:251-296) opines that in eternal generation the entire divine nature is caused to be the nature of the second Person. Shedd believes that if one accepts the nouns "Father" and "Son" to be indicating absolute truths, then that one would not deny or doubt the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. Shedd also thinks that the Holy Spirit is eternally essentiated by spiration.

Dahms (1983:222-232) argues from the usage of *monogenēs* in the Septuagint that the adjective applied to Christ by John in the New Testament means that the Son is eternally generated. Elsewhere (1994:363), Dahms reasons that since the Son is eternally role subordinate to the Father , it follows that the Son is eternally generated. As that eternal subordination, Dahms thinks, finds its ontological basis in generation, that generation must be eternal too.

Kitano (1999:90-98) understands begetting passages as Psalm 2:7 and John 6:57, as well as the adjective *prototokos* in Col 1:15-20 to indicate that the Son is derived from the Father by eternal generation. Kitano also argues (pp.7-35) that this view of the derivation of the Son from the Father is endorsed through out Church history.

Pieper (1950:391) tells his readers that the reason the Father is called "Father" is because "He is not of another." But the Son "…has the divine essence from the Father." That is why He is called Son." Peiper's argument is limited to the terms "Father" and "Son" which Scripture gives the Persons.

Lewis and Demarest (1987:255- 256) say that "the Son is begotten from the eternal essence of the Father . . . ." Augustine and some ancient Greek theologians are cited as support for that view by Lewis and Demerest.

Wiley (1940:431) believes that the order of the subsistences [that is "Persons"] in the one divine essence is that the Father is independent. But the Son derives His Godhead from the Father, and so the Son is eternally dependent on the Father because of the Son's filial relationship. Wiley, like most of the above, does not acknowledge any position contrary to his being held by evangelicals, and Wiley does not apparently feel compelled to provide evidence for his views other than a brief reference to the Nicene Creed and his corollary tenet of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.

Clark (1985:109-126) insists, with others above, that the names "Father" and "Son" imply generation and filiation. Clark stipulates in his explanation, that it is not the essence which is generated but the Person of the Son which is begotten. The careful reader of this article will have already noted that in making this qualification, Clark is not in agreement with all listed above who affirm a belief in eternal generation. Some of those do say that the divine essence is generated! One may be justified in inferring that as these scholars disagree about just what it is that is eternally generated—subsistence, deity, or essence—that the entire tenet of eternal generation becomes suspect. How clearly Scriptural can the doctrine of eternal generation be if adherents to that tenet cannot agree about what is generated? But Clark does not evidence an awareness of that being a difficulty.

Instead, not being distracted by such "minor" inconsistencies in the opining of those who assert the eternal generation of the Son, Clark vigorously expends energy and space, to take to task those evangelicals who suggest that the framers of the Nicene Creed wrongly understood the adjective *monogenēs* to mean derivation, not uniqueness. Consequently, Clark thinks it proper for those who wrote that Creed to apply as well the verb *gennaō* to the begetting

of the Son in eternity—even though Scripture does not. Clark insists that certainly the one hundred bishops whose native tongue was Greek knew more about the propriety of saying the Son is eternally begotten of the Father than do modern critics of that view who vainly quibble, Clark thinks, over the meaning of the Greek adjective *monogenēs*.

In summary some of the arguments advanced for the eternal begetting of the Son are : (1) the begetting passages, (2) the meaning of *monogenēs*, (3) the meaning of *prototokos*, (4) passages where the Son is said to receive life from the Father, (5) the doctrine is affirmed in church history, (6) the names "Father" and "Son," (7) the eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit evidences the eternal generation of the Son, and, (8) the eternal relational subordination of the Son evidences the eternal generation of the Son. Each of these arguments will be briefly evaluated below. However, before that, the reader should be introduced to some American evangelicals who deny the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father.

3. Other American Evangelicals Reject The Doctrine Of Eternal Generation.

The sheer confidence, unflinching conviction, and varied and substantial argumentation of these samples of American evangelicals who hold to the eternal generation doctrine would not suggest that a number of other American evangelicals just as confidently reject that doctrine. Nevertheless, it

is the case that there are a number of American evangelicals who do not subscribe to the doctrine of the eternal begetting of the Son, and these also have their reasons. Some of these theologians will be identified below.

But first, the writer should make it clear that the following particular examples of American theologians who doubt that the Son is eternally generated by the Father, are not teaching some narrowly held, new view to Conservative Christological thought. First, soon after the turn of the 20th century, a series of twelve volumes called "The Fundamentals" were published (Torrey and Dixon 2000). These were freely provided to hundreds of thousands of ministers and missionaries through out the English speaking world. This set discusses eighty-three doctrines of the Christian Faith. Now despite the alarming

warnings of some of those who fall into the class of theologians exemplified above, as Williams, who asserts that were the eternal generation doctrine not true, then God just could not be God, that tenet finds no place among the eighty-three doctrines in The Fundamentals! In fact, R.A. Torrey, an editor of that series, in his "What The Bible Teaches," rejects eternal generation by saying that the begetting passages refer only to Jesus' birth from Mary (1933:85-88).

Then, second, various creedal statements as that of the interdenominational Evangelical Theological Society do not require adherence to the doctrine. Neither do some American denominational creeds require belief in eternal generation, for example, the Baptist New Hampshire Confession of 1833, the Presbyterian Auburn Declaration of 1837, the Reformed Episcopal Articles of 1875, and, the American Congregational Declarations of Faith of 1883. While each affirms the Trinity, none of these even mention the doctrine of eternal generation (Schaff 1983)! So, the following examples of theologians who deny that doctrine appear not to be asserting some new or narrowly held view regarding intra-Trinal relationships.

Erickson in two books on the Trinity offers several arguments against the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation. He says the begetting passages refer only to temporal relationships and the name "Son" indicates a likeness not a derivation (1984:298-299, 301). Erickson believes that each Trinal Person depends on the others instead of One being the Cause of the others. This dependence refers to the perichoresis doctrine which defines that each Person interpenetrates the others (2000:62-65).

Buswell (1976:110-112) argues against the eternal generation doctrine lexically by saying that *monogenēs* does not indicate derivation. Buswell also says that assumptions about ontological relationships in God should not be made based on relationships seen in the economy of redemption. The doctrine of eternal generation, Buswell asserts, should ,therefore, be dropped.

Warfield (2003:163,171) opines that both the eternal generation of the Son doctrine and that of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit are but "remnant suggestions of derivation and subordination." The word "Son" merely indicates a likeness to the Father, not a begetting from the Father.

Boettner (1947:112-117) also thinks that the terms "Father" and "Son" indicate equality not derivation. Neither does the term "Firstborn" refer to a begetting. Economic Trinal relationships are not evidences of activities innate in God.

Reymond (1998: 324-335) denies that *monogenēs* and the begetting passages evidence eternal generation. The titles "Father" and "Son" do not indicate sources or superiority. Christians should not believe that the Father is eternally begetting the Son.

Charles Hodge (1986:468-471) rejects the opinion that passages claimed to evidence an eternal begetting, as John 5:26 really evidence that, it is unreasonable to think that a communication of essence as in human paternity exists in God. Terms as "Father" and "Son" may not indicate derivation at all.

This article has been brought to the place where the writer must go beyond just saying that there are two views about eternal generation. It is time to evaluate, however briefly, each of the eight arguments mentioned above for the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.

4. An Evaluation of Eight Arguments for Eternal Generation

4:1. Is the begetting passage in Psalm 2:7 convincing evidence of an eternal generation of the Son? Psalm 2:7 does not appear to indicate an eternal begetting. The verb *yālad* can be used figuratively as in Job 15:35. The verb rather than evidencing eternal generation may only indicate that a loving relationship exists between the Father and the Son (Gilchrist, 1980:868). As Calvin says (2003:18), the verse refers to a temporal context where the Son is God's Agent on earth. Hebrews 1:5 is an exact quotation from the Septuagint. Yet,as Westcott (1955:21) explains, in Hebrews 1:5 eternal generation "appears foreign to the context." Hebrews 5:5 also cites Psalm 2:7, but there Christ's Sonship is connected to Christ's being High Priest not to an eternal begetting (Ellingworth 2000:281-282). The Lukan citation in 3:22 may not be original (Metzger 1985:136).

4:2. Does *monogenēs* prove eternal generation? Opinion is divided over the question of from what is *monogenēs* derived. Some say it is derived from the

verb *gennao* (Dahms 1983:222). Others say it is derived from the noun *genos* (Harrison 1984:799). As meanings change with usage, etymology, however, may not be a deciding factor (Carson 1989:26, 29).

To respond to Dahms above, in the Septuagint, which profoundly influenced the New Testament writers and first century readers (Grassmick 1976:157; Girdlestone 1974:9), only the Hebrew *yāhîd* is rendered by the Greek *monogenēs*! But *yāhîd* does not mean birthed; it means "only one" or "only" (Alden 1997:434; Gilchrist 1980:373). Further, by consulting a concordance of the LXX, as Morrish (1976:164), one discovers the four places in the canonical literature where *monogenēs* is used in that translation (see Jdg 11:34; Pss 22:20; 25:16; 35:17). And in none of these is the idea of begetting required. For example, in Psalm 35:17, is it really likely that David is saying that his soul or life is "only begotten"?

Jumping forward, when Hebrews calls Isaac *monogenēs* (11:17), are we to think the writer is saying that Isaac was the "only begotten" of Abraham? Is it not instead that Isaac was the unique son? Again jumping forward, when Clement of Rome in his first letter to the Corinthians (chap. 25) calls the fabled bird of Egypt, the Phoenix, *monogenēs*, should we suppose that Clement believed that the phoenix was "only begotten"? Is "unique" not more likely Clement's meaning? That John (only) calls Christ *monogenēs* does not prove that Christ is eternally begotten because *monogenēs* does not mean "only begotten."

4:3. Does *prototokos*, "first-born," as applied to Christ in Colossians 1:15 refer to eternal generation? Despite the opinion of Shedd (1980:325) and Walvoord (1969:43) that it does, this seems unlikely. By the time the New Testament literature was written, *tokos* in the compound adjective had probably lost its force (Arndt and Gingrich 1957:734). The only probable usage in the New Testament of *prototokos* meaning a birthing, and that physical, is a reference to Jesus' being born of Mary (Michaelis 1995:878; Bartels 1986:668). It rather seems to be the case that "first born" in Colossians refers to the pre-eminence of Christ (O' Brien 1982:44; Lightfoot 1969:148).

4:4. Do passages like John 5:26, where it is said that the Father gives life to the Son, refer to eternal generation? This may be approached both exegetically by observing context and theologically by referencing God's qualities.

The writer wishes to do the latter first. It is observed that systematic theologians often see it that the divine attributes inhere in the divine essence (Lewis 1989:451; Strong 1967:245). One divine attribute is that of aseity by which is meant that God is the Cause of His own being; God is self-existent (Theissen 1952:120; Berkhof 1996:58). The Trinal Persons do not each have a different set of attributes as each has the same essence in which the attributes inhere (Erickson 1985:265). So, just as Frame (2000:708) says, if the Father is not derived and has no cause, then neither can the Son be derived or have a cause. If the Father gives life to God the Son ontologically and eternally, then God the Father is the Cause of God the Son. But this cannot be because if the Father is uncaused then the Son is uncaused.

Then the context of John 5:26, after an examination, reveals that this passage does not reference an eternal relationship. How can it since it says that the Father will show the Son things in the future so that the Jews of that time will marvel? Beasley-Murray (1987:77) and Brown (1966:215) would concur with Calvin's stipulation when the Reformer unconditionally states that the text "strictly applies to Christ as He was manifested in the flesh" (2003:207).

4:5. As the doctrine of eternal generation is widely held among the church fathers must it be held by moderns? Certainly it cannot be denied that both Western and Eastern fathers even before Nicaea assert the eternal begetting of the Son. Tertullian states that the Father is greater because the Father begets the Son, and the Son is only God because He proceeds from God (Against Praxeas, 26). Origen avers that only the Father is *autotheos* because the Son receives His deity from the Father (Commentary on John, 2.6; De Principiis, 1:2:2).

The Nicene Creed requires the faithful to believe that the Son is begotten (*gennēthenta*) of the Father before creation (Schaff 1998:3). Was this doctrine of the framers of that Creed purely based on Scripture? Or, could a concern as Novatian's, be a motivating factor? Novatian said that unless

> the Son were begotten there cannot be only one God (A Treatise Concerning The Trinity, 31). Positing the Father as the Source of the Trinity possibly was the motivation for the acceptance of the eternal essentiation of the Son. Were the monarchy of the Father taught, then the unity of God is thought preserved and tritheism is disavowed. This is Kelly's opinion on the function of the eternal generation doctrine as held by the Apologists (1978:101).

The eternal begetting also assures the *homōousios* of the Son and counters the Arian and Semi-Arian churchmen who deny that the Trinal Persons are of the identical essence (Grillmeier 1975:268; Werner 1972:93-94). But the virtue of a doctrine comes not just from its being useful but the virtue of a doctrine comes from being Scriptural. While much respect should be given the church fathers and the ancient creeds, Scripture, not tradition, is the authority over faith and practice.

4:6. Does the name or title "Son of God" when applied to Christ clearly evidence eternal generation? It does not! It should be noted than none of those mentioned above who deny eternal generation would deny that Christ is eternally God's Son. As Erickson (2000:89) and Warfield (1970:77) say, "Son" is a Hebrew idiom not expressing derivation but likeness or equality. Bess (1965:17-24) provides evidence that when the Old Testament says "sons of", for example in "sons of the troop," 2 Chronicles 25:13, the meaning is membership in that group. Sons of the troops are soldiers! "Man" and "son of man" are used interchangeably (Psalm 8:4; Job 25:6). And, as John 5:18 shows, "Son of God" means equal to God—not derived from God!

4:7. Does the eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit prove the eternal generation of the Son? As stated above, some, as Wiley affirm not just the eternal generation of the Son but also aver the eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit. The latter tenet becomes corollary to the former and is assumed to be evidential of it. Adherents of that doctrine both internationally and in America go so far as to involve themselves in discussions of whether, as in the Western view, the Spirit eternally proceeds from both the Father and the Son or just, as in the Eastern view, from the Father only (Bray 1998; Torrance 1998:447; Hodge 1997:165) .

However, the evidence for the teaching of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit is quite weak. Frame (2000:715) and Boettner (1971:122) correctly assert that the issue pivots on the interpretation of John 15:26. Is that being described in 15:26 eternal or temporal? It appears to be temporal! First, the argument advanced by Hengstenberg (1980:273) and Lenski (1961:1069) that eternal Trinal relationships are the subject because verb is present tense is not convincing. A verb is identified as being gnomic partly by the context (Wallace 1996:525), but here the context is temporal just as Morris says (1984:638). Second, "proceeds" is thought to be qualified by the future tense "will send" (Beasley-Murray 1987:276). Third, 15:26 should be interpreted in the light of 14:26 which is temporal (Reymond 1998:338). Fourth, as the Son's "coming forth" is economic not eternal in John 8:42, that of the Spirit may also be economic (Carson, 1991:529). Fifth, as the preposition is *para* not *ek*, the Spirit does not proceed "out of God" but "from the side of God" (Robertson 1934:596, 614) which seems less to be describing an eternal relationship as the Father being the Source of the Spirit than it does a temporal one (Bernard 1963:449).

4:8. Does the eternal relational subordination of the Son prove the eternal generation of the Son? This question leads to the subject of the second article. In that article, the writer will try to convincingly evidence that God the Son is not according to Scripture eternally role subordinate to God the Father despite the assertions of many American evangelicals who say He is; the Son rather is only temporally role subordinate.

5. Conclusion

The writer has demarcated the views of those American evangelicals who subscribe to the eternal generation of the Son from those who do not. After considering the evidence advanced for that doctrine, the writer suggests that none of the reasons offered, or the cumulative effect of all, require evangelicals to affirm the tenet.

Works Cited

Alden RL 1997. *Yāhîd*. NIDOTTE (vol. 2). Zondervan.

Arndt WF and Gingrich FW 1957. *A Greek-English lexicon of the Testament and lther early Christian literature*. Chicago Press.

Beasley-Murray GR 1987. *John*. WBC. Word.

Berkhof L 1996 (new ed.). *Systematic Theology*. Eerdmans.

Bernard JH 1963. *The gospel according to St*. ICC. T&T Clark.

Bess HS 1965. The term "Son of God" in the light of Old Testament idiom. *GTJ* 6(2):17-24.

Boettner L 1971. *Studies in theology* (10th ed.). Presbyterian and Reformed.

Bray G 1998. The double procession of the Holy Spirit in evangelical theology: do we still need it? *JETS* 41(3):416-421.

Brown RE 1966. *The gospel according to John*. Anchor Bible (vol. 29). Doubleday.

Buchsel HMF 1981. *Monogenēs*. TDNT (vol. 4), 737-741.

Buswell JO 1976. *A systematictheology of the Christian religion*. Eerdmans.

Calvin J 2003. *Commentary on the Psalms*. Translated by H Beveridge. (reprint by Calvin Translation Society). Baker.

_____ 2003. *Commentary on the gospel according to John*. Translated by W Pringle. Baker.

Carson DA 1989. *Exegetical fallacies*. Baker.

_____ 1991. *The gospel according to John*. Eerdmans.

Clark GH 1985. *The Trinity*. The Trinity Foundation.

Clement of Rome. First epistle to the Corinthians in the Apostolic Fathers. Translated by JB Lightfoot and JR Harmon. Baker.

Dahms JV 1983. The Johannine use of m*onogenēs* reconsidered. *New Testament Studies* 29:222-232.

_____ 1994. The subordination of the Son. *JETS* 37:351-364.

Dods M n.d. John. In *The Expositor's Greek New Testament* (vol. 1). Erdmans.

Ellingworth E 2000. *The epistle to the Hebrews*. NIGTC. Erdmans.

Erickson M 1984. *God in three Persons*. Baker.

_____ 2000. *Making sense of the Trinity*. Baker.

Frame J 2000. *The doctrine of God*. Presbyterian and Reformed.

Gilchrist PR 1980. *Yāhîd*. TWOT (vol. 1). Moody.

Girdlestone RB 1974 . Synonyms of the Old Testament. Erdmans.

Grassmick JD 1976. Principles and practices of Greek Exegesis. Dallas: Seminary Press.

Grillmeier A 1975. Christ in Christian tradition (vol. 1). Translated by J Cawte and P Allen. Knox.

Harrison EF 1988. Only begotten. *EDT*. Grand Rapids:Baker.

Hengstenberg EW 1980. Commentary on the gospel of John (vol. 2). Klock and Klock.

Hodge AA 1997. *The person and work of the Holy Spirit*. Calvary.

Hodge C 1986. *Systematic theology* (vol. 1). Eerdmans.

Kelley JND 1979. *Early Christian doctrines* (rev. ed.). Harper And Row.

Kitano K 1999. The eternal relational subordination of the Son to the Father. Unpublished Th.M. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Lenski RCH 1961. *The interpretation of St. John's gospel.* Augsburg.

Lewis GR and Demarest BA 1987. *Integrative theology* (vol. 1). Academie.

Lewis GR 1989. God, Attributes of. *EDT*: Baker.

Lightfoot JB 1969. *St. Paul's epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*. Zondervan.

Metzger BM 1985. *A textual commentary on the New Testament* (corrected ed.). United Bible Society.

McIntire CT 1989. Fundamentalism. *EDT*. Baker.

Michaelis W 1995. *Prototokos*. *TDNT*. Translated by GW Bromiley. Grand Rapids.

Morris L 1984. *The gospel according to John.* NICNT. Eerdmans.

Morrish G 1976. *A concordance of the Septuagint*. Zondervan.

O'Brien PT 1982. *Colossians, Philemon.* WBC. Word.

Origen n.d. De Principiis. In A Roberts and J Donaldson (eds), *The ante-Nicene fathers* (vol. 4). T&T Clark.

_____ n.d. Commentary on the gospel of John. In A Roberts and J Donaldson (eds), *The ante-Nicene fathers* (vol. 4). T&T Clark.

Pieper F 1951. *Christian dogmatics* (vol. 1). Concordia.

Pierard RV 1989. Evangelicalism. *EDT*. Baker.

Reymond RL 1997. *A new systematic theology of the Christian faith.* Nelson.

Robertson AT 1934. *A grammar of the Greek New Testament in the light of historical research.* Broadman.

Schaff P 1998. *The creeds of Christendom* (vol. 3; rev. ed.). Baker.

Strong AH 1967. *Systematic theology*. (25th printing). Judson.

Theissen HC 1952. *Introductory lectures in systematic theology*. Erdmans.

Tertullian n.d. Against Praxeas. In A Roberts and J Donaldson (eds), *The ante-Nicene fathers* (vol. 3). T&T Clark.

Torrance IR 1998. A theological interpretation of the agreements on the Trinity and incarnation between the Orthodox and the Reformed churches. *Orthodox Theological Review* 43: 441-452.

Torrey RA 1933. *What the Bible teaches.* Revell.

Torrey RA and Dixon AC 2000. *The fundamentals*. Baker.

Wallace DB 1996. *Greek grammar beyond the basics*. Zondervan.

Warfield BB 1970. *The person and work of Christ*. Presbyterian and Reformed.

_____ 2003. Biblical doctrines. In *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield.* Baker.

White JR 1998. *The frgotten Trinity.* Bethany.

Wiley HO 1940. *Christian theology* (vol. 1). Beacon Hill.

Williams JR 1996. *Renewal theology*. Zondervan.

Review Article:
A Short Survey of Dutch 'Evangelical' New Testament Scholarship in the Past 25 years[1]

Franklin Jabini[2]

1. Introduction

The term 'evangelical' in a Dutch context needs an explanation. In the Netherlands, this term is used broadly for Christians of different denominational backgrounds, such as Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist and Brethren. Evangelical in this context is 'conservative', or as some prefer 'faithful to Scripture'.[3] In the Dutch evangelical world, scholars from a Reformed background have been the leaders in the area of theological

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Frank holds a DTh from the University of Zululand. He is a senior lecturer at the South African Theological Seminary.

[3] The Dutch word used is 'Bijbelgetrouw'.

scholarship, such as systematic theology,[4] biblical studies,[5] Ethics[6] and missions.[8] Evangelical scholarship in the Netherlands has made extensive use of the fruits of conservative Reformed scholars.[8] Prior to the 1980's, Dutch evangelical scholarship was dominated by Reformed scholarship.

In the 1980's, Evangelicals of other Christian traditions and Reformed scholars jointly produced a series of books in the field of Bible and exegesis.[9] The goal of these monographs was to present an approach to the authority of scripture and exegetical issues in selected books of the Old and New

---

[4] E.g., Herman Bavinck's four volumes Reformed Dogmatics (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek,* 1906-1911), G.C. Berkouwer's eighteen volumes Studies in Dogmatics (*Dogmatische Studien,* 1949-1972), H. Berkhof's Christian Faith (*Christelijk Geloof,* 1973) and J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema's Short Reformed Dogmatics (*Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek,* 1992). A new series of an Evangelical dogmatic was recently started by Willem Ouweneel. Volume one (*The Spirit of God*) and two *(The Christ of God)* appeared in 2007. This will be the first dogmatic series written by an non-reformed theologian in the Netherlands. These two volumes will be followed by five others covering: *The ways and council of God, The salvation of God, The Church of God, The Future of God and the Word of God.*

[5]E.g., the 63 volumes of Commentary on Old and New Testament (*Korte Verklaring van de Heilige Schrift*), edited by Profs. C.H. Aalders, C. van Gelderen, S. Greijdanus, F.W. Grosheide, A. Noordtzij, J. Ridderbos and other Reformed theologicans, which started in the first quarter of the 20th century. The volumes Genesis – Ruth in this series, were published in English as *Bible Student's Commentary* by Zondervan, e.g. *Genesis* 1981, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, 1986.

[6] Especially the 15 volumes *Ethical Reflections* series written by Prof Jochem Douma, between 1970 and 1990. He wrote among others on *Abortion, Homosexuality, Euthanasia, Environment, Peace in society, Politics, Apartheid* and *Justice*. Volumes 2-4 of this series which dealt with the *ten commandments* were published in one volume in English as *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* by P & R Publishing, 1996.

[8] E.g. Bavinck's *Inleiding in de Zendingswetenschap,* 1954 (published in English by the P & R Publishing Co. as *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*), Verkuyl's *Inleiding in de Nieuwere Zendingswetenschap,* 1975 (published into English by Eerdmans as *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*) and *Inleiding in de evangelistiek* (with O. Jager), 1978.

[8] This article will only focus on the contributions of conservative Reformed scholars.

[9] The volumes on *Bible and Exegesis* were part of a general series entitled: *Theological Explorations*. The second part of the series was on *the Bible and the Practice* and it dealt with theological and practical subjects, such as: *Heaven and hell; Church and Evangelism; Faith and History; Jesus, the only way*.

Testament that was consistent with Evangelical scholarship.[10] The volumes present alternative interpretation to various New Testament issues, such as the Synoptic Problem.[11] These volumes have been used extensively by Evangelicals, who were battling with their own theological identity. The monographs answered some of the challenging questions and created a climate for various new initiatives in Biblical and Theological studies.[12] Some Evangelical publishers joined in distributing books under the umbrella called: *Telos books,* while others translated books into English.[13] Reformed and 'Evangelicals', joined together as the *Center for Evangelical and Reformation Theology,* linked with the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam as an interdenominational and international research and teaching centre for the development of Evangelical Theology at graduate and postgraduate level.

This short review will focus on two Reformed-Evangelical contributions to the study of the New Testament.

---

[10] The general editor for the series was Drs A. G. Knevel. The New Testament exegetical subjects were: *Explorations in The Synoptic Gospels,* volume 5 (1990) and *Explorations in the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, volume 7 (1993). The final volume in this series, volume 8, appeared in 1995 and dealt with the Old Testament messianic expectation. At that time the editor felt that the series served its purpose and that there was no need to continue. The other volumes in the series were: *Explorations in Genesis.* Volume 1 (1986), *Explorations in Exodus.* Volume 2 (1986), *Explorations in the authority of the Bible.* Volume 3 (1987), *Explorations in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. V*olume 4 (1989) and *Explorations in Isaiah.* Volume 6 (1991).

[11] Some books by Eta Linnemann, although not as a part of the series, were also published, e.g. *Historical Criticism of The Bible, Methodology or Ideology?*; *Is There a Synoptic Problem?*;

[12] Several individuals wrote bible study books or commentaries, e.g. Rev. C. den Boer, who published bible studies based on messages on various Pauline epistles (Reformed); Willem Ouweneel, Henk Medema and Gerard Kramer, who also published on the New Testament (Acts – Revelation), (Plymouth Brethren). Scholars from a Reformed background also published a series of monographs for undergraduate students entitled *Theology in a Reformed perspective,* under the general editorship of Drs. I A. Kole. The series covers an orientation in *Christian Ethics* 1990, *Diaconate* 1991, *Liturgy* 1992, *New Testament* 1993, *Study of Religion* 1994, *Archaeology* 1994, *Philosophy* 1994 – 1997, *History of Dogma* 1996 etc.

[13] E.g. Fee's *New Testament Exegesis* was published by Boekencentrum in 2001.

2. New Testament Study Bible

In 1986, the first volume of a new series of studies in the text of the New Testament appeared.[14] The final volume in the series appeared in 2003. The series consists of six volumes of word studies, one general introduction to the series and a synopsis of the gospels. The other ten volumes consist of a short introduction to the books of the New Testament, dealing with general background issues, a concise verse-by-verse commentary (from an evangelical conviction), an interlinear Greek-Dutch translation based on the Textus Receptus, with variants from (Nestle-Aland and Hodges-Farstad) and a comparison of various Bible translations. In order to help non-Greek readers, underneath the full text, which appears in Greek characters, a transliteration is provided and is numerically coded to the six word study volumes.

The study Bible has proved to be of great help to college students, pastors and teachers, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the Dutch speaking Republic of Suriname and Curacao. Bible translators in languages in Suriname have used the study Bible as a major reference tool.[15] Since the Dutch speaking evangelical community is small, the price of the complete study Bible series is very high, € 875.00. The 17 volume set appeared in electronic format in 2005.[16] This has been a wise decision for travelling teachers/preachers. The cost of the electronic edition is only € 180.00.

---

[14] The project was an imitative of the Evangelical Center "In de Ruimte", after the model of the Norwegian bible teacher, Thoralf Gilbrant. This same model was followed in the USA. A number of scholars worked together on the "Complete Biblical Library". The first editors for the project were the New Testament scholar Gijs van den Brink and the Classicist Henk Courtz. The project was known as the "In de Ruimte" Study Bible. In 1999, a new organization took over the responsibility of the project, "Centrum voor Bijbelonderzoek" (Center of Biblical Research), and brought it to completion.

[15] Drs. Henk Courtz, who contributed most to the Greek-Dutch interlinear translation, worked on Bible translation in Suriname in the late 1990's. Most of the translators in the local projects did not have training in Greek and Dutch is the official language of Suriname. Translators therefore prefer to use this Dutch resource instead of English tools.

[16] At the completion of the New Testament the editors launched an Old Testament companion to the project. So far, three volumes have appeared. The editors for the series are now: Gijs van den Brink, Hans Bette, Mart-Jan Paul and Arie Zwiep.

3. Commentary on the New Testament

In 1987, Dr Jakob van Bruggen published *Christ on Earth*, the first volume in a new series of New Testament commentaries.[17] The first edition of this series, in the Reformed tradition, started under the editorship of Seakle Greijdanus and Frederik W. Grosheide in the 1930's.[18] The target audience then was the scholar. The contributors therefore used Greek without transliteration and also quoted Latin and German sources without translation. Although most of the volumes of this old series are still available (antique book stores), they are not helpful to general readers. The specialist will also find scholarly commentaries in other languages that are more up to date.

The new series consists of newly written commentaries on the books of the New Testament and, in addition, three topical studies written by Dr. Van Bruggen. The topical studies are: *Christ on Earth* (1994), *The Gospel of God's Son* (1996) and *Paul* (2001).[19]

The target audience of the new series differs from the previous one. The scholar and pastor are not the only focus of these commentaries. The text was written in such a way that even non-theologians and serious Bible students can benefit from it. The authors have avoided technical discussions and learned footnotes. The exegesis is based on the Greek text and the interpretation focused on the meaning of the text for the first readers and the present day Christian community.

---

[17] Baker Books published the English translation "*Christ on earth*. The gospel narratives as history" in 1998. The full title of the book is: *Christus op aarde*. Zijn levensbeschrijving door leerlingen en tijdgenoten (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament. Derde serie, Afdeling Evangeliën, [deel 1]), Kampen, Kok 1987..

[18] Some of the contributors to this first series also wrote commentaries for the old edition of the New International Commentary on the New Testament (e.g. Grosheide, *1 Corinthians* 1953, H. Ridderbos *Galatians,* 1953).

[19] So far 19 volumes appeared in the series, with four more to appear to complete the series in the next three years. Van Bruggen wrote the following commentaries for the series: *The gospel of Matthew* 1994*, The gospel of Mark* 1988*, the gospel of Luke* 1993*, the Epistle to the Romans* 2006 and *the Epistle to the Galatians* 2004.

Most of the contributors to the series received their doctorate at the Theological University of Kampen (Broederweg) under supervision of Professor Van Bruggen, the general editor of the series.[20] Dr P.J. Lalleman, Dr J. van Eck and Dr L. Floor are the exceptions.[21]

Besides their theological background, most of them have a strong background in the classical literature. This is one of the main strength of the series. Students of the text will not be disappointed in trying to understand the text in its first century context. Dr Anderson for example compares 1 Corinthians 13 with a textbook use for pre-rhetoric students of those days. The parallels between these two are striking. Throughout his commentary, he refers to and compares the epistle with the Greek literature of that time. The same can be seen in Dr J. van Eck's commentaries on the book of Acts and Colossians/Philemon. According to Van Eck, Paul's style of writing can be compared with the improvised philosophical argument , as can be found in the speeches of Epictetus (written down by one of his pupils, Arrianus). The price per volume is between € 27.50 and € 55.90.

4. Conclusion

Despite the very productive 25 years in Evangelical New Testament scholarship in the Netherlands, there seems to be a concern as far as the future of such publications is concerned. According to a publisher and an editor, the readership of New Testament commentaries and academic studies is declining.[22] It is not clear what the reason is for this. With this trend, Reformed Evangelical New Testament scholarship will have to depend on outside sources, such as publications in English and German.

---

[20] Dr Dean Anderson (1 Corinthians 2008), Dr Pieter van Houwelingen (*The gospel of John* 1997, *The epistles to the Thessalonians* 2002, *First Peter* 1991, *2 Peter and Jude* 1993, and the forth coming, *the Pastoral Epistles*), Dr Hendrik van de Kamp (*Revelation* 2000 and forth coming, *Hebrews*), Dr. T.E. van Spanje (forth coming, *2 Corinthians*).

[21] Van Eck wrote the commentaries on *Acts* 2003 and *Colossians*/*Philemon* 2007. Lalleman wrote on the *Epistles of John* 2005 and Floor wrote on *Ephesians* 1995, *Philippians* 1998 and *James* 1992.

[22] The publisher H. Medema and the editor Prof J. Van Bruggen, personal communication. Books are published in smaller quantities.

The two series surveyed will continue to be an asset to both pastors and serious Bible students. At this moment, they are the best resources for this category. The study Bible is available in electronic format. A further step would be to make both series available on one electronic platform, preferably Libronix. This will reduce the cost of the series and it will enable travelling scholars, such as this reviewer, to use these resources on their laptop while travelling.

Teach Us to Number Our Days: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Psalm 90[1]

Dan Lioy[2]

Abstract

Psalm 90 is a communal lament authored by Moses in which he sought the wisdom and favor of the Lord. Perhaps toward the end of the Israelites' 40-year period of wandering in the desert, the great lawgiver, intercessor, and advocate of God's people reflected on the brevity of human existence, especially against the backdrop of Yahweh's eternality. Moses noted that even the strongest and healthiest of people are frail and transient before the all-powerful Creator of the universe. Only He, in His grace and mercy, can bring enduring value out of the toils and troubles experienced by His loyal followers. Likewise, He alone can fill the lives of the covenant community with productivity, joy, and satisfaction for His glory.

---

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Dan Lioy holds a ThM (Dallas Theological Seminary) and a PhD (North-West University). He has lectured at Trinity Theological Seminary, Marylhurst University, and Southwestern College. He has written several academic monographs, including ones on the Sermon on the Mount, the gospel of John, and the Book of Revelation. He is presently a postgraduate supervisor with the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Superscription: Providing an Historical Context for Understanding Psalm 90

Psalm 90 is regarded as a communal lament (cf. Clifford 2005:191, 197; Craven 1992:22; Leslie 1949:217, 250; Waltner 2006:442; Weiser 1962:66), that is, a hymn initially composed to express the grief and sorrow of the assembly over a distressing circumstance (cf. Robertson 1977:47, 49; Rosenberg and Zlotowitz 1999:xvi; Seybold 1990:115-116; Westermann 1980:13, 24, 35, 119). The precise nature and cause of the anguish remains unknown, being sketched only in the broadest of terms (e.g., the "long and exhausting hardships" arising from "famine and disease", Tate 1990:438; cf. Alter 2007:318; Eaton 2003:323). Some conjecture that while the poem contains some ancient stylistic elements (Kraus 1989:215), it nonetheless is a literary amalgam that was created in post-exilic Israel by "learned scribal composers, collectors, and interpreters of psalms and teachings" (Tate 1990:439; cf. Briggs 1906:2:272; Broyles 1999:113; Steussy 2004:163; Terrien 2003:645-646).

The latter view notwithstanding, there is sufficient evidence to support the historical association of Moses to Psalm 90 (cf. Calvin 2007; Deffinbaugh 2001; Hengstenberg 1864:119; Spurgeon 2001). For instance, in the *Targum* (an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh), the following inscription appears at the beginning of the psalm: "The prayer that Moses the prophet of the LORD prayed when the people, the house of Israel, sinned in the wilderness" (Cook 2001). This suggests that toward the end of the Israelites' 40-year period of wandering in the desert, the great lawgiver, intercessor, and advocate of God's people reflected on the brevity of human existence, especially against the backdrop of Yahweh's eternality. In the Hebrew text of Psalm 90, the superscription likewise identifies the poem as a "prayer of Moses"[3] (cf. Pss 17:1; 72:20; 86:1; 102:1; 142:1). Admittedly, the exegetical significance of the Hebrew phrase is unclear. It is just as ambiguous in the Septuagint translation. For both versions, the locus of possible meanings include "belonging to", "dedicated to", "with reference" / "concerning", and

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *Today's New International Version* (hereafter abbreviated TNIV).

"for the use of" (cf. Anderson 1983a:43-44; Craigie 2004:33-35; McCann 1996:4:655-656; VanGemeren 1991:5:19).

At least four additional reasons exist for upholding the traditional linking of Moses to Psalm 90 (cf. Barnes 1869:1; Freedman 1985:59; Fruchtenbaum 1998:1; Kidner 1973:36; Leupold 1969:641; Perowne 1989:2:162-163; Stuhlmueller 1983:69): (1) several linguistic correspondences exist between the poem and Deuteronomy 32-33 (e.g., "days" and "years" / "generations" in Deut 32:7 and Ps 90:15; "work" / "works" / "deeds" in Deut 32:4 and 33:11 and Ps 90:16); (2) various thematic affinities are found between Psalm 90 and the Pentateuch (e.g., God's creation of the universe and humankind's morality in Gen 1-3 and Ps 90:2-3; God's eternal existence and righteous indignation in Deut 32:7; 33:27 and Ps 90:2, 4, 9-10); (3) the intercessory nature of the hymn corresponds with Moses' role as a priest and advocate for Israel (cf. Exod 32:11-13; 34:9; Num 14:13-19; Deut 9:25-29; Ps 99:6; Jer 15:1); and (4) in the remainder of the Old Testament, it is only Moses who petitions the Lord to "relent" (or "turn"; Ps 90:13) from His wrath toward His chosen people (cf. Exod 32:12, 14; Ps 106:23).

What Moses said to God in Psalm 90 was to "become God's words to successive generations of faithful travelers" (Balentine 2003:467). Moses—an illustrious individual with a "glorious and tragic past" (Terrien 2003:642)—also wrote two other poems, which are recorded in the Pentateuch (cf. Exod 15:1-18; Deut 32:1-43). Because of the Mosaic authorship of Psalm 90, it is the oldest datable song in the Hebrew Psalter (Constable 2006:161; Waltke 2007:874). Moreover, due to the stateliness of its "cadence and style" (Terrien 1952:134), the hymn is both "one of the most magisterial" in the collection (Brueggemann 1984:110) and among the "jewels of the Psalter" (Harrelson 1977:181).

Along with the superscription to Psalm 90, Moses is mentioned eight times in the Hebrew book of prayers (Urbrock 1998:26; Waltke 2007:874 886). These and other related biblical references provide a glimpse into the life and times of the famed lawgiver. This information, in turn, paints a broader historical context to better understand the communal lament he authored. Beginning with Psalm 77:20, it notes that God led His people out of Egypt like a shepherd would guide a flock of sheep; also, He chose Moses and Aaron to be

in charge of the procession. In 99:6, these two are said to be among the Lord's "priests". The latter translates the Hebrew noun *kōhen,* which refers to those whom God appointed to act as intermediaries for His people, especially in times of national distress. According to 103:7, God revealed His ways to Moses. This included His benevolent character, upright statutes, salvific plans, and saving acts.

Exodus 33 indicates that Moses regularly communed with the Lord in the "tent of meeting" (v. 7). Whenever Moses entered it, a "pillar of cloud" (v. 9) came down onto the tent. Inside, God spoke to Moses "face to face" (v. 11), that is, in the direct manner someone would converse with a "friend". In light of this, it makes sense that the superscription to Psalm 90 would call Moses the "man of God", that is, a person who was "God-inspired" (Freehof 1938:260) and who "represented hope and fidelity to his contemporaries" (Schaefer 2001:225). At times this title was used in the Old Testament as a designation for a true prophet (Barnes 1869:1; Tanner 2001:92; cf. Deut 33:1; Jos 14:6; 1 Sam 2:27; 9:6, 9-10; 1 Kings 13:1; 17:24; 2 Kings 4:9; 1 Chron 23:14; Ezra 3:2). Psalm 105:26 refers to Moses as the Lord's "servant", which indicates that the lawgiver was a member of God's royal administration (cf. Delitzsch 1982:3:48).

Such laudable truths notwithstanding, there were times when the Israelites challenged the authority of Moses as their intercessor and advocate (cf. Fruchtenbaum 1998:1-2; Stark 2007:173-174). For instance, while the covenant community was encamped at Rephidim in the Sinai desert, they complained to Moses about the lack of water (Exod 17:1-2). The entire region was a dry and inhospitable place. The topography included barren mountain cliffs, rock-covered valleys, and sandy dunes. Aside from the infrequent wadi, the region had little vegetation. Only the hardiest of desert plants survived the arid climate (for example, salt-loving bushes and acacia trees found in the beds of the wadis).

Moses, being frustrated by the people's lack of faith, responded by asking the Israelites why they constantly wanted to test the Lord; but the people turned their complaint back to the lawgiver, apparently refusing to admit that their quarrel might be with God. They wanted to know why Moses had led them into the wilderness to die of thirst (v. 3). Moses, though perplexed by the

people's short memory, cried out to the Lord (v. 4). God told Moses to take some of Israel's elders with him and to leave the crowds behind. Moses was to walk to nearby Horeb, where he had earlier encountered the burning bush (cf. 3:1-3), and strike a particular rock with his staff. God promised that when Moses did so, enough water for all the people would come out of the rock (17:5-6). As the elders watched, Moses struck the rock, and water began gushing out of it. Because the people argued with Moses and tested God at that place, Moses called the site Massah, which means "testing", and Meribah, which can mean (among various connotations) "arguing" (v. 7; cf. Ps 95:8-11).

According to Psalm 106:16, the chosen people allowed envy and resentment to poison their attitude toward Moses and Aaron. For example, at Mount Horeb, in the episode involving the golden calf (cf. Exod. 32; Ps 106:19-22), the Lord threatened to wipe out all the people for their idolatry. It was only the intervention of Moses that forestalled the Israelites' destruction. God's chosen servant and leader stood in the gap between the Lord and His people and was able to prevent God's wrath from destroying the covenant community (Ps 106:23).

Numbers 20:1-13 recounts an incident in which "trouble came to Moses" (Ps 106:32) because of the discontentment of God's chosen people. Most likely, the reference to the "first month" (Num 20:1) is in relation to the fortieth year of the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness. It was at that time that Moses' older siblings, Miriam and Aaron, died (20:22-29; 33:38). Also, by then most of the Hebrews who had been at least 20 years old when the Lord freed them Egypt, had died (cf. 14:20-25). They were replaced by a new generation of God's people to begin the next stage of His plan for the covenant community, namely, the conquest and settlement of Canaan. According to 20:1, the Israelites established camp one final time at Kadesh. This oasis of several springs in the Desert of Zin was located south of Canaan and within relatively close proximity to the river of Egypt (that is, the Wadi el-Arish; Num. 34:4-5; Ezek. 47:19; 48:28). The Desert of Zin was situated on the western fringe of the Sinai Plateau, as well as adjacent to and north of the Desert of Paran.

At Kadesh, the Israelites' supply of water ran out. The community, feeling frustrated and unsettled, "gathered in opposition" (Num 20:2), which means

they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. Moses, however, was the primary target of the people's grievance, which they framed as a legal complaint or lawsuit against him. They quipped that it would have been better for them to die in front of the tabernacle along with their kindred (v. 3), whom God had previously struck down in judgement (cf. 14:22; 16:31-35). The ingrates asked why Moses led the entire covenant community into the wilderness. Was it, as they suggested, so that they would perish in the desert, along with their livestock (20:4). More generally, the malcontents asked why Moses would bring them out of Egypt to such a dreadful place where virtually nothing grew. Indeed, in the absence of water, the region was barren of produce such as grain, figs, grapes, and pomegranates (v. 5).

In response to the vociferous complaints of God's people, Moses and Aaron turned away from them and went to the entrance of the tabernacle. Then the two threw themselves down with their faces to the ground, and the Lord's glorious presence was manifested before them (v. 6). Next, God commanded Moses to pick up his staff and assemble the entire covenant community (vv. 7-8). Then, in the sight of the entire gathering of people, Moses was to speak to a nearby rock. When he did so, the Lord promised that water would gush out of it. In fact, so much would be produced that it would supply enough water to satisfy the drinking needs of the entire populace and their livestock (cf. Ps 114:8).

Just as the Lord had directed, Moses went and picked up his staff (Num 20:9). Then he and his brother, Aaron, summoned the people to assemble "in front of the rock" (v. 10). Tragically, what followed deviated from God's original command. Moses, in particular, allowed four decades of pent up frustration to prompt him to speak rashly in a moment of anger (cf. Ps 106:32-33). He chided the Israelites for being a group of "rebels" (Num 20:10). Moses then upstaged God—who alone has the right to act as Judge over His people—by asking whether it was necessary for the lawgiver and his brother to somehow get water to come out of the rock in front of the assembly. Then in a violent act of indiscretion, Moses raised the staff and used it to pound the rock two times (v. 11). Despite Moses' flagrant violation of God's instructions, a large stream of water came out abundantly from the rock, enabling all the people and their livestock to drink.

Instead of trusting that the Lord's will was appropriate and good, Moses had openly violated it. In doing so, the lawmaker, in partnership with Aaron, had offended the Lord, debased His holiness, and failed to credit to Him the miracle that occurred. The Hebrew verb *qādash*, which is rendered "holy" (v. 12), means "to be separate", "to be distinct", or "to set apart". As Leviticus 11:44 reveals, God is incomparable in His majesty and absolutely pure in His moral virtue; but tragically, when Moses acted in a rash and violent manner, he left the covenant community with the false notion that God is temperamental, fickle, and pugnacious—in other words, as emotionally flawed as human beings.

Moses and Aaron, by not displaying sufficient reverence for God "in the sight of the Israelites" (Num 20:12), were forbidden from leading the chosen people into Canaan. Perhaps "one of the most incredibly surprising aspects of the whole biblical story" is that the "illustrious Moses dies before entering the Promised Land" (McCann 1993:156). This outcome serves as reminder that not even a person as great as Moses was exempt from the Lord's discipline (cf. Constable 2006:162). Of the generation of Hebrews who had experienced the exodus from Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb were permitted to enter the land God had promised to give to the descendants of the patriarchs.

The "waters of Meribah" (v. 13) became the name of the place where the Israelites argued with and complained against the Lord, and where His holiness was demonstrated and maintained among the people (for example, by judging Moses and Aaron). The Hebrew noun rendered "Meribah" can mean (among various connotations) "strife", "contention", or "quarrel". In reflecting on this historic incident, Psalm 95:8 exhorted later generations of God's people not to harden their hearts as they did "at Meribah". Even in such a regrettable situation as this, the Lord proved Himself to be holy and maintained His honor "in the sight of all the people" (Lev 10:3).

First Corinthians 10:1-5 makes reference to various episodes from Israel's years of wandering in the desert to depict the Messiah as the spiritual rock of God's people. Previously in his letter, Paul had warned the Corinthians not to engage in idolatry. Specifically, he had discussed eating food sacrificed to idols (chap. 8). In chapter 10, the apostle used illustrations from Israel's exodus from Egypt and wandering in the Sinai wilderness to show what

befalls people who reject God by succumbing to idolatry (v. 6; cf. Rom 15:4). The generation of Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt had unparalleled opportunities to witness the majesty of God and grow strong in faith. In an extraordinary act of deliverance, the Lord led them all through the Red Sea. Every day they received divine guidance from the cloud that went before them (1 Cor 10:1). The cloud indicated that the Hebrews were under the leadership and guidance of the Lord (Exod 13:17-14:31).

Through those events that generation became identified with Moses. Being in a sense "baptized into Moses" (1 Cor 10:2), the Israelites were under the submission of this aged leader in a way similar to the manner in which believers are submitted to the Messiah through baptism. Furthermore, God miraculously fed the Israelites every day with manna (Exod 16; 1 Cor 10:3). On more than one occasion, He caused water to gush from rock formations to satisfy the multitude and their livestock (Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:1-13). The people understood that they were eating and drinking out of God's merciful and loving hand. The manna and gushing rock represented the grace that would appear fully and personally in Jesus of Nazareth, the Rock (1 Cor 10:4). Put another way, our crucified and risen Saviour was the one who provided deliverance for the Israelites.

Regrettably, though, this privileged generation did not live up to its heritage. Most of those Hebrews—including Moses—died in the wilderness because they rebelled against God, provoking His displeasure and judgement against them (1 Cor 10:5). In Paul's day, some Corinthian believers might have assumed they could get away with certain sins, like idolatry (cf. v. 14), because they had been baptised and were participating in the Lord's Supper (cf. vv. 16-17). That would explain why the apostle wrote as he did, describing long-ago events in terms of the two Christian ordinances.

Paul was warning his readers that baptism and communion would not automatically protect them from God's judgement, just as God's miracles at the Red Sea and in the Sinai wilderness did not shield the Israelites and their leader, Moses, from an ignominious end (cf. vv. 21-22). If the Corinthians were astute, they would flee idolatry (v. 14). It was not enough to know that idolatry was wrong. Paul's readers had to intentionally run away from it. The apostle was urging not only weak Christians to abandon this sin but also

believers with strong consciences whose actions might cause weak Christians to spiritually stumble.

2. Affirming the Lord as God (Ps 90:1-2)

Psalm 90 contrasts the eternality of God and the mortality of people. The fragility and transience of humankind is brought into sharp relief through a variety of chronologically oriented terms and phrases, including "years", "day", "our days", "watch in the night", and "morning". The Lord's decision to consign an entire generation of Israelites (including Moses) to wander for 40 years and then die in the Sinai desert mirrors the hardship and anguish that typifies the broader human experience. The godly recognise that ultimately life is fleeting and largely undermined by the presence of decay and death throughout creation (cf. Rom 8:20-22). In this regard, rather than label Psalm 90 as a funeral dirge, it is more fitting to view it as a "hymn of faith in the style of a lament" in which "trust in God eternal" is admonished (Terrien 1952:135; cf. Hengstenberg 1864:117-118; Mowinckel 1962:1:196).

Four different Hebrew nouns are used in the poem to refer to God (cf. Anderson 1983b:650; Barnes 1869:2; Craven 1992:88, 95-96; Eaton 2003:28-31; Kidner 1975:328; Kraus 1986:17, 20, 22-23, 28; Smith 1996:368; Urbrock 1998:27; VanGemeren 1991:5:15, 593). In verses 1 and 17, "Lord" renders the word *'ādônay*. It emphasizes the supreme authority, rule, and majesty of God over all creation. "God" (v. 2) translates the noun *'ēl*. This generic term for the divine underscores His preeminent might and strength, which undo the stratagems of His foes. In verse 17, "God" renders the noun *'ĕlōhîm*. Despite its plural form, it is consistently used in the Old Testament as a singular term. *'Ĕlōhîm* portrays the Lord as the one, true, and unique God. The totality of Scripture leaves the impression that He is unique in His being or essence, the fountain and source of all things, and the one who unifies all the forces of time and eternity. "Lord" (v. 13) renders the four Hebrew letters making up the divine name, *yhwh* (or Yahweh). This special name for the covenant-keeping God of Israel emphasizes His eternal existence, supreme power, and active involvement in human history. In short, He is the ever-present, ever-living God (cf. Exod 3:13-14).

Moses opened Psalm 90 with the affirmation that throughout each and every generation, the Lord has been the "dwelling place" (v. 1) of His people. The Hebrew noun *mā'ôn* can also be rendered as "habitation" or "refuge" (cf. 71:3). Metaphorically speaking, God is like an oasis in the desert around which the faithful encamp (cf. VanGemeren 1991:5:592). Also, in a sense, the Lord has been and always will be the place of safety for His people and the one who protects them from all sorts of danger (cf. 91:9). Likewise, He is the "foundation, support, [and] mainstay" (Dahood 1968:322) of the covenant community (cf. 90:17). While God is "lofty, He is not inaccessible". In point of fact, Yahweh is "reachable, always there for those willing to approach Him on His basis, the basis of faith" (Fruchtenbaum 1998:2).

This is the same Lord who, like a midwife, brought the mountains into existence and enabled them to pierce through the crust of the earth and dominate its landscape (90:2; cf. Brueggemann 1997:148; Gill 1999; Terrien 2003:643). Figuratively speaking, "God is not portrayed as Mother Earth, but as mother of the earth" (McCann 1996:4:1041; cf. Kraus 1986:63; McCann 1993:157; Deut 32:18). The Israelites regarded the mountains, which God created, as "being the most ancient and permanent part of the earth" (Freehof 1938:261; cf. Kraus 1989:215). The noun *'ôlām*, which is rendered "everlasting" in connection with God, denotes an unlimited duration of time. Its repetition in this verse stresses the profound truth that before the mountains and the earth were ever created, Yahweh eternally preexisted (Jacob 1958:38; Rosenberg and Zlotowitz 1999:570; Smith 1993:165, 374; cf. Pss 93:2; 145:13; Isa 40:28; Jer 10:10; Rev 1:8). In truth, time "does not bind or limit Him as it does us" (Constable 2006:161; cf. Schaefer 2001:227).

3. Recognizing the Brevity of Life Under God's Rule (Ps 90:3-6)

The one who created the earth and all its inhabitants is also the supreme Lord. Genesis 2:7 says that He formed the first human being "from the dust of the ground". Then He breathed into the man's nostrils the "breath of life" (cf. Deffinbaugh 2001). In an ironic turn of justice, the same creature who dared to transgress God's command was consigned to die. As 3:19 relates, the great King created Adam from the soil—the "dust" of the earth—and in death he would yield his remains to the soil (cf. Barnes 1869:3; Jacob 1958:156).

Romans 5:12 declares that as a result of Adam's misdeed, sin entered the world and brought the curse of death to the human race and all of creation.

Psalm 90:3 refers to this same sentence of death, which hangs over everyone like an ominous storm cloud. All it takes is God's simple command to end the lives of His mortal creatures. At His directive—"return to dust"—their brief existence suddenly ends. The Hebrew noun *dakkā',* which is rendered "dust", points to material that has been pounded, crushed, or pulverised (cf. Delitzsch 1982:3:51; Smith 1996:368; Tate 1990:432; Tanner 2001:102-103). Perhaps in a general sense, this is a reference to the "crushing weight of time upon human existence" (McCann 1993:158). Clearly, the laments voiced by the psalmist are "based on the experience of life" as well as observing the "lives of others". Indeed, "no revelation is necessary to learn their truth" (Mays 1994:291).

The epitome of God's judgement is seen in the faithless generation of Israelites, whose hapless end was to return to the arid soil of the Sinai desert after spending 40 years aimlessly wandering in it (cf. Num 13—14). Much of what took place during those dreary decades is passed over without comment in the biblical record. Undoubtedly, there was not much of significance that occurred in relation to the advancement of God's program of redemption (Lawson 2006:81-82). The Hebrews would have travelled from one place to the next. They would have established camp wherever they could find adequate amounts of water and possibly meagre amounts of vegetation. Of course, the Lord kept the people alive by His generous provision of manna. Perhaps now and then over those long years, the covenant community would circle its way back to Kadesh Barnea, the spot where they had first rebelled against God (cf. Deut 2:14).

Mere mortals cannot begin to fathom the truth that to the everlasting God a thousand years are as fleeting as a single day and as momentary as yesterday after it has quickly passed (Ps 90:4). The ancient Israelites divided their days into two 12-hour periods—day and night, respectively. Furthermore, depending on the season of year, they divided the night into three or four equal periods of three to four hours (cf. Jdg 7:19; 1 Sam 11:11; Lam 2:19; Barnes 1869:4; Gill 1999; Perowne 1989:2:165). Psalm 90:4 reveals that to the Lord an entire millennium seems as short-lived as a night watch (cf. 2 Pet 3:8). More generally, God's knowledge of time and eternity is instantaneous,

simultaneous, exhaustive, and absolutely correct. He is always aware of everything that occurs, regardless of whether it is past, present, or future (cf. Brug 2005:82; Kraus 1989:218; Vos 2005:133).

The Hebrew of Psalm 90:5, which linguists have found somewhat difficult to translate (cf. Thomas 1968:267), can be rendered as "You flood them [with] sleep" or "you bring them to an end [with] sleep" (cf. Tate 1990:433; Winton 1968:267-268). Perhaps the imagery is that of a torrent of water that devastates everything in its path, whether animate or inanimate (cf. Cohen and Oratz 1992:298). In the end, nothing survives the onslaught of the deluge (cf. Calvin 2007; Deffinbaugh 2001; Kidner 1975:329). Against the backdrop of God's eternal preexistence, mere mortals last no longer than a dream before the years of their lives are engulfed and swept away in the "sleep of death" (cf. Briggs 1906:2:274; Delitzsch 1982:3:53; Tanner 2001:103; Tsevat 1985:115-116).

Moses also used the analogy of tender grass that sprouts up at daybreak to represent the potential of youth (Eaton 2003:323; Rosenberg and Zlotowitz 1999:571). In the "coolness of the early morning dew" (Tate 1990:441), it glistens and bursts into bloom; but by dusk the grass has dried up and withered in the unrelenting heat of the sun (v. 6; cf. Barnes 1869:5; Harrelson 1977:186). VanGemeren (1991:5:593) suggests as the possible conceptual backdrop the "dry summer climate in Canaan", in which a "few days of hot weather" can alter the "green landscape of the winter and spring" into a "brown, parched" dead zone. The existence of every living entity—including human beings—is just as ephemeral and cursory (cf. Jacob 1958:52; Smith 1993:237; Urbrock 1974:7, 15; Pss 102:25-28; 104:29-30; 144:3-4; 129:6; Isa 40:6-8; Jas 1:10-11; 1 Pet 1:24-25).

4. Coming to Terms with God's Wrath (Ps 90:7-12)

Every day, people throughout the world experience the brevity and impermanence of their earthly existence. Their physical and mental capabilities, which might have held tremendous promise earlier in their lives, diminish and ebb away with the passing of the years and decades. This is a consequence of God's judgement of sin in the human race and throughout the universe. A testament to this truth is the monotony and misery the Israelites

experienced while wandering in the wilderness, only thereafter to be greeted by death (cf. Deut 4:25-28; 11:16-17).

Psalm 90:7 vividly refers to God's anger wiping out the lives of people through the incessant onslaught of death. The Hebrew verb *kālâh,* which is rendered "consumed", denotes something that has wasted away, failed, or perished (cf. Dahood 1968:324). The noun *'aph*, which is translated "anger", literally refers to the nose or nostrils of the face. The image is that of a snorting sound that is produced by intense annoyance or dissatisfaction over some circumstance (cf. Rosenberg and Zlotowitz 1999:571; VanGemeren 1991:5:551). With respect to the Lord, His anger is an expression of His righteous indignation over humanity's sins, including those involving His chosen people (cf. 2:5; 7:11; 39:11).

The second part of 90:7 completes the thought begun in the first part. When people experience God's "indignation", they are "terrified". The first term renders the Hebrew noun *chēmâh,* which denotes the hot displeasure associated with God's wrath. "Terrified" renders the verb *bāhal*, which draws attention to the alarm and anxiety that people feel. In a manner of speaking, they are overwhelmed by the Lord's fury, which brings about their demise (cf. Mowinckel 1962:2:12).

It is easy for people to imagine that no one knows about transgressions they commit in their heart, such as greed, arrogance, and resentment (cf. Barnes 1869:6; Gill 1999); but before the penetrating light of God's holy presence, nothing is hidden from His sight. Moses depicted the Lord as spreading out our "iniquities" (v. 8) before Him. Every form of mischief is transparent and all our perversities are exposed. Even the sins people try to hide are ever-present before the luminosity of His countenance. In a manner of speaking, God's face is comparable to a lamp that dispels the surrounding darkness to reveal what would otherwise remain hidden (cf. Matt 10:26; Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; 12:2; John 3:19-21).

In Psalm 139, David noted that God knew the king's every action, all that he undertook, the way in which he pursued his goals, his thoughts before they were formed, and his words before they were spoken (vv. 2-4). According to Hebrews 4:12, God uses His Word, like a double-edged sword, to pierce to the

innermost recesses of our being and judge our feelings and intentions. Verse 13 uses comprehensive language to reinforce this assertion—"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight" and "Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him". In essence, the whole lot is revealed to God, to whom we are responsible to give an account. This explains why David prayed that the Lord would probe his heart and discern his anxious thoughts. Then, should God find any idolatrous bent or any other offensive tendency in the monarch, David prayed that the Lord would guide him in the path that is true and everlasting (Ps 139:23-24).

In 90:9, the Hebrew verb *pānâ,* which is rendered "pass away", conveys the image of something that is moribund and close to dying. Under the glare of the Lord's gaze and the heat of His raging fury, a person's existence withers and feels as if it is cut short prematurely. Life itself tends to be filled with unending struggles, which cripple the ability of people to deal with a successive series of afflictions. At the end of countless misfortunes, weary earthbound travellers end their pain-filled years with a sigh. The Hebrew noun *hegeh,* which is rendered "moan", can also denote the transience of life, which passes away all too quickly.

In Ecclesiastes 2:12-26, Solomon took a sobering look at the certainty of death. He wondered whether prudence and hard work bring more meaning to life than do foolishness and laziness. It is clear, he admitted, that wisdom is better than foolishness; but all people are destined to the same fate—the grave. Thus wisdom and foolishness, along with labour and laziness, receive the same reward. Furthermore, work seems futile because labourers cannot permanently enjoy the fruit of their efforts but must leave it to others when they die. Nonetheless, the Teacher advised getting whatever satisfaction one can from work. The righteous are blessed, while sinners lose what they accumulate.

Such a perspective is often lost on youth, for whom seven or eight decades of life seem like a long time. In antiquity, seven and "seventy" (Ps. 90:10) epitomised completion and perfection. The parallel construction of this verse reinforces this impression with the observation that some people, due to their God-given strength, live to be 80 years old (cf. Anderson 1983b:653; Robertson 1977:48). Even more impressive is the fact that the span of Moses'

life reached 120 years. Indeed, Deuteronomy 34:7 notes that the eyesight of the lawgiver was still good, and his body remained strong. All the same, he did not escape death (cf. Alter 2007:317; Brug 2005:81). Likewise, it does not matter how long people might live. Against the backdrop of God's eternality all the days of their existence are too few (cf. Calvin 2007; Spurgeon 2001).

"Best of them" (Ps 90:10) renders the Hebrew noun *rōhab,* which literally means "arrogance" or "pride". The focus is on the prime of life, when young people are filled with confidence at what they imagine they can accomplish in their zeal and strength; yet even the prime of their life, with all its "pageantry" (Kraus 1989:217) and "frenetic activity" (Tate 1990:435), is scarred by "trouble and sorrow" (cf. Barnes 1869:7; Perowne 1989:2:167). The more literal rendering is "destruction and wickedness", which points to the grief, disappointment, and loss that typifies human existence. After a lifetime of toil and heartache, one's existence suddenly ends. Moses compared the abrupt onslaught of death to a bird that quickly flies away as a result of being "frightened from its roost" (Leupold 1969:646).

In Ecclesiastes 12:6-7, Solomon used a series of poetic images to describe the swift termination of life. He mentioned the severing of the silver cord from which a golden lamp hung, which in turn caused the lamp (representing life) to be broken. In a parallel analogy, the Teacher referred to a clay pitcher being smashed so that it could no longer carry the water of life. Even the wooden waterwheel that drew the water had been broken. Another possibility is that the silver cord is the human spine, while the lamp is the head. The pitcher is the heart, which will no longer carry life-giving blood, and the wheel represents the lungs (carrying air), the heart (carrying blood), or the organs of digestion.

Solomon, after using imagery to describe the inevitable demise of people, next showed the ultimate results of the breakdown of the body. In death, the original components, or "the dust", will return "to the ground" from which it came. At the same time, the breath of life, which originated from God, returns to Him (cf. Gen 2:7; 6:17; 7:22; Ps 146:4; Eccl 3:19). Understandably, all Solomon's talk of decline and death must have left him feeling depressed. Just as he had done at the beginning of his monologue (cf. 1:2), the Teacher

lamented that life seemed absolutely futile and absurd (Eccl 12:8; cf. Jens 1995:179-181).

Moses wanted the covenant community to recognise that life's afflictions and brevity were manifestations of God's judgement on sin (Ps 90:11). The lawgiver admitted that no one, regardless of how wise and informed he or she might be, has ever fathomed the "full extent" of God's anger or even the "duration" of its intensity and severity (Clifford 2000:65; Clifford 2003:97; Clifford 2005:202). The second half of this hard-to-understand verse is literally rendered "and like your fear [is] your wrath". *Yir'â* is the Hebrew noun rendered "fear" and denotes a reverential trust in the Lord that is the basis for His people knowing Him, doing His will, and fully appreciating His unfailing love (Deffinbaugh 2001; cf. Pss 111:10; 147:11; Prov 1:7). One possible meaning is that God's wrath causes humans to fear Him. Another likely sense is that the awesomeness of God's raging fury mirrors the fear He deserves to receive from human beings (cf. Barnes 1869:9; Freehof 1938:262; Kidner 1975:330).

More generally, as mortals experience God's righteous indignation, it should prompt them to think seriously about the brevity of life. David prayed that God would help His servant more fully appreciate the transient nature of his life (Ps 39:4). The Lord had made the king's existence seem no longer than the width of his hand. Indeed, the entire span of his life was a fleeting moment to God. For that matter, to Him the lifetime of every human being—even those who seemed secure—was but a vapour (v. 5). From the perspective of the eternal Lord, people were as impermanent as shadows. Thus, all their hustle and bustle to amass what they could not keep seemed futile (v. 6). If mortals were wise, they would recognise their accountability to God for everything they did while on earth. In contrast, those who were morally deficient would, in their arrogance, foolishly disregard the swift passage of time and their God-given responsibility to worship and serve the Lord (cf. 10; 49; 73:4-12; 92:6-7; 94:8-11).

Against this theological backdrop, Moses petitioned God to teach the covenant community to "number [their] days" (90:12). The idea is that, in becoming more aware of how short existence really is, God's loyal followers will value the time He has given them, recognise it as His gracious gift to them, and seek

to accomplish His will (cf. McCann 1996:4:1043; Tate 1990:442-443). By their attitudes and actions, they demonstrate the "capacity to submit, relinquish, and acknowledge the decisive impingement of Yahweh on one's life" (Brueggemann 1984:111). The prudent, as a result of being so inclined, obtain a "heart of wisdom". *Lēbāb* is the Hebrew noun rendered "heart" and denotes the locus of a person's thoughts, will, and ethical character (cf. Day 2003:130). *Chokmâ* is the noun translated "wisdom" and refers to God-given prudence in all areas of life (cf. Vos 2005:129, 136). Together these terms point to those who astutely use all the allotted time they have on earth—in which life is filled with "opportunity and possibility" (Miller 1986:129)—to bring glory to the Lord (cf. Clifford 2000:66; Clifford 2003:99; Clifford 2005:203; Kraus 1986:145-146).

5. Petitioning the Lord for the Restoration of His Favor (Ps 90:13-17)

In Psalm 90:3, Moses noted that at God's command, He turns people back to dust. Then, in verse 13, the advocate for the covenant community petitioned the Lord to "relent" (cf. McCann 1996:4:10421043; Urbrock 1998:29). In essence, the plea was for God to turn back from His anger and return to a posture of favour with His chosen people (cf. Balentine 2003:470; Freedman 1985:59; Weiser 1962:602). Moses, in literally asking "How long?", wanted to know when the Lord would bring to an end the suffering of the Israelites, who saw their lives withering away in the Sinai Desert (cf. Clifford 2005:191, 199; Gill 1999; Tate 1990:443). In essence, the advocate implored God to transform the endeavours of the covenant community "from a fleeting, transitory action into a responsible, enduring work" (Jens 1995:184).

Moses used the Hebrew noun '*ebed* to refer to God's people as His bondservants. In connection with this, the intercessor used the verb *nācham* to petition God to have pity or show compassion on the Israelites (cf. Exod 32:12, 14; Deut 32:36). As noted earlier in this essay, Moses enjoyed a close, personal relationship with Yahweh (cf. Tanner 2001:96; Tate 1990:438). The lawgiver, being absolutely convinced of the Lord's righteousness, openly expressed his sorrow over the hardship an entire generation of Israelites had to endure. Moses felt bold enough to go before the throne of God and appeal to His justice, confident that the good and faithful Judge of all the earth would be

merciful to His chosen people (cf. Mowinckel 1962:1:24, 91, 222; Mowinckel 1962:2:75; Isa 40:1; 49:13; 51:3, 12). For believers this "plea . . . is set within the framework of a larger human experience" (Steussy 2004:163). As such, the poem functions as a "prayer for God's community in every period of crisis and loss" (Clifford 2005:205; cf. Lawson 2006:84; Urbrock 1974:1).

In Psalm 90:14, Moses compared the wilderness experience of the Israelites to a nighttime filled with seemingly endless anguish (cf. Barnes 1869:9; Rosenberg and Zlotowitz 1999:573). The advocate prayed that God would end the suffering of His people by filling each and every morning thereafter with His "unfailing love" (cf. Pss 30:5; 46:5; 49:14; 59:16; 143:8; Lam 3:23). The latter renders the Hebrew noun *chesed,* which points to the Lord's steadfast goodness, kindness, and faithfulness (cf. Kraus 1986:43-44). Yahweh's displays of grace toward His people were an outflow of His covenant relationship with them (cf. Exod 34:6-7; Deut 7:9, 12; 2 Sam 7:15; Pss 89:24, 28, 33, 49; Isa 55:3). The resurrection of the righteous remnant at the second advent of the Messiah will be the ultimate display of the Lord's covenant faithfulness (cf. Mays 1994:295; Stuhlmueller 1983:70-71; Rom 5:2-5; 8:18-23; 2 Cor 4:16-18).

Moses, perhaps representing the sentiments of the Israelites wandering in the Sinai Desert, longed for God to shower His people with His compassion so that they might once again delight in a life of service to Him. It would be a renewed opportunity for them to celebrate the Lord's goodness and sing for joy at what time they had left on earth to revere Him (Ps 90:15). The intercessor petitioned God to give them as many days of gladness as He had of affliction. Put another way, Moses asked God to exchange the Israelites' years of misfortune and misery with times of prosperity and happiness (cf. Cohen and Oratz 1992:300).

The parallel sentence structure of verse 16 indicates that the "deeds" of God "on behalf of his people" (VanGemeren 1991:5:597) are characterized by "splendor" (cf. Isa 40:5). The latter term renders the Hebrew noun *hādār,* which can also be translated "glory", "majesty", or "honor". Psalm 111:3 states that the Lord's work in the world is glorious, majestic, and righteous. His deeds include providing food for His worshippers and enabling them to triumph over their foes (vv. 5-6). It was the heartfelt petition of the psalmist

that future generations of Israelites would experience God's covenant blessings, including His ongoing acts of redemption (v. 9; cf. Mowinckel 1962:2:102).

The latter included the "favour" (90:17) of the sovereign Lord, Israel's covenant-keeping God, resting on them. The underlying Hebrew noun is *nō'am* and can also be rendered "beauty" (cf. 27:4). In either translation, the focus is on God bestowing His kindness on His chosen people. The Lord's approval would be evident in enabling future generations of Israelites to be successful in all their endeavours (cf. Deut 2:7; 14:29; 16:15). A literal rendering of Psalm 90:17 brings out the fervour of Moses' petition: "and the work of our hands establish over us, and the work of our hands, establish it". The historical books of the Old Testament, beginning with Joshua, reveal that the Lord did indeed grant Moses' request by giving meaning, significance, and enduring value to the labour undertaken by future generations of Israelites in the promised land (cf. Delitzsch 1982:3:59; Miller 1986:130).

6. Postscript

Psalm 90 emphasises the frailty and morality of people in a sin-cursed world. This profound truth notwithstanding, the poem's sombre depiction of human life should not remain detached from the rest of God's Word. In point of fact, the canonical arrangement of the Hebrew Psalter pairs Moses' communal lament with the more hope-filled declarations recorded in Psalm 91. Here one finds a temple worshipper (possibly a priest or Levite) expressing categorical trust in the Lord despite the trials and tribulations of life. The references to shelter, refuge, protection, and so on, emphasise that God watches over and preserves the covenant community from a multitude of perils that often threaten humanity.

As a balancing contrast to the preceding analysis of Psalm 90, a brief discussion of Psalm 91 is provided in this postscript to the essay. In a didactic or wisdom poem declaring confidence in Yahweh, His loyal followers are encouraged to go to Him for habitation and safety. Verse 1 depicts them as living in the shelter (perhaps originally a reference to the protective precincts of the temple) of the Most High (cf. 23:6; 27:4-5; 31:20), who alone is the one, true, and sovereign God. Like an attentive parent eagle who covers its

young under the shadow of its outspread wings (or alternatively, like the pinions of the cherubim on either side of the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the temple), so too the Almighty (Hebrew, *Shadday*) tenderly provides sanctuary for His people to shield them from harm (cf. 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7). Because He is the all-powerful King and Judge of the universe, the faithful can look to Yahweh as their defender and protector, the true and living God in whom they have placed their trust (91:2).

Such confidence in the Lord is not misplaced, for as verse 3 relates, God rescues His people from every secret trap (whether human or demonic in origin). The poet depicted these as the snare used by a fowler to hunt birds. Not even a deadly plague would overtake the righteous remnant. Amid the hidden dangers of life (including war, disease, wild animals, and demons), they are safe in the Lord's care. His metaphorical "feathers" (v. 4) protect them and His "wings" give them refuge. His faithfulness is comparable to a shield or a rampart that protects the covenant community.

God watches over His own at all times and in all places. He safeguards them from the terrors of the night and sudden attacks during the day (e.g. originating from arrows shot by an enemy; v. 5). Not even an epidemic—such as a dreaded communicable disease that strikes in the dark or a scourge that ravages at noon—would harm the Lord's chosen people (v. 6). Even if a thousand persons fell dead beside God's loyal followers and ten thousand perished around them from the wasting disease, they would remain safe and secure (v. 7). In contrast, they would see with their own eyes the retribution of the Lord on the wicked, namely, those who refuse to trust in and obey God (v. 8).

Psalm 90:1 affirms that Yahweh has been the dwelling place of His people since time immemorial. In corresponding fashion, 91:9 encourages the righteous to take refuge in the covenant-keeping God of Israel and to find shelter in the one who reigns sovereign over all the earth. Verse 14 further notes the Lord's pledge to rescue those who cling to Him in love. He even promises to keep safe those who acknowledge Him as Lord and live according to His Word (cf. Rom 8:28). In their time of trouble, He will answer their prayer for help by delivering and honouring them (Ps 91:15). Verse 16 serves as a fitting response to 90:17. What Moses requested, the Lord declared to do

for His loyal followers. He would let them live to a ripe old age and show them His salvation.

The New Testament similarly teaches that the Father safeguards those who trust in His Son (cf. Rom 8:31-39). For example, 1 Peter 1:5 says that God's power protects and preserves believers to receive salvation in Christ, which is ready to be revealed at the end of time. The Greek verb *phroureo,* which is rendered "shielded", conveys the idea of vigilantly defending a fortress. Believers can count on God's protection regardless of the hardships they might encounter. The "salvation" the apostle mentioned refers to the believer's complete deliverance from sin in the future. When the Messiah returns, He will raise His people from the dead and give them glorified bodies. They will then enjoy the riches of heaven.

Works Cited

Alter R 2007. *The book of Psalms: a translation with commentary*. WW Norton and Company.

Anderson AA 1983a. *Psalms (1-72)*. NCBC. Eerdmans.

_____ 1983b. *Psalms (73-150)*. NCBC. Eerdmans.

Balentine SE 2003. Turn, O Lord! How long? *Review and Expositor* 100(3):465-481.

Barnes A 1869. *Notes, critical, explanatory, and practical on the book of Psalms* (vol. 3). Harper and Brothers Publishers.

Briggs CA 1906. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the book of* Psalms (vol. 2). T&T Clark.

Broyles CC 1999. *Psalms*. NIBC. Hedrickson.

Brueggemann W 1984. *The message of the Psalms: a theological commentary*. Augsburg Publishing House.

_____ 1997. *Theology of the Old Testament: testimony, dispute, advocacy*. Fortress Press.

Brug J F 2005. *People's Bible commentary: Psalms II* (rev. ed.). Concordia Publishing House.

Calvin J 2007. *Calvin's commentaries. Vol. 10: Psalms, Part III*. Translated by J King. Internet Sacred Text Archive. Accessed from http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc10/cc10024.htm.

Clifford RJ 2000. What does the psalmist ask for in Psalms 39:5 and 90:12? *JBL* 119(1): 59-66.

Clifford, R J 2003. *Abingdon Old Testament commentaries: Psalms 73-150*. Abingdon Press.

_____ 2005. Psalm 90: Wisdom meditation or communal lament? In PW Flint and PD Miller (eds), *The book of Psalms: composition and reception (Supplements to Vestus Testamentum)*, 190-205. Brill.

Cohen A and Oratz E 1992. *The Psalms: Hebrew text and English translation with an introduction and commentary*. The Soncino Press.

Constable T 2006. *Notes on Psalms*. Sonic Light. Accessed from http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm.

Cook EM. 2001. *The Psalms Targum: an English translation*. Newsletter for Targumic and Cognate Studies. Accessed from http://www.tulane.edu/~ntcs/pss/ps4.htm.

Craigie PC 2004. *Psalms 1-50*. WBC. Thomas Nelson.

Craven T 1992. *The book of Psalms*. The Liturgical Press.

Dahood M 1968. *Psalm II: 51-100*. Doubleday & Company.

Day J 2003. *Psalms*. T&T Clark.

Deffinbaugh B 2001. Psalm 90: place for pessimism. Biblical Studies Press. Accessed from http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=520.

Delitzsch F 1982. *Biblical commentary on the Psalms* (vol. 3). Translated by F Bolton. Eerdmans.

Eaton J 2003. *The Psalms: a historical and spiritual commentary with an introduction and new translation*. T&T Clark.

Freedman DN 1985. Other than Moses . . . who asks (or tells) God to repent? *Bible Review* 1(4):56-59.

Freehof SB 1938. *The book of Psalms: a commentary*. Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Fruchtenbaum AG 1998. Psalm 90: an exposition. *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 4(2): 1-10.

Gill J 1999. Commentary on Psalms 90. In *The new John Gill exposition of the entire Bible*. Heartlight. Accessed from http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/geb/view.cgi?book=ps&chapter=090&verse=>.

Harrelson W 1977. A meditation on the wrath of God: Psalm 90. In AL Merrill and TW Overholt (eds), *Scripture in history and theology: essays in honor of J C Rylaarsdam,* 181-191. The Pickwick Press.

Hengstenberg EW 1864. *Commentary on the Psalms* (vol. 3). Wipf and Stock.

Jacob E 1958. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Translated by AW Heathcote and PJ Allcock. Harper and Brothers Publishers.

Jens W 1995. Psalm 90: on transience. Translated by WC Linss. *Lutheran Quarterly*. 9(2): 177-189.

Kidner D 1973. *Psalms 1-72: a commentary*. InterVarsity.

_____ 1975. *Psalms 73-150: a commentary*. InterVarsity.

Kraus HJ 1986. *Theology of the Psalms*. Translated by K Crim. Augsburg.

_____ 1989. *Psalms 60-150: a commentary*. Translated by HC Oswald. Augsburg Fortress.

Lawson SJ 2006. *Holman Old Testament commentary: Psalms 76-150*. Holman Reference.

Leslie EA 1949. *The Psalms*. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.

Leupold HC 1969. *Exposition of Psalms*. Baker.

Mays JL 1994. *Psalms*. John Knox Press.

McCann JC 1993. *A theological introduction to the book of Psalms as Torah*. Abingdon Press.

McCann JC 1996. The book of Psalms. In LE Keck et al. (eds), *The new interpreter's Bible*, 4:641-1280. Abingdon Press.

Miller PD 1986. *Interpreting the Psalms*. Fortress Press.

Mowinckel S 1962. *The Psalms in Israel's worship* (vols. 1-2). Translated by DR Ap-Thomas. Abindgon Press.

Perowne JJS 1989. *Commentary on the Psalms. Vol. 2: Psalms 73-150*. Kregel.

Robertson D 1977. Literary criticism of the Bible: Psalm 90 and Shelley's "hymn to intellectual beauty". *Semeia* 8:35-50.

Rosenberg MS and Zlotowitz BM 1999. *The book of Psalms: a new translation and commentary*. Jason Aronson.

Schaefer K 2001. *Berit Olam studies in Hebrew narrative and poetry: Psalms*. The Liturgical Press.

Seybold K 1990. *Introducing the Psalms*. Translated by RG Dunphy. T&T Clark.

Smith JE. 1996. *The wisdom literature and the Psalms*. College Press.

Smith RL 1993. *Old Testament theology: its history, method, and message*. Broadman and Holman.

Spurgeon CH 2001. Psalm 90. In *The treasury of David*. The Spurgeon Archive. Accessed from http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps090.htm.

Stark R 2007. *Discovering God: the origins of the great religions and the evolution of belief*. HarperCollins.

Steussy MJ 2004. *Psalms*. Chalice Press.

Stuhlmueller C 1983. *Psalms 2 (Psalms 73-150)*. Michael Glazier.

Tanner BL 2001. *The book of Psalms through the lens of intertextuality*. Peter Lang.

Tate ME 1990. *Psalms 51-100*. WBC. Thomas Nelson.

Terrien S 1952. *The Psalms and their meaning for today*. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

_____ 2003. *The Psalms: strophic structure and theological commentary*. Eerdmans.

Thomas, D W 1968. Note on *zrmtm snh yhyw* in Psalm 90:5. *Vestus Testamentum* 18(2): 267-268.

Tsevat, M 1985. Psalm 90:5-6. *Vestus Testamentum* 35(1):115-116.

Urbrock WJ 1974. Mortal and miserable man: a form-critical investigation of Psalm 90. *Society of Biblical Literature seminar papers* 110(1):1-34.

_____ 1998. Psalm 90: Moses, morality, and . . . the morning. *Currents in theology and mission* 25(1):26-29.

VanGemeren WA 1991. Psalms. In FE Gaebelein et al. (eds), *The expositor's Bible commentary*, 5:3-880. Zondervan.

Vos CJA 2005. *Theopoetry in the Psalms*. T&T Clark.

Waltke BK 2007. *An Old Testament theology: an exegetical, canonical, and thematic approach*. Zondervan.

Waltner, J H 2006. *Believers church Bible commentary: Psalms*. Herald Press.

Weiser A 1962. *The Psalms: a commentary*. Translated by H Hartwell. The Westminster Press.

Westermann C 1980. *The Psalms: structure, content, and message*. Augsburg Publishing House.

Winton D 1968. Note on *zrmtm snh yhyw* in Psalm 90:5. *Vestus Testamentum* 18(2):267-268.

The Divine Sabotage: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Ecclesiastes 3[1]

by Dan Lioy[2]

Abstract[3]

The author uses the concept of the "divine sabotage" as a starting point for an exegetical and theological study of Ecclesiastes 3. He notes that on the one hand, God has "set eternity in the human heart" (v. 11). Yet, on the other hand, "no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end". The author explains that God has imposed limitations on the human race that *undermine* their efforts to look beyond the present—especially to understand the past and probe into the future. Expressed differently, because people are creatures of time, their heavenly-imposed finitude *subverts* their ability to fathom the eternal plan of God. An objective, balanced, and affirming examination of Solomon's treatise indicates that the fundamental quality of life is defined by revering God and heeding His commandments (cf. 12:13).

---

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Dan Lioy holds a ThM (Dallas Theological Seminary) and a PhD (North-West University). He has lectured at Trinity Theological Seminary, Marylhurst University, and Southwestern College. He has written several academic monographs, including ones on the Sermon on the Mount, the gospel of John, and the Book of Revelation. He is presently a postgraduate supervisor with the South African Theological Seminary.

[3] This essay is a preliminary version of material to appear in a forthcoming monograph being researched and written by the author. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The idea for the title of this essay comes from Roland Murphy's discussion of Ecclesiastes 3:11 (1987:256; 1992:39). The verse states that God has "set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end".[4] Murphy explains that God has placed within people an awareness of "the timeless", namely, a "sense of duration". Yet, He also prevents people "from understanding what [He] is about in all the key undertakings of life". This is a "case of divine sabotage" in which humanity's efforts to look beyond the present—especially to understand the past and probe into the future—are subverted by numerous heavenly-imposed limitations.

Seow (1997:173) remarked that "God is responsible for giving both time and eternity, and the human being is caught in the tension between the two". In a similar vein, Bridges (1860:68) observed that people "can neither unravel the thread of [God's] counsels, nor grasp the infinite perfection of his work". Kaiser (1979:60) described the finitude and frustration of human beings in this way: "So vast, so eternal, and so comprehensive in its inclusion is [God's] plan that man is both threatened and exasperated in his attempts to discover it for himself". Williams (1984:257) maintains that God "does not resolve the crisis" for humankind. Instead, He "remains hidden in His person, work, and justice". In light of this dilemma, Lee (2005:121) concluded that "any attempt to strain for the impossible or master the mysterious is destined to lead only to frustration and failure".

Polkinghorne stated in an interview that the "mysterious infinite reality of God cannot be caught within the finite nets of human thinking" (Fitzgerald 2008). Kidner (1976:39) likened the human predicament to the "desperately nearsighted, inching their way along some great tapestry or fresco in the attempt to take it in". People "see enough to recognize something of its quality", yet the "grand design" eludes them, for they "can never stand back far enough to view it as the Creator does, whole and entire" from start to finish. Caneday (1994:103) noted that "man struggles for life and meaning in

[4] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *Today's New International Version* (hereafter abbreviated, TNIV).

an environment that taunts him with its paradoxes: birth and death, weeping and laughter, love and hate, war and peace, and the like". This "relentless and inflexible cycle of events extends beyond the grasp of man's control and understanding".

Together, the litany of preceding comments paint a rather stark, unsettling picture. When we candidly and objectively look at the facts, we should not be surprised that at times our existence seems vague, incongruous, and antithetical. We are left feeling confused, powerless, and frustrated. As well, somewhere along the way, we begin to ask what life is *really* all about. Solomon (otherwise referred as the Teacher, sage, and Qoheleth), who was Israel's wisest and most powerful king, also wrestled with these issues, and he recorded his observations and conclusions in the Book of Ecclesiastes.[5] This essay will consider in part what he had to say by undertaking an exegetical and theological study of chapter 3 of his discourse. Observations and conclusions drawn from it are representative of what is found throughout the philosopher-theologian's entire treatise.

2. The Lord's Sovereign Ordering of Life's Events (Eccl 3:1-8)

Earlier in Ecclesiastes, Solomon noted that life is ephemeral, unreliable, and incomprehensible, especially when divorced from God (cf. 1:1-11). Likewise, true meaning and joy come only from God. In chapter 3, the sage considered the spectrum of life's activities and events and affirmed that all of them were under God's sovereign ordering and control (cf. Ps 31:15; Prov 16:1-9). The parallel sentence structure of Ecclesiastes 3:1 indicates that the Hebrew terms rendered "time" and "season" denote a range of human endeavors and situations on earth, all of which are appointed by God to occur at the appropriate moment (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:273, 773). While He has ordained a time for everything, the responsibility of the upright is to seek the Lord's wisdom so that they might discern what activities go with what seasons.

[5] This essay holds to the traditional view of the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. Admittedly, it is not imperative to have a definitive identification of the author to understand the message of the book. For a discussion regarding the inspired perspective of Ecclesiastes, see Lioy 2006.

Verses 2-8 list many of the activities that take place "under the heavens" (v. 1). The reader finds here 14 pairs of opposites. In Hebrew speech, the mentioning of opposites together expressed totality (for example, "heaven and earth" stands for all of physical and spiritual reality). Thus, these 14 pairs are meant to be representative of all the activities of life (cf. Glenn 1985:983; Longman 1998:114; Provan 2001:87). Verse 2 opens with the observation that God establishes the time for birth and the time for death. In Qoheleth's view, God has a plan for one's arrival on earth, for the living out of one's temporal existence, and for one's departure from life. In the previous two chapters, the sage commented on the brevity of life. Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 rounds out his presentation by addressing what comes between birth and death.

In the divine ordering of earthly existence, people take time to plant crops as well as to uproot the same (v. 2). They engage in killing and healing activities, as well as tearing down and building up initiatives (v. 3). These three lines of the poem address creative and destructive endeavors used for either establishing or undermining. For instance, planting seeds and pulling weeds must be done to reap a harvest. The same is true of life in general. Some aspects must be planted and others uprooted if one's life is to be complete and meaningful.

When Solomon noted that there is a time to kill, he was not condoning premeditated murder. His point was more complex than that. Perhaps he was suggesting that the righteous must wrestle for God's wisdom during times when they are confronted with aggression. For instance, when is the proper time to resist evil with forcefulness? On the other hand, when is it time to negotiate and seek reconciliation? Of course, there are also times when those who seek to revere and obey God need to tear down negative aspects of their personal lives and times when they need to build up the positive aspects.

Verse 4 moves the reader farther along the path of life's sovereignly ordered events by mentioning such activities as expressing sorrow and joy, along with mourning and dancing. The Teacher covered the range of human emotions—both private and public—in these two lines of the poem. The Hebrew words translated "weep" and "laugh" indicate expressions of an individual's emotions (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:113, 987), while the Hebrew verbs translated "mourn" and "dance" indicate expressions of a group's

emotions (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:704, 955). Put differently, there is a time for an individual to be sad, and a time for that person to be happy. Likewise, there is a time for an individual to join with others in lamenting a loss, and a time for that person to join with others in celebration.

In verse 5, the sage drew attention to throwing away and gathering stones, along with embracing and refraining from doing so. Various interpretations exist of these two lines of the poem, which focus on friendship and enmity. In ancient times, fields taken by enemies were made unproductive by scattering stones across them. Oppositely, stones were gathered from fields as a sign of a community's desire for peace. A different interpretation points to the gathering of stones for use in building a wall to keep out invaders. In contrast, tearing down those stone walls indicated the residents' desire to make peace with their enemies.

According to one view, "a time to embrace" is a call for people of faith to comfort someone who is experiencing pain, grief, or reconciliation; and yet at other times, it is best for the upright to respect a person's privacy, and not to interfere. A second, more literal view places Qoheleth's advice in the context of love and its physical expression between a man and a woman. Thus, there is a time to show affection and a time to refrain from doing so.

Verse 6 reveals that God establishes the time for individuals to search for people and possessions as well as the moment when the latter should be given up as lost. At least a portion of life on earth consists of humanity's concern for accumulating or getting rid of what they own. According to the sage, God bestowed on people special times when they must look long and hard for things, friendships, and goals, and hold on to them when they were acquired; but there are other times when He summons people to give these up.

In verse 7, the Teacher spotlighted times of ripping things up and sewing them together, as well as keeping silent and deciding to speak. The tearing and mending most likely refer to the ancient custom of rending one's clothes in grief. If so, this line of Solomon's poem restates verse 4, in that it shows there is a season to express grief and a season to recover from grief. The second half of verse 7 reminds the reader that communication—a key part of human

existence—is like a two-way street. Thus, there is a time to remain quiet and a time to voice one's opinion, an interval to listen and an interval to remark.

Verse 8 notes that in the divine ordering of earthly matters, there are times for love and hate, along with seasons for war and peace. Qoheleth recognized that life on earth can hardly resemble what God intended for it when human affections are missing. Indeed, throughout history, the existence of people has been be marked by both love and hatred. The sage encouraged his readers to be careful about the times both are exercised. As a king, Solomon understood the necessity of taking account of the political endeavors of his audience. For instance, the same emotions that can give rise to love or hatred in two individuals can also give rise to war or peace in two communities. Furthermore, as history has shown, conflicts will always arise. Sometimes wrong is resisted with force; at other times, peace is the goal.

3. The Decision to Enjoy the Present Amid Life's Uncertainties and Inequities (Eccl 3:9-22)

The poem recorded in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 leaves the reader with the impression that there is an unmistakable rhythm and order to existence on earth; however, it would be incorrect to conclude from this that everything that occurs in the world is straightforward and predictable. An examination of the first two chapters of Solomon's treatise indicates that existence is filled with paradoxes and that God oversees the ebb and flow of Creation, even though it remains opaque and cryptic to human beings.

It is understandable why people, in their effort to make sense of life's enigmas, would ask what advantage or benefit they obtained from their hard work (v. 9). Qoheleth acknowledged the "burden" (v. 10) God has placed on the human race. "Burden" renders the Hebrew noun '*inyān,*[6] and also can be translated as "occupation", "task", or "job" (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:775). In the present context, this referred to the efforts of people—through theology, philosophy, and science (to name a few disciplines)—to determine on a daily basis where they fit into the divine ordering of life;

[6] The Hebrew consonantal and vowel transliterations used in this essay conform to those found in Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:xx.

however, this search for meaning only ends in frustration, for people constantly discover anew that the whole picture of life on planet Earth eludes them.

Theology may be defined as the study of the metaphysical—including the nature of God, the content of religious belief, and the character / conduct of religious practice—done through an examination of revelation, Scripture, personal experience, and culture. Philosophy may be defined as the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, done primarily through speculative means (rather than empirical methods). Science may be defined as the investigation of physical reality, done through a complex interplay of theory, observation, and experimentation (cf. Baker 2007:153-172; O'Brien, 2007:59-67; Orr 2006:437-442; Scott 2001; Willard 1994).

Even the sharpest minds remain ignorant of God's providence. Rather than become endlessly preoccupied with trying to discern the latter, Solomon affirmed that God has beautifully orchestrated everything to occur at precisely the right moment. The king also acknowledged that God has "set eternity in the human heart" (v. 11). Expressed differently, the Creator has made people with a deep-seated, inborn awareness of "God's ways in the world" that transcends the present and impels them to comprehend how the past, present, and future all fit together (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:816).

Krüger (2004:87) thinks the Hebrew noun '*ôlām,* which is rendered "eternity", denotes a "concept or idea of 'distant time' that extends far beyond the life of an individual human being in the direction of either the past or the future or both" (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:761). Despite each generation's stellar intellectual abilities and attainments, people remain largely ignorant of what God has foreordained. They are even unable to fathom the nature and timing of events during the course of their individual lives. Incredibly, no one is "privy to the designs of this inscrutable God, and cannot predict the consequences of human works" (Ranger 1989:2). This impasse is a prime example of divine sabotage.

For a discussion of the overall failure of science, as a discipline, to recognize God as the primary agent or cause behind the ordering and coherence of the

universe, cf. Pretorius 2007. The author notes that science is able to "argue what reality is from as many realms and ideas" as it chooses; yet this hypothesising is based on a "limited understanding of how the cosmos was formed". In contrast, the Judeo-Christian Scripture "widens the picture". Specifically, the Bible "gives deeper meaning to the purpose for creation and causes one to search for answers to greater truths than science can produce" (41). In the final analysis, the "theistic world-view" is the "most biblically viable" paradigm "within which reality can be understood" (10). More generally, even the "most major alternate world-views are self-defeating and inadequate" in making sense of existence (both physical and metaphysical). All these constructs (whether philosophical or empirical in character) are unable to "answer questions surrounding humanity's journey of life and their final destination, life after death" (26).

Such observations notwithstanding, Pretorius affirms that "both science and theology involve themselves in a journey of discovery, both seek answers, and both concern themselves with truth" (12). Furthermore, he maintains that it is possible for "science and theology" to "comfortably work to further each ones' understanding of reality" (23). Based on the preceding supposition, it seems reasonable to consider "science and religion" as separate and complementary disciplines that "address aspects of human understanding in different ways". Moreover, "attempts to pit science and religion against each other create controversy where none needs to exist" (National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine 2008:12).

In another study, it was maintained that since the dawn of time, the human drive for life has been checkmated by death (Lioy 2006). Specifically, a biblical-theological examination of Genesis 5 and Ecclesiastes 1 indicates that despite the efforts of people both individually and collectively to extend the realms of human existence, their efforts are ultimately ambushed (in a manner of speaking) by a divinely-imposed termination of life (cf. Pss 2:1-6; 18:25-27; 37:1-40; 75:4-10; 90:3-12; Prov 3:32-35; 10:25; 14:11; Isa 40:5-8, 15-17, 21-24; Dan 2:20-21; 7:9-12; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5-6; Rev 18:1-24; 19:11-21). Moreover, while each generation appears to be making incremental strides—sometimes even laudable gains—the reality of death neutralizes these advances and in some cases entirely wipes them out. A consideration of 1

Corinthians 15:50-58 informs people of faith that only in the Messiah can work and leisure be enjoyable, beneficial, and fulfilling.

Paul's statements recorded in Romans 1:18-32 draw attention to a circumstance in which the Lord increasingly gives pagan humanity over to the futile outcome of their perverted lifestyles. The apostle began by affirming that God's wrath was being revealed against the wickedness of all those who suppressed the truth (v. 18). This is something that is occurring even now, as people continue to believe their own deceptive hearts. The individuals described in Romans 1 were certainly worthy of God's wrath, for they suppressed divine truth. The latter refers to the character of God and His invisible qualities revealed in creation.

God's eternal power and divine nature are demonstrated through what He has made (vv. 19-20). This is known as natural revelation, for God uses the created order to disclose a part of Himself. Special revelation, in contrast, is the disclosure of God's character through the written words of Scripture. God, who is "spirit" (John 4:24), is invisible (Col. 1:15). Though the physical eye cannot see Him, His existence is reflected in what He has made. Because God has disclosed Himself in creation, all people stand condemned before Him. The condemnation of those who suppress God's truth is justified because ignoring the revelation of God in creation is indefensible.

Romans 1:21-23 indicates that these individuals worshiped the creation instead of the Creator. By seeing the intricate design of the universe, they could clearly understand the nature of God. Instead of glorifying God for His power, they looked for substitutes. In their foolishness they refused to give thanks to God. Their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened. Because of their idolatry, God abandoned pagan human beings (or "gave them over") to their depravity. Instead of attempting to restrain their wickedness, God simply allowed their sin to run its course. He removed His influence and allowed their willful rejection to produce its natural consequence, which in this case was deadly.

What did God give the Gentiles over to? Verse 24 indicates it was *sexual impurity*. In this way pagans exchanged the truth of God for a lie. This also involved an exchange in worship. People served the creation instead of the

Creator (v. 25). In verse 26 we read for the second time that God "gave them over"—this time to *sexual perversion*. Individuals perverted God's gift of physical intimacy in the context of marriage by engaging in homosexual acts (vv. 26-27). Men and women exchanged natural relations (between men and women) with unnatural relations (men with men and women with women). The result of exchanging the truth of God for a lie was the substitution of natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. For this twofold exchange, they received the due penalty for their perversion.

In verse 28 we read for the third time that God "gave them over"—this time to a *depraved mind*. These pagans put God's reasonable moral boundaries out of their minds, and God responded by abandoning them to warped thinking. Out of this mindset comes all kinds of evil deeds. In verses 29 and 30, Paul categorized these into four kinds of active sin: wickedness (the opposite of righteousness), evil (the profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness), greed (the relentless urge to acquire more), and depravity (a constant bent toward immorality). Such sinful behavior was not due to ignorance of God's commands (v. 32). Rather, people sinned despite their knowledge of God, making them all the more responsible. Not only that, but they also applauded these practices in others. Perhaps seeing others do these things filled them with a sense of self-justification. In any case, they received what they deserved —*spiritual death*.

According to Ecclesiastes 3:11, since God's ways are inscrutable, human beings are powerless to make anything different—at least permanently. Towner (1997:5:284) explains that this state of affairs is "deterministic, but not fatalistic", for people are "still perfectly free and responsible to act". The author takes issue with the notion that Qoheleth depicts God as being "arbitrary and capricious or even just plain absent". Instead, the sage characterizes God as being both transcendent and imminent in the world, which He created and oversees. This view is contra Bickerman (1967:149), who claims that for Qoheleth, God was an "morally neutral being, beyond good and evil." Also, God reputedly was as "arbitrary and fickle as Luck".

Lee (2005:47) points out that in the "drama of life", God is the undisputed "primary Actor", the "one who gives and authorizes". Moreover, the "human agent is given a responsibility for the proper use of that right of disposal".

Accordingly, rather than become frustrated and disillusioned, people of faith choose to revere and obey God, trusting that His wisdom is infinite and His eternal purposes are wise. Ellul (1990:37) maintains that the "unexpected appearance of God in this text cannot be seen as a later supplement or pious veneer". Instead, "God's presence at every turn signifies a righting of the situation".

For an analysis of the concept of God in Ecclesiastes, cf. Estes (1982). The author's study deals with both the "elements of God's activity" (19-102) and the "effects of God's activity" (103-163). Estes concludes that Qoheleth's primary emphasis is on God's transcendence, sovereignty, and inscrutability (164-165). In a similar vein, Kidner (1976:15) asserts that in Ecclesiastes the reader encounters God in three primary ways: "as Creator, as Sovereign, and as Unsearchable Wisdom". Eaton (1983:82) advances the discussion by noting that affirming the "sovereignty of God" is crucial to properly enjoying His material blessings. Here one finds "secularism [giving] way to theism, pessimism to optimism, [and] human autonomy to human faith".

This mindset is reflected in verse 12, where Qoheleth advised his readers to enjoy life in the present (cf. 2:24-26). Based on his observations and personal experience, he concluded that the most worthwhile approach is for people to find joy in their God-given existence. The latter included doing "good" (3:12) as long as they lived. Lee suggests that "enjoyment is not only a matter of right conduct." As well, it is a "matter of *character* and *disposition*" (2005:52; italics are the author's). While deriving enjoyment in life could include the satisfaction the comes from being charitable and philanthropic in one's undertakings, this does not rule out the idea of obtaining pleasure from daily, ordinary experiences. Indeed, the Teacher noted that a great source of contentment can be found in eating, drinking, and performing satisfying work (v. 13).

How can one find real delight in the common outlets of life? The righteous do so by believing that such daily activity—indeed, all of life itself—is a gift of God. The is only possible when people humbly revere the Lord and place their confidence in Him. Smith (1996:731) maintains that Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 is not advocating "licentiousness". Instead, Qoheleth is enjoining "that happy appreciation of the innocent pleasures which the love of God offers to those

who live in accordance with his standards of goodness". Ginsberg and Fox (2007:6:90) explain that while God-given enjoyments are "brief, imperfect, and uncertain, they are enough to make life worth living".

Furthermore, the sage advised the prudent to adopt a measure of humility regarding the short-term import of their lives. Unlike the achievements of the human race (whether individually or collectively), everything God undertakes has a certain finality to it. As a matter of fact, what He does "endures forever", with people being unable to change His sovereign plans. God has designed the world to operate in this way "so that people will fear him" (v. 14; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:431). The latter is not an irrational feeling of dread and impending doom. As well, it is more than courteous reverence. Fearing the Lord is a multivalent concept. It includes an affirmation of His sovereignty and power; it involves revering Him in worship and obeying Him unconditionally (cf. 12:13); and it encompasses a "reverent recognition of the perfection of God's work" (Krüger 2004:89).

Parsons (2003:164) thinks the "concept of the fear of God is not an afterthought but is a theme woven into the fabric of the book" (cf. Eccl 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). According to Gordis (1995:236-237), the biblical concept of fearing God has "both a metaphysical and an ethical character". Expressed differently, the notion "embodies both a theory of life and a course of conduct". In specific terms, fearing God "means to be conscious of His limitless and unfathomable power and to be aware of the uncertainty and brevity of life". Seow (1997:268) explains that those who fear God recognize the "chasm between the divine and the human". Also, they know the "proper place of humanity in relation to the deity". Moreover, they embrace life as God providentially gives it—including the "contradictory realities" of existence on earth.

Deuteronomy 10:12 conveys a similar set of priorities. Moses urged the covenant community to live in reverential trust of the Lord, to obey His commandments, and to love and serve Him with all their heart and soul. A corresponding set of admonitions is found in Micah 6:8. The Lord's requirements recorded in this verse set the highest standards for godly living. For instance, to "act justly" means to treat others with honesty, integrity, and equity (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:1048). To "love mercy" implies

being loyal to God and kind to others (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:13, 338). This is not done impulsively, but rather as a consistent part of one's life. To "walk humbly" with God signifies being circumspect in what one says and modest in one's demeanor (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:229, 857). People of faith willingly choose to follow the Lord and submit to His will. These requirements progress from what is external to what is internal and from one's relationship to other people to one's relationship with God. Specifically, in order to be just toward other people, one must display loyal love. Also, such compassion demands a humble walk before the Lord.

In Ecclesiastes 3:15, Solomon used a brief poem to take a broader view of history, especially as it affects people. Throughout the course of human affairs, people seek to discern God's will. As they try to make sense of His providential undertakings, they begin to discover that history is more than just facts and events repeating themselves without meaning. Admittedly, incidents tend to occur in certain patterns over and over again. Nonetheless, whatever is happening now or will take place in the future has already occurred before (cf. 1:9-11). Such observations notwithstanding, the upright, with faith in God's wisdom, can learn from the course of human events in ways that will benefit them in the present.

The precise meaning of the latter part of 3:15 is debated. The TNIV margin states that "God calls back the past". The idea is that He seeks to do again what occurred in prior generations. The TNIV main rendering of 3:15 says that one day "God will call the past into account". This statement can be both unsettling and reassuring. For instance, it is sobering to realize that people must answer to God for whatever they have done throughout their time on earth. All the same, it is comforting to remember that God will vindicate the righteous. In particular, He will not overlook those who have suffered evil at the hands of others, especially believers and innocent people who have been persecuted or slaughtered.

The reality of the latter truth is stressed in Revelation 20:11-15, which concerns the judgment of the wicked dead. John, in his heavenly vision, saw God open several books that contain a record of the deeds of every human being. The Lord will judge all people according to their works. This did not mean that salvation is based on good deeds, but that God keeps a record of

what people do in this life. God then will open "the book of life", which records the names of those who trusted in the Messiah for salvation. The Lord Jesus will deliver from judgment only those whose names appear in this book. For those who spurn the Son, all that remains is for the Father to condemn them. It will be a terrifying scene as He issues a verdict of guilty against the unsaved.

Moreover, John saw the sea giving up the dead who were in it, and death and Hades (the realm of dead) also giving up their dead. The idea is that no one will escape judgment. The Creator will cast death and Hades into the eternal lake of fire. John called this the second death because it is the final state of everlasting torment. The documents detailing humanity's deeds will be a sobering witness that cannot be refuted. The Father will banish forever from His presence those who do not have their names listed in the Lamb's book of life. No unsaved person will escape this fate.

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 explore further the theme of divine justice in the midst of human oppression. "Judgment" (v. 16) translates the Hebrew noun *mishpāt,* which refers to the rendering of a verdict (whether favorable or unfavorable) in a court of law (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:1048). "Justice" translates the noun *tsedeq,* which denotes what is upright or fair in a moral or legal sense (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:841). Solomon observed that often in a society's judicial system, people grasped for power rather than pursued justice, and then they used that power to maltreat others. As a result, "wickedness" reigned over the place of judgment instead of equity and compassion. "Wickedness" translates the noun is *resha'*, which points to a variety of iniquities committed by people in society (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:957).

Down through the centuries, believers have wondered why God allows evil in the world (cf. Hab 1:13). Whether one is considering evil attitudes, actions, or aims, this wickedness results from the absence of the moral perfection that God originally intended to exist between good things. Ultimately, only God knows why He has allowed evil to exist in the world. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Lord may use ungodliness to bring home to people the distressing fact of their mortality, to warn them of greater evils, to bring about a greater good, or to help defeat wickedness. The last two reasons are especially evident

in the cross of the Messiah. Despite the tragedy of His suffering at Calvary, His atoning sacrifice resulted in a greater good (the salvation of the lost) and the defeat of evil (for instance, sin and death).

Rather than giving in to pessimism and despair, Qoheleth voiced some hope. He pointed his readers to a higher court—the justice of God—when he stated his belief that the Lord would judge both the "righteous" (Eccl 3:17) and "wicked." "Righteous" translates the Hebrew adjective *tsaddîyq,* which refers to those who are lawful and upright in their conduct (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:843). "Wicked" renders the adjective *rāshā',* which (like the related noun *resha'*) denotes those guilty of criminal activity (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:957). Garrett (1987:163) acknowledges that "Qoheleth does not speculate about what type of punishment the wicked will receive". Nonetheless, he "offers the the hope, albeit an undefined one, of divine judgment and vindication".

The sage observed that in the divine ordering of life's events, there is an appropriate time for every human undertaking (cf. v. 1). Likewise, God has reserved a time of judgment for all that people do. Perhaps for the moment the wicked might seem to get away with their evil deeds, but in the end God's justice will triumph (cf. Eccl 9:1; 11:9; 12:14; Mal 3:16—4:3; Rev 22:11-12). Kaiser (1979:125) clarifies that people are "responsible beings, not brutes, who are destined to live to confront the past with the God that they either feared or flouted".

Next, Solomon directed his attention to another related aspect of the human condition. Time after time people fail the divine test to live uprightly. The presence of injustice in the world clearly establishes this fact. Additionally, despite the efforts of individuals to exceed the parameters of their existence, they remain as mortal as any other creature on earth (Eccl 3:18). Like animals, people both breathe and are destined to die. In point of fact, the "shadow of death relativizes human distinctions" (Crenshaw 1987:84). Moreover, the prevalence of wickedness and the inevitability of death indicate that humans have no temporal superiority or "advantage over animals" (v. 19).

Because this is so, the sage declared that everything in life seemed fleeting and fruitless. After all, both humans and animals have the same lifebreath and end

up in the grave. Fox (2004:26.) explains that the Hebrew noun *rûach,* which is rendered "breath" (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:924), does not refer to an "immortal 'soul,' but . . . an animating force that gives and preserves life" (cf. Gen 6:17; Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29-30). Every creature is made from the same minerals and chemicals of the ground, and in death that is where all of them return (Eccl 3:20; cf. Gen. 3:19; Pss 49:12, 20; 103:14). No living entity can escape this destiny. In light of this sobering truth, people of faith choose to revere God and obey Him (cf. Laurin, 1990:594; Waltke 2007:964-965).

In a way, the issue of death is just as difficult to deal with as is the issue of injustice—particularly for those who have no trust in God. For the atheist, if there is no ultimate justice (as is typically alleged), and if people simply die off like snakes and sparrows (as is often maintained), then life would indeed seem to be a farce. To an extent, Solomon indulged this mindset in Ecclesiastes 3:21 by adopting a noncommittal stance on the question of whether there is life after death. Hubbard (1991:200) suggests that Qoheleth made numerous provocative statements in Ecclesiastes as a way to "penetrate the dull ears and hard hearts" of his peers. In a corresponding manner, Dorsey (1999:197) thinks Qoheleth first aimed for the "demolition of misguided hope" before "rebuilding on firmer ground". Expressed differently, the author "clears away the foolish debris down to bedrock, and only then does he begin to rebuild on a solid foundation".

When the horizon of human knowledge and understanding rise no higher than temporal earthly existence, it is impossible to prove conclusively that in death a human's lifebreath ascends upward to heaven and an animal's lifebreath sinks down into the netherworld. A determination cannot be made on the basis empirical evidence obtained through scientific investigation. In short, "death prevents one from extrapolating a conclusive forecast after he dies from principles governing his present life" (Lobdell 1981:95). Wright (1991:5:1164) notes that Solomon was "speaking phenomenologically", that is, "as things appear to the senses". In like manner, Glenn (1985:985-987) remarks that "no living person can *observe* or *demonstrate* a difference between people and animals by watching them as they die" (italics are the author's).

Even so, it is clarifying to note that the Teacher did not categorically rule out the likelihood of immortality for people. Also, Qoheleth did not affirm the pagan notion that death is either a state of nothingness or total annihilation. Indeed, as Waltke (2007:965) indicates, the "doctrine of the afterlife in Ecclesiastes is consistent with the Old Testament in general". Furthermore, other passages of Scripture reveal a distinction between the respective fates of humans and animals. While people have an afterlife that is dealt with by God, all other earthly creatures cease to exist when they physically expire. In the Old Testament, there is an emerging awareness of the truth that there is life after death for people (cf. Pss 16:9-11; 49:15; 73:23-26; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). With the advent of the Messiah, the truth of the resurrection has been fully and clearly revealed in the gospel (cf. John 5:24-29; 2 Tim 1:10).

In Paul's day, some of the Corinthians did not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead. They may have affirmed that Christians, after death, live on forever in heaven as spirits; but to them the idea of one's soul being rejoined with one's body was distasteful. Paul felt he had to correct their error. Recognizing the seriousness of this problem, the apostle strove to reason the Corinthians out of their mistaken opinion. To start, he pointed out that if the dead are not raised, then neither could Jesus have been raised, for that would be an exception to the rule. Besides, if the dead are not raised, then there was no point in the Messiah's resurrection. In short, the Corinthians' two beliefs contradicted each other. They could not assert that Jesus was raised and claim say that the dead are not raised (1 Cor 15:13-16).

From this point Paul drew some conclusions, ones the Corinthians would not like but would have to recognize as logically consistent with their denial of any resurrection. First, if the Savior was not raised, then the apostle's preaching and the Corinthians' faith were both useless, for Jesus' resurrection is at the core of the Christian faith. Without His resurrection, the gospel is not worth spreading or believing (v. 14). Next, if the Son was not raised, then Paul had taught falsehood about God, for the apostle declared that the Father had raised the Son from the dead. In other words, Paul was a liar and the Corinthians could not trust his teaching (v. 15). Finally, if the Messiah was not raised, then the Corinthians' belief in Him had done nothing to solve their sin problem. They were all still hell-bound. In that case, no one was more pitiable

than believers, for Christians were hoping for salvation while remaining under condemnation for their sin (vv. 17-19).

In one sense, all the logical conclusions Paul had drawn from the Corinthians' implicit denial of Jesus' resurrection were meaningless, for He was raised. The apostle firmly asserted that Jesus is the "firstfruits" (v. 20) of those who would be resurrected. At harvest time, Israelite farmers took the first and finest portions of their crops and offered them to the Lord (Exod 23:16, 19; Lev 23:9-14). The whole nation initially celebrated the offering of the "firstfruits" in the late spring, 50 days after Passover, at the beginning of harvest season. At first, this celebration was known as the Festival of Weeks. Later it became known as Pentecost, the Greek word meaning "fiftieth". The celebration was repeated throughout summer as other crops were brought in. The whole purpose of the festival was to give thanks to God for His bounty. It was a time of great rejoicing throughout Israel. The Son not only was the first to rise from the dead, but also He serves as a pledge that more resurrections will one day follow. His resurrection guarantees that all the deceased who placed their trust in Him while alive will someday be raised from the dead.

In Ecclesiastes 3:21, Qoheleth may have meant to galvanize his readers into action by being so opaque about the issue of life after death. Instead of them giving up in the face of certain death, the sage urged them to make the most of their opportunity to live for God. Solomon perceived that because life is so short and filled with injustice, it was best for people to find satisfaction in their work. Ultimately, whatever joy they obtained from their labor was their God-given reward. Assuredly, after people died, God would not bring them back from the grave to reenter temporal existence and discover what the future held for succeeding generations on earth. In short, God's perfect plan for human beings was to serve Him fully and joyfully right now before their lives ended (cf. 9:7-10).

In Ephesians 5:15-20 (cf. Col 3:15-17), Paul offered similar counsel for his readers. He urged them to act like people with good sense, not like fools. Indeed, because the era in which they lived was characterized by evil, they were to make the most of every opportunity. For instance, rather than act thoughtlessly, they were to discern what the Lord wanted them to do. This included putting themselves under the control of the Holy Spirit. In turn, those

whom He filled had a strong desire to worship God, particularly with music. Paul encouraged believers to communicate among themselves with psalms, hymns, and other kinds of sacred melodies. Additionally, on an individual level, they were to praise the Lord with all their hearts. In these and other ways, they offered thanks to the Father for all He had done for them in union with the Son.

4. Conclusion

This essay has undertaken an exegetical and theological study of Ecclesiastes 3. Doing so has enabled an exploration of a number of issues related to the central question of this provocative book: What is life *really* all about? The reader discovers that from the vantage point of eternity, human existence seems "utterly meaningless" (Eccl 1:2; 12:8), especially when divorced from God. One also finds out that humanity's efforts to look beyond the present—especially to understand the past and probe into the future—are thwarted by the divine sabotage. Expressed differently, because people are creatures of time, their heavenly-imposed finitude subverts their ability to fathom the eternal plan of God. This frustrating predicament is like trying to pitch "our tents in an oasis of peace and happiness" surrounded by a "desert of absurdity" (Towner 1991:5:303).

The prudent response to this nonnegotiable impasse acknowledges and accepts both the "impossibilities and possibilities of being human". Also, there is an awareness that "human limitations can lead to a profound freedom". In this scenario, God empowers the upright to "embrace life all the more fully and enjoy the gift of each moment of goodness present to them". There is a recognition that while "life is beyond one's control", every single "moment is for the taking, by the gift of God" (Lee, 2005:121). Furthermore, one learns from a study of Ecclesiastes 3 that the fundamental quality of life is defined by revering God and heeding His commandments (cf. 12:13). If human existence is likened to a cord made of three strands (cf. 4:12), it remains coherent and interconnected when God is at the center of one's inner world, the core of one's understanding of the external world, and the basis for the significance one derives from life.

Works Cited

Baker C 2007. *The evolution dialogues: science, Christianity, and the quest for understanding* (2nd ed.). American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Bickerman E 1967. *Four strange books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther*. Schocken Books.

Brown F, Driver SR, and Briggs CA 1983. *The new Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Christian Copyrights.

Bridges C 1860. *A commentary on Ecclesiastes*. The Banner of Truth Trust.

Caneday AB 1994. Qoheleth: enigmatic pessimist or godly sage? In RB Zuck (ed.), *Reflecting with Solomon: selected studies on the book of Ecclesiastes*, 81-113. Baker.

Crenshaw JL 1987. *Ecclesiastes: a commentary*. Westminster.

Dorsey DA 1999. *The literary structure of the Old Testament: a commentary on Genesis–Malachi*. Baker.

Eaton MA 1983. *Ecclesiastes: an introduction and commentary*. IVP.

Ellul J 1990. *Reason for being: a meditation on Ecclesiastes*. Translated by JM Hanks. Eerdmans.

Estes HB 1982. *God is in heaven: an investigation of the concept of God in the book of Ecclesiastes*. Ph.D. dissertation. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Fitzgerald M 2008. Physicist and priest: an interview with John Polkinghorne. *The Christian Century* 125(1). Accessed from http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=4274.

Fox MV 2004. *The JPS Bible commentary: Ecclesiastes*. The Jewish Publication Society.

Garrett DA 1987. Qoheleth on the use and abuse of political power. *Trinity Journal* 8(2): 159-177.

Ginsberg HL and Fox MV 2007. Ecclesiastes. In Mberenbaum and F Sholnik (eds), *Encyclopedia Judaica* (2nd ed.), 6:88-90. Macmillan Reference.

Glenn DR 1985. Ecclesiastes. In JF Walvoord and RB Zuck (eds), *The Bible knowledge commentary: Old Testament*, 975-1007. Victor Books.

Gordis R 1995. *Koheleth—the man and his world*. Jason Aronson, Inc.

Hubbard D 1991. *Mastering the Old Testament: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*. Word Publishing.

Kaiser WC 1979. *Ecclesiastes: total life*. Moody Press.

Kidner D 1976. *The message of Ecclesiastes: a time to mourn, a time to dance*. IVP.

Krüger T 2004. *Qoheleth: a commentary*. Translated by OC Dean. Fortress Press.

LaSor WS, Hubbard DA and Bush FW 1996. *Old Testament survey: the message, form, and background of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.). Eerdmans.

Laurin R 1990. Ecclesiastes. In CF Pfeiffer and EF Harrison (eds), *The Wycliffe Bible commentary*, 585-594. Moody Press.

Lee EP 2005. *The vitality of enjoyment in Qohelet's theological discourse*. Walter de Gruyter.

Lioy D 2006. Checkmating the human drive for life: A biblical-theological examination of Genesis 5, Ecclesiastes 1, and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. *Conspectus*. 2:1-22.

Lobdell CM 1981. *The theology of Ecclesiastes*. Ph.D. dissertation. Bob Jones University.

Longman T 1998. *The book of Ecclesiastes*. Eerdmans.

Murphy RE 1987. The faith of Qoheleth. *Word and Wisdom* 7(3):253-260.

Murphy RE 1992. *Ecclesiastes*. Word Biblical Commentary. Word Books.

National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine 2008. *Science, evolution, and creationism*. The National Academies Press.

O'Brien GJ 2007. A theology of purpose: creation, evolution and the understanding of purpose. *Science and Christian Belief* 19(1):59-74.

Orr M 2006. What is a scientific worldview, and how does it bear on the interplay of science and religion? *Zygon*. 42(2):435-444.

Parsons GW 2003. Guidelines for understanding and proclaiming the book of Ecclesiastes, part 1. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160(638):159-173.

Pretorius M 2007. *Understanding reality: exploring the interaction between theology and science, with special reference to a theistic presupposition to certain worldviews*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Pretoria.

Provan IW 2001. *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. The NIV application commentary. Zondervan.

Ranger CA 1989. *Send forth your bread upon the waters: a critical investigation of Qoheleth 10:16—11:2*. Ph.D. dissertation. St. Mary's Seminary and University.

Scott EC 2001. *Science, religion, and evolution*. National Center for Science Education. Accessed from http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/6366_science_religion_and_evoluti_6_19_2001.asp.

Seow CL 1997. *Ecclesiastes: a new translation with introduction and commentary*. Doubleday.

Smith JE 1996. *The wisdom literature and the Psalms*. College Press.

Towner WS 1997. The book of Ecclesiastes: introduction, commentary, and reflections. In LE Keck et al. (eds), *The new interpreter's Bible*, 5:267-360. Abingdon Press.

Waltke BK 2007. *An Old Testament theology: an exegetical, canonical, and thematic approach*. Zondervan.

Willard D 1994. Blind science vs. blind faith: some thoughts on breaking the deadlock. *Reasons to Believe*. 8(4). Accessed from http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=104.

Williams ND 1984. *A biblical theology of Ecclesiastes*. Ph.D. dissertation. Dallas Theological Seminary.

Wright JS 1991. Ecclesiastes. In FE Gaebelein et al. (eds), *The expositor's Bible Commentary*, 5:1137-1197. Zondervan.

Homosexuality: Legally Permissible or Spiritually Misguided?[1]

By Anna-Marie Lockard[2]

Abstract

One of the most divisive issues facing the Christian church today is the ubiquitous issue of the acceptance of homosexual behaviour within the parameters of church leadership. Revisionist theologians contend that the church must redress her stance on this issue to keep in step with the prevailing culture of the day, which favours the acceptance of homosexual behaviour due to its proposed biological determinism.

This article analyses this divisive issue from four perspectives: (a) historical attitudes towards homosexuality in a variety of cultures across time, (b) empirical studies regarding the causation of homosexual orientation, (c) the witness of scripture and (d) the implications for pastoral ministry.

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Anna-Marie Lockard holds a Master of Theology from the South African Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Philosophy from Trinity Theological Seminary. She has been a faculty member at Trinity Theological Seminary and is now currently serving as the Vice Principal for Academic Affairs at Nazarene Theological College in Johannesburg, South Africa. She is also a postgraduate supervisor of pastoral counselling at South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

For more than two decades few topics have become as divisive in the 21st century church as the issue of homosexuality. The heated debate touches on a variety of issues that are contested throughout the culture: sexual ethics, the meaning of marriage and family and, most significantly, the genetic basis for same sex relationships. Within the church, debated issues on homosexuality have involved revisionist theology regarding scriptural interpretation, ecclesial authority and theological understandings of creation and sexuality.

One popular argument often posited by revisionists is that the church's stance should be re-evaluated in the light of new scientific evidence which suggests that homosexuality is a genetically inherited condition and thus a permanent state. Their consensus, therefore, is that homosexuality should be accepted by the church as a natural variant of sexual orientations, a manifestation of the richness of God's creation (Austriaco 2003).

As a result of theological revisionism, the schism within several mainline denominations in the USA (e.g., Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Methodist, Lutheran, United Church of Christ and Anglican) has proved painful. The Protestant church, particularly the Episcopal Church, has been on the verge of rupture since the 2003 election of an openly homosexual bishop, V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire (Rossi 2006).

This issue was an impetus which caused the battle over gay marriage which shook the political and religious foundations of South African society when archbishop Njononkulu Ndungane supported V. Gene Robinson's election in 2003. South Africa became the fifth country in the world to allow gay marriages. Retired Anglican Bishop David Russell of Cape Town posits that South Africa is now dividing along new lines—this time over sexuality (Kane 2007). Additionally, the United Methodist Church faced issues "so deep as to harbour the danger of explicit disunity or schism" (Christian Century, 1998).

Predictably, many church members are confused over what constitutes sound Christian teaching. Those who take the traditional and conservative view hold that sexually active homosexuals are ineligible for ministry. Those who are

more liberal argue that the church is being rigid and out of touch with social progress; it needs to modernise its criteria for appointing ecclesial leaders.

1.1. Dichotomy in cohesive theological thought

Revisionist theologians (Nelson 1977; Boswell, cited in Humphreys 1985) acquiesce to a climate of tolerance toward same sex behaviour and posit that one must re-examine scriptural interpretations to include more relevancy to the current cultural mores, while conservative theologians argue that scriptural tradition maintains that there is a generally accepted code of morality, derived from the inerrancy of the scriptures, and deviations from that code should be labelled as abnormal, deviant behaviour (sin).

Max Stackhouse (quoted in Helm 1998), professor of Christian ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, contends otherwise when he states:

> I think a rough consensus has been reached among mainline churches: They agree to defend the rights of homosexuals and on the need for a policy of tolerance toward people in homosexual relationships. Although, most churches agree that homosexual relationships are not the ideal. They are not something the church should praise or celebrate. Despite disagreement on ordination, there are these two over-arching agreements.

Is faulty theological reasoning behind the gay hermeneutic? Clearly, the confusion of the church on the issue of homosexuality is varied with both liberal and conservative views. Is there a possibility to assuage the confusion and bring to light God's revealed plan for all human behaviour?

1.2. Statement of purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine critically the divisive issue of homosexuality from four perspectives: historical, empirical, scriptural and pastoral.

- *Historical*. The article will examine ancient societies in an attempt to determine the origins of the practice and to learn whether they were tolerated by those societies. Proponents of homosexual behaviour contend that anti-homosexuality ideas originated from the Western Christian churches. This article will explore the historical accuracy of these contentions.
- *Empirical*. The paper will examine the findings of empirical, scientific research regarding the causes of homosexuality to determine there is convincing scientific evidence showing that homosexual behaviour is biologically or genetically determined. The salient issue of homosexual orientation versus chosen behaviour will be examined, asking questions such as: Are people born gay? Can a homosexual change his/ her sexual orientation? Is there a gay gene for homosexuality?
- *Scriptural*. The article will briefly present the traditional view of the witness of Scripture. Although revisionist theologians postulate against the witness of scripture, it is essential to give careful and accurate interpretation to God's mandates on homosexual behaviour.
- *Pastoral*. Finally, particular emphasis will be given to the implications of the study for pastoral ministry within the context of the current and future church of Christ. Two of the most salient issues facing pastoral counsellors today will be examined: If homosexuality is legally permissible, (a) should the church conduct same-sex marriages? (b) should homosexual "Christians" be given full rights among church leadership in all aspects of teaching, preaching and leading?

1.3. Defining homosexuality

The word "homosexuality" was first used in 1869. Even the root word "sexuality" is a 19th century coinage (ACUTE 1998). For clarity of this research, the following definition of the word "homosexual" will guide the contents of this paper:

> People whose sexual attraction is predominantly towards their own sex, whether or not it is expressed in homoerotic sexual activity, and that the term "homoerotic sexual practice" be used

> to denote genital or other activity pertaining to sexual arousal between people of the same sex (ACUTE 1998:17).

Let us examine the historical dimensions of ancient societies to determine the origin of the practice. When and where did the practice surface? How were homosexuals treated by society?

2. Historical dimensions of homosexuality

Many proponents of homosexuality argue that hostility toward homosexual behaviour originated with the Christian church. One prominent proponent of this ideology was Professor John Boswell, a Roman Catholic professor of history at Yale University. Upon his death to AIDS in 1994, Boswell left a legacy of being the foremost scholar on the history of lesbian and gay Christianity. In his book *Homosexuality, Intolerance, and Christianity,* Boswell set out to claim evidence that the church was the cause of hostility to homosexual people. However, he claims *not* to have found such evidence when he wrote: "As it happens, it isn't what I found in the documents in this case" (Boswell, quoted in Humphreys 1985).

Animosity to homosexuals did not originate with the Christian church. Abhorrence to such behaviour was evidenced in ancient and pagan societies, beginning with the ancient Hebrews, Egyptians, and Assyrians. Historical evidence maintains each of these societies had laws against homosexual practices (Davis 1993).

Other ancient societies also showed a clear aversion to homosexuality.

Hittite Laws. Hittite law from the second millennium B.C. classified homosexuality as an abomination which incurred harsh and cruel punishment. For instance, a man convicted of homosexual rape was subjected to forcible penetration, then castrated (Greenberg 1988:126).

Iran (early Persia). Zoroastrianism founded in Iran (unknown date) took a very harsh view of homosexuality. Its teaching places sodomites among the ranks of those who may be killed on the spot. Later texts of the 9th century A.D. continue to regard homosexuality as heinous (Greenberg 1988:186).

Greek Society. Although from the 6th century homosexuality was referred to in the art and literature of Greece, it is historically clear that ancient Greek culture never fully accepted homosexuality as a societal norm. For example, Aristotle, Herodotus, and many Stoic and Cynic philosophers expressed moral disapproval of homosexual practices (Davis 1993). Other Greek societies strongly disapproved of sexual relationships between men of the same age. Men who did not marry, according to Plutarch, were scorned or punished by Spartan authorities (Hine 2007).

Roman Society. Similarly, in ancient Roman society, visibility of the practice through the writings of Suetonis, Catullus, and Martial, was ridiculed and not met with general social approval (Davis 1993; Norton 2004).

Ancient Pagan Societies. Additionally, there is a lack of historical evidence for the acceptance of homosexuality within the pagan cultures. The 8th century Vikings, Visigoths, Celts, and Vandals vehemently opposed homosexual activity. As a result, some of these pagan cultures punished the people severely. The Visigoths' law condemned homosexuals to be burned at the stake (Davis 1993). Equally, Salvian, 5th century presbyter of the church in Marseille, France, described the Goth, Saxon, and Vandals as strictly chaste: "The vandals were not tainted by effeminancy, nor did they tolerate it" (Greenberg 1988:243).

Within the pagan culture of the Celts, homosexuality was strongly disapproved and completely unacceptable. Such men were regarded as abominations. Homosexual men were often exiled from their homeland and if they kept the practice hidden and were discovered, they were put to death by mob rage (Hine 2007).

Germanic Peoples. Homosexual relationships were frowned upon amongst the Germanic peoples of the 10th-12th centuries. Tacitus reports that the German custom was to bury alive in a swamp anyone found guilty of homosexual behaviour (Greenberg 1988).

Early Europe. From 1000 to 1500, Europe began to experience an increase in homosexual activity. From the late 16th century to the early 19th century, sexual deviation grew in England. In 18th century London, homosexuals

"married" without legal sanction in central London in places called "molly houses". These places consisted of disorderly pubs and coffee houses where homosexual activities transpired (Norton 2004).

The Netherlands. In 1969, 44 percent of the Netherlands population rejected homosexuality (DeBoer 1978). Loving relationships between two men or two women was by no means generally accepted in the Netherlands (Sandors 1980:1). However, a transition in the societal norm occurred when homosexuality was transformed from sin and pathology into psychological and social problems that could be treated in mental health care, thus ushering in a change in relation between religion and healthcare. Religion lost importance in modern Dutch society because physicians, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists created new areas of intervention in people's private lives and took over the traditional task of the church in the field of charity and pastoral care (Oosterhuis 1996).

North America. American settlers from England in the 17th-18th centuries labelled homosexual behaviour a sin and a crime, an aberrant act for which the person received punishment in this life and the next. During World War II, USA armed forces excluded homosexuals from serving in the military.

In North America, during the 1940s, there were strong societal norms (religious beliefs, laws, and medical sciences) against homosexual behaviour. Typically, anti-homosexuality attitudes prevailed as a theme of American political culture throughout the same era. It was during the 1950s when America swung the pendulum in favour of homosexuality.

A leading advocate of gay rights began when Henry Hay, a member of the Communist party, founded what is known as the homosexual emancipation movement, the Mattachine Society (D'Emilio 1983). As a result, growth of homosexuality escalated into the 1970s through gay bars in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These highly gay-oriented establishments served as a marketplace for homosexual liaisons (Murray 1996).

In North American history since the 1970s, homosexuals have been increasingly visible and militant. It was in 1973 that homosexual activists pressured the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexual from

its list of mental disorders as outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (Davis 1993; cf. APA 2007). However, since that time some psychologists have questioned the validity of removing homosexuality from the illness model. Their rationale is that, despite its legitimate therapeutic and sociopolitical drawbacks, the illness model of homosexuality included elements of causality that are lacking from newer theories (Gonsiorek 1990:1).

Neither ancient nor modern history support the contention that abhorrence to same-sex behaviour originated with the Christian church. Pagan cultures, too, found the practice to be unacceptable for a variety of reasons.

3. Multifactorial causation of homosexuality

3.1. The interactional model for homosexuality

Recently, scientists have postulated that there may be factors that pre-dispose one to homosexual behaviour. Matheson (2007) studied the predisposition of homosexuality and made several compelling discoveries. Evidence suggests that three main groupings of factors are involved in complex interactions: biological drives, interpersonal relations and psychological factors. These comprise what social scientists call an interactional model for homosexuality.

Byne and Parson (2007) concur with Matheson (2007) that an interactional model exists for homosexuality, combining biological and environmental influences. However, there is a caveat when discussing the biological aspect of homosexuality. Herein, lies the apex of the debate and it is at this conjecture that Christians must exercise caution and gain clarity on the issue. Let us further and more clearly define the biological model for homosexuality.

Biological research on homosexuality is driven by powerful ideologies. Research on same sex behaviour is not "immune to the cultural and political context within which it takes place" (Abbott 1995:59). Biological theory suggests that genes or prenatal hormones cause homosexuality. Some scientists (e.g., Schuklenk, Stein, Kerin & Byne 1997) propose that the brain and hormones direct our behaviour in a one-way cause and effect manner. Biologic theory assumes that the brain affects behaviour, but behaviour does not influence (or change) behaviour.

However, Valenstein (1998:126-128) argues that experiences or behaviours can indeed modify the brain:

> A person's mental state and experience can alter the brain. . . . Various experiences can cause structural and functioning changes in the brain. . . . Genes are responsible for establishing scaffolding of the brain, but a large amount of neuronal growth that leads to the establishment of connections has been shown to be influenced by experience.

Thus, we learn that it is through the biological model for homosexuality that the issue causes intense debate and concern for Christians. If one espouses this model, one is in agreement that homosexuality is an illness for which the person is helpless to control. Thus, society and the church must fully accept homosexuals into complete fellowship.

Environmental theorists, such as Matheson (2007), posit that social experiences such as an unhealthy parent-child interaction and or sexual abuse contribute to same sex behaviour and, therefore, the behaviour is primarily learned.

Abbott (1995), however, brings another compelling component into the debate when he proposes that an interactional model for homosexuality, which addresses biological, environmental and psychological issues, fails to consider the aspect of freedom of choice in shaping sexual orientation and behaviour. As in all human behaviour, there is the element of personal choice which is a strong component in shaping behaviour. Following is a careful analysis of the free agency aspect of persons when discussing contributory causal factors of homosexuality.

3.2. Free moral agency of human beings

It is imperative to assess the individual's own active participation (choice) in sexual preference, that is, a person's freedom to choose a homosexual lifestyle. Diamond (1998) addresses this salient issue when he contends that while biology may bias a person's sexual orientation, individual behaviour is flexible when responding to environmental influences, and therefore free

choice must be considered. It is generally agreed that humans are at least somewhat free to make behavioural choices regardless of past or current experiences (Abbott 1995).

The concept of "free agency" implies choice, free will or self-determinism—the ability to make decisions independent of past choices or circumstances (Burr, Day & Bahr 1993). Humans do have agency to make conscious choices and are free to alter their thinking, emotions and behaviours (Warner 2001). A sober example of a person's free agency to choose moral behaviour even amidst the most dehumanising situations comes from the Nazi concentration camps of the 20th century. Viktor Frankl a psychiatrist and survivor of the Nazi concentration camp during World War II concurs that the experiences of the camp (Nazi prison) life prove that man/woman does have a choice in his/her actions. Frankl (1985:86) concludes:

> There were always choices to make. Every day, every hour offered the opportunity to make a decision. In the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually.

In a similar way, individuals have been predisposed to homosexuality due to a variety of environmental influences may make decisions that lead to same sex behaviour. But, if they do, there is always an element of choice or free agency involved.

Theologically, free agency is a two-fold process. First, there must be "knowledge of truth". Second, a person must make a decision to "live truthfully". Agency does not consist chiefly in doing what we want; rather it consists in doing what we should do, that is, knowing true principles and making a conscious *choice* to live by them (Williams 2004). In the Old Testament, Joshua admonished the Israelites to make a choice when he said: "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh 24:15, ESV). God has always granted mankind the freedom of choice.

Freedom without moral principle is not freedom. Thus free agency cannot exist in a moral vacuum (Needleman 2004). Psychologist Allen Bergin (2002:206) concurs:

> For sexual expression to nurture relationships, . . . it must be guided by spiritual principles. Behaviour outside these principles puts at risk our ability to attain the highest joys of sexual expression. Such principles come from our Creator.

Therefore, free agency is the ability to grasp the true reality of our sexual natures and the conscious, deliberate choice to fulfil our true roles as heterosexual beings. The individual is considered able (in most situations—apart from extreme mental handicaps) to alter his/her thinking, emotions, and behaviour to live in harmony with revealed truth (Abbott 1995).

Glock (2004) cogently summarises the impact of free will upon the engagement in same sex relationships:

> Scientists effectively ignore free will as a possible causal agent. This is not because scientists do not believe in a free will. Certainly in their everyday lives they think and act as if free will exists. When they function as scientists, however, they have not found means to establish if free will may be operative as a determinate of human behavior.

While science gives no credence to free will as a possible contributor to behaviour, neither does science offer proof of its non-existence (Glock 2004). Both environmental factors which predispose one to homosexuality and freedom of choice must be considered as factors contributing to the causation of homosexuality.

Is there a natural orientation toward same sex behaviour or is it clearly a chosen behaviour?

3.3. Natural orientation or chosen behaviour?

As evidenced previously, debate in the sexual polemics of the day continues in the blurring of the line between sexual orientation (biologic basis) and chosen

behaviour (free agency) of homosexuals. The standard Roman Catholic position on homosexuality does not condemn homosexual orientation; it does condemn homosexual behaviour.

While the homosexual community denies that sexual orientation is chosen (most homosexuals believe they have no choice, since they were "born that way"), it fails to recognise that, indeed, homosexual behaviour in its human dimension is a chosen act of life (O'Brien 2004).

Scientific literature has often concluded that the sexual orientation of a person cannot be changed any more than one can change his/her eye colour. Thus, it postulates a biological (illness) model for homosexuality. However, Throckmorton (2003:4) compellingly contends:

> My literature review contradicts the policies of major mental health organizations because it suggests that sexual orientation, once thought to be an unchanging sexual trait, is actually quite flexible for many people, changing as a result of therapy for some, ministry for others, and spontaneously (as a matter of choice) for still others.

Even psychiatrist Robert Spitzer, a member of the American Psychiatric Association who was instrumental in helping to remove homosexuality from the *Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973, now concurs that some people can change. He reached this conclusion following his interviews in 2000 with 200 men and women who claimed to have completely turned from homosexuality (Abbott 1995).

In a further discussion of sexual identity development, Strauss (2006) postulates that it is a safe observation to conclude that humans are personally aware beings able to make choices regarding their own sense of identity and course of behaviour.

3.4. Empirical research on the causes of homosexuality

In evaluating a multifactorial causation for homosexuality, scientific research on sexual orientation has taken many forms. One early approach was to discover evidence of a person's sexual orientation in his/her endocrine system.

The hypothesis was that homosexual men would have less androgenic (male) hormones or more estrogenic (female) hormones than heterosexual men. However, an overwhelmingly majority of studies failed to demonstrate any correlation between sexual orientation and adult hormonal constitution (see Schuklenk, Stein, Kerin & Byne 1997).

Perhaps one of the most globally divisive moral questions today is whether or not there is a gay gene for homosexuality. This debate initially ignited a media fire-storm during the 1990s when there was a surge of interest by western scientists to push toward the discovery of a major gene for homosexuality. Revisionist theologians and pro-homosexual activists often cite the following three scientific studies published in the 1990s to prove their position that homosexuality is a genetically-inherited condition.

3.4.1. LeVay: neurons in the hypothalamic region of the brain

The first study was conducted by Simon LeVay in 1991.[3] A scientist at Salk Institute in San Diego California, he reported his findings that a group of neurons in the hypothalamic region of the brain appeared to be twice as large in heterosexual men than in homosexual men. Previous studies in primates suggested that the hypothalamus is a region of the brain involved in regulating sexual behaviour. Other studies indicated that these neurons are larger in men than in women. As a result, LeVay concluded that sexual orientation had a biological basis (Austriaco 2003).

Later, LeVay admitted that all nineteen of the subjects identified as homosexuals had died of AIDS complications. Medical doctors agree that it is possible that the reduced size of their hypothalamus may have been caused by their illness rather than their homosexuality (Fryrear 2006:2). At a later interview, LeVay himself revealingly opined:

> Time and again I have been described as someone who proved that homosexuality is genetic. . . . I did not. It is important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that

[3] For a more detailed analysis of LeVay's research and the three problems identified in his paper, refer to www.NARTH.com website and "Science" 253 (1991): 1034.

> gay men are born that way . . . nor did I locate a gay center in the brain.

Although, LeVay himself has made public statements that gay men are not "born that way", proponents of homosexuality continue to spread erroneous information to the uninformed populous.

3.4.2. Bailey and Pillard: study of identical twins

The second scientific study to determine a genetic basis for homosexuality was undertaken in December 1991 by John Bailey and Richard Pillard. They reported that it was more likely for both identical twins to be homosexual than it was for fraternal twins or both adopted brothers. Bailey and Pillard reported that 52 percent of identical twins were homosexual; 22 percent of fraternal twins were both homosexual, and 11 percent of the adoptive brothers were both homosexual.

It is now clear, however, that there were scientific problems with each of these reports, which seriously undermined the validity of their study. Bailey's (Bailey et al. 1994) follow-up study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that the genetic influence may be dramatically less than his earlier studies indicated. Since then, it is well known in the behavioural science community that Bailey's statistical methods have been refuted (Jones 1999:53).[4]

3.4.3. Dean Hamer's study of chromosomes

The third and perhaps the most widely publicised research suggested a genetic link to homosexual behaviour. In 1993, Dean Hamer and his colleagues at the USA National Institute of Health studied forty pairs of homosexual brothers and concluded that some cases of homosexuality could be linked to a specific region on the human X chromosome (xq28) inherited from the mother to her homosexual son.

This study, however, has come under heavy criticism both inside and outside the behavioural sciences. The office of Research Integrity of the Department

[4] For further study of Bailey and Pillard's (1991) research, see *General Psychiatry* 48:1089.

of Health and Human Services, USA, investigated Hamer for alleged fraud in this study (eventually he was cleared of the charges). Significantly, the study could never be reproduced. Although Hamer, as a behavioural scientist, was well aware that you cannot verify the validity of research without innumerable such correlations.

Two subsequent studies (Hamer et al. 1995; Bailey et al. 1999) of other homosexual brothers have concluded that there is no evidence that male sexual orientation is influenced by an X-linked gene (Austraico 2003). In July 1993, the *Science* research journal was quick to publish the study by Hamer which posited that there might be a gene for homosexuality.

Unfortunately, what was not disseminated and understood by the non-scientific community was the fact that Hamer and his research team performed a common type of behavioural genetics investigation called a "linkage study". This is a limited model of research whereby researchers identify a behavioural trait that appears to be prevalent in a family and then proceed with the following:

- They look for a chromosomal variant in the genetic material of the family.
- They determine whether that variant is more frequent in family members who share the particular trait.[5]

Importantly, despite intensive scientific and medical research, there is no sound evidence that people are born homosexual. Rather, studies indicate that behaviour is acquired and not instinctive.

3.4.4. The genetics of behaviour

It is erroneous to conclude that the correlation of a genetic structure with a behavioural trait implies that the trait is "genetic" or inherited. Hamer and his colleagues failed to relay to the non-scientific community that there cannot be a human trait without innumerable such correlations (NARTH 2004).

[5] For a complete study of Hamer's research, see "Science 261" July 16, 1993:321.

A more recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago (UIC) was published in March 2005. Psychologist Brian Mustanski led the team. UIC press release boasted the following:

> In the first-ever study combining the entire human genome for genetic determinism of male sexual orientation . . ., we have identified several areas that appear to influence whether a man is heterosexual or 'gay' (AFA 2005).

Dr Warren Throckmorton, professor of Grove City College in Pennslyvania, conducted a very thorough critique of Mustanski's study. He cites admissions by the researchers that their evidence of genetic differences between heterosexual and homosexual men falls short of being statistically significant. Three members of NARTH also reviewed Mustanski's study and found it to be lacking. One member, Dr. Dean Byrd states:

> Sexual orientation involves complex behaviors which involve multiple factors. Homosexuality might involve predispositions that are strongly influenced by cultural and environmental factors. (AFA 2005:1).

Behavior scientists tell us that in understanding the theory in genetics-of-behavior, one must clearly comprehend two major principles that guide the research: (a) heritable does not mean inherited; (b) genetics-of-behaviour research which is valid will identify and then focus only on traits that are directly inherited (NARTH 2004).

Reputable scientists concur that although almost every human characteristic is potentially heritable, few human behavioural traits are directly inherited. Inherited means directly determined by genes and changing the environment of a person will not prevent or modify the trait (e.g., eye colour or height).

Even Dr Hamer, who, following his landmark study in 1991, was donned the "gay gene guru", now recognises the multifactorial components to homosexuality. He was later poignantly quoted in several sources: "Environmental factors play a role. There is not a single master gene that makes people gay…. I don't think we will ever be able to predict who will be gay" (Fryrear 2006:1). Five years after Hamer's study was published, he

consented to another interview and reiterated: "There is not a single all-powerful gay gene, and for the record, there is no gay gene" (Gallagher 1998:1).

Often researchers, in qualifying their findings, will use scientific language that is unfamiliar to the non-scientific community. Although to their fellow scientists the researchers have been honest in acknowledging the limitations of their findings, the media does not always receive the same understandings. As a result, this evades general understanding and, if not clearly understood by the press, will be avoided in publications. A case in point is an example of scientific jargon used by one researcher: "The question of the appropriate significance level to apply to a non-Mendelian trait such as sexual behaviour is problematic." Although this rings of scientific jargon to the lay populous, it is actually a very significant statement which translates as follows: "It is not possible to know what the findings mean – if anything- since sexual orientation cannot be inherited."

Dr Joel Gelenter, a Yale scientist, refutes the recent genetics-of-behaviour research for homosexuality when he asserts:

> Time and again, scientists have claimed that particular genes or chromosomal regions are associated with behavioral traits, only to withdraw their findings when they were not replicated. Unfortunately, it is hard to come up with findings linking specific genes to complex human behaviors that have been replicated. All (findings) were announced with great fanfare; all were greeted unskeptically in the popular press; all are now in disrepute (NARTH 2004).

Gelenter (NARTH 2004) is correct when he affirms that often researchers' overzealous public statements to the media are grandiose, yet when addressing their colleagues in the scientific community, they respond with caution.[6] For example, Dean Hamer, when addressing the scientific community in an interview by "Scientific American", was asked the volatile and controversial

[6] For current article on how scientific research is sometimes manipulated and produced by Scientists, see Hubbard and Wald (1999).

question as to whether homosexuality had a biologic determinism. He quickly replied:

> Absolutely not. From twin studies we know that half or more of the variability in sexual orientation is not inherited. Our studies try to pinpoint the genetic factors . . . not [to] negate the psychosocial factors (NARTH 2004).

3.4.5. Bailey and Martin: female same-sex orientation

A scientific study set out to determine a genetic basis for same sex female orientation was conducted by Northwestern University professor Michael Bailey and Australian geneticist, Nicholas Martin. They concluded:

> Female sexual orientation is more a matter of environment than heredity. We would say our research did not find evidence that female sexual orientation has a genetic basis. (Bailey et al. 1993).

Thus far, this paper has demonstrated two components in the complex issue of homosexuality: First, this researcher identified the ancient practices and history of homosexuality. Second, relevant empirical scientific reports were analysed as to the validity of the scientific community's assertions that there could be a biologic or genetic determinism for homosexuality. Documented quotes by the scientists themselves lend validity to the basis that indeed, a gene has not been discovered to confirm that homosexual behaviour has a pathological basis. Let us now turn our attention to another very salient and divisive issue among the behavioural scientists: Is it possible for homosexuals to change their behaviour and live productive and rewarding heterosexual lives?

3.5. Changing a person's sexual orientation

Matheson (2007) is a current licensed professional counsellor (LPC) in New Jersey and is the director of the Center for Gender Wholeness. Matheson's counselling practice works primarily with male gender issues in trying to

restore homosexual men toward heterosexual behaviour. He contends: "Overcoming unwanted same-sex attractions is absolutely possible."

Evidence supporting environmental theories posit that same-sex behaviour is primarily learned and, therefore, can be unlearned or changed. Van der Aardweg (1985), Nicolosi (1991) and Satinover (1996) have collected data suggesting that homosexuals have been successful in completely reversing their sexual orientation. A significant study was conducted by MacIntosh (1995) when he interviewed 422 psychiatrists regarding their assessment of homosexuals who change their orientation to heterosexuality. The doctors reported that 23 percent of their patients had converted to heterosexuality, and 84 percent made significant improvement toward heterosexual identity. Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts (2000) surveyed 882 individuals who had gone through some type of conversion education or therapy (mostly in religious settings). Amongst those responding, 34 percent reported a significant change toward heterosexuality. Twenty-three percent reported no change; and 43 percent reported some change. About 7 percent of the men reported that they were doing worse psychosocially than before the conversion interventions (Throckmorton 1998).

Robinson (1998) summarized his findings after interviewing seven married men who had been previously involved in a high level of homosexual activity. Reportedly, these men were reactivated into religious worship and had not participated in homosexual activity for at least one year. As a result, they no longer had compulsive same-sex lustful desires or thought patterns. Robinson (1998:319-320) summarized his findings:

> The most important conclusion of this study is that change is possible . . . the change was experienced as being personally fulfilling and greatly increasing the quality of their lives socially, emotionally, and spiritually.[7]

[7] For a testimony from a former homosexual, see Duncan (1989). For additional studies proposing that homosexual behaviour can be reversed, Nicolosi (1991; 1993) and Nicolosi, Byrd & Potts (2000).

3.6. Multiple causation of homosexuality

Other behavioural scientists (Matheson 2003; LeVay 1996; McFadden 1998; Goldberg 1994) share the view that sexual orientation is shaped for most people at an early age through complex interactions of either environment, parent-child relationships, social interactions and/or psychological components, thus comprising multifactorial causation for homosexuality. Simon LeVay (1996) concurs: "At this point the most widely held opinion (on causation of homosexuality) is that multiple factors play a role".

Neuroscientist, Dennis McFadden, from the University of Texas, opines:

> Any human behavior is going to be the result of complex intermingling of genetics and environment. It would be astonishing if it were not true for homosexuality (Charlotte Observer 1998).

Steven Goldberg concludes: "I know no one in the field who argues that homosexuality can be explained without reference to environmental factors" (Goldberg 1994).

Thus far, this paper has critiqued and analysed two important components in assessing the issue of homosexuality: Firstly, the historical dimension of the origin and accepted practices of same sex behaviour and, secondly, the presentation of the scientific community's empirical studies and evaluation of the biologic determinism for homosexual behaviour versus the multifactorial causation.

The third essential component for evaluating the issue of homosexuality is that of the tradition and witness of scripture interpretation. Throughout the span of human history, the moral values of civilized societies have given credence to the stated moral code of the holy scriptures as given by God himself to mankind. History is a witness to the fall of sophisticated societies that turned from biblical mandates on accepted human behaviour. Therefore, let us carefully examine the theological determinants on the moral behaviour of men and women.

4. The tradition and witness of Scripture

Proponents of homosexuality contend that Christians selectively choose from scripture to defend their stance that homosexuality is wrongful behaviour. Several biblical passages, however, which deal directly with homosexuality have been expounded upon admirably by many ancient and modern biblical scholars from both the Old and New Testament writings, such as the following: Gen 19:1-29; Rev 18:22, 20:13; Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9; and 1 Tim 1:10 (ACUTE 1998).

Additionally, a general pattern of clear biblical teaching on sexuality was affirmed and well summarised by the House of Bishops' 1991 statement "Issues in Human Sexuality." There was in scripture an evolving convergence on the idea of lifelong monogamous heterosexual union as the setting intended by God for the proper development of men and women as sexual beings (ACUTE 1998:16).

Genesis 1-2. For a complete and succinct understanding of human sexuality, it is foundational that we begin by examining the creation account in Genesis 1-2. It is here that one clearly discovers that human sexuality is reflected in the extreme physical differentiation between our first parents, Adam and Eve. It is in such a design that God defines sexual differentiation as the basis of human marriage and pro-creation. It is at the beginning of creating mankind when God determined that homosexual relationships cannot fulfil the procreative dimensions of human sexuality and marriage which God so brilliantly designed (Davis 1993). God purposely designed physical differentiation between men and women.

Genesis 19. The first reference to homosexual behaviour in the Bible is found in Genesis 19:1-11. This text has been the object of intense debate among revisionist theologians. The passage describes how Lot entertained the two angels sent to the city of Sodom. That night some of the men of the city demanded to see Lot's visitors: "Where are the men that came to you tonight? Bring them out that we may know them (19:5)."

Revisionists (e.g., Nelson 1977) argue that the demand to "know" (Hebrew, ידע) the strangers was nothing more than a desire to get better acquainted in a

hospitable fashion, to show respect and acceptance toward the visitors. The problem with this assumption, however, is that in the book of Genesis, the Hebrew word ידע is used twelve times and in ten of those instances it denotes sexual intercourse (Davis 1993). In Genesis 19:8, ידע is used in a way that unmistakably refers to sexual intercourse. It is clear that the men of Sodom were not asking for a friendship acquaintance, but rather they were demanding homosexual intercourse with Lot's guests.[8] Both the immediate context of Genesis 19:5 and a history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation point to the true meaning of the text: homosexual practices. Therefore, the revisionist interpretation of this passage is a gross misinterpretation.

The law of Moses. Homosexual behaviour is strongly condemned in the Mosaic laws of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The word "abomination" (תועבה) is used five times in Leviticus chapter 18. It is a term of strong disapproval, depicting what is detestable and hated by God.

Judges 19. In Judges 19 there are explicit references to homosexuality. We find the same Hebrew word ידע in verses 22 and 25 to demonstrate that the men of that city were demanding homosexual intercourse with the visiting Levite. The language of the biblical narrative is consistent with the reference to homosexuality and that such practices are viewed with abhorrence (Davis 1993).

Why does scripture evidence that homosexuality is so abhorrent to God? Ashton (2007) suggests that the nations who inhabited Canaan before the Israelites conquered the land practiced homosexuality and prostitution only in connection with their heathen worship; this is what the law was trying to prevent. Homosexuality was generally rampant in many of the Canaanite cities. The word "sodomy" has become a widespread term used to describe the homosexual act. The term derived from the city of Sodom during the prevalent time of homosexual practices of that particular society. There is historical evidence that rife homosexuality had infiltrated the very fabric of ancient societies, in a similar way that is transpiring in many 21st century societies.

[8] For a more thorough analysis of the views of Josephus, Justin Martyr, Origen, Methodius of Olympius, and the Jewish commentator Rashi, see Davis (1993).

The New Testament. In three places of the New Testament: Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, there are strong prohibitions to homosexuality. Romans 1:26-27 discusses homosexuality from the perspective of the larger context of man's relation to God and God's general revelation in nature—because they turned away from God:

> Even women exchanged natural relations with unnatural ones . . . men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men.

Biblical scholars safely conclude that in Romans 1, homosexuality is seen not as a violation of some Jewish or Christian sectarian code, but rather as a transgression against the moral law of God our Creator (Davis 1993). Davis further contends that it is significant in Pauline analysis of his New Testament writings, that homosexual practices derive ultimately from the human heart or inner disposition which has turned away from God.

This inward and invisible apostasy of the heart (away from God) becomes apparent and demonstrable in immoral and deviant sexual behaviour.

More specifically, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the apostle Paul used two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai,* which are generally considered by biblical scholars to refer to homosexual behaviour.[9] The term *arsenokoitai* is used in the New Testament only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and in 1 Timothy 1:10. The word is a compound from *arsen* "male" and *koite* which is a word with definite sexual overtones. The literal etymology of this compound term suggests "males who go to bed with males" (Davis 1993).

Both the Old Testament and New Testament have quintessential teachings that homosexuality is contrary to the moral law of God as defined in the holy scriptures. Therefore, revisionists who erroneously conclude otherwise use forced and arbitrary modes of interpretation to strengthen their claim that the

[9] There has been some debate about the proper translation of these two terms. The debate is reflected in these translations: (a) "effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind" (KJV), (b) "male prostitutes and homosexual offenders" (NIV) and (c) "homosexual perversion" (NEB).

scriptures need to be reassessed to keep abreast with the modern cultural mores, which contend that homosexual behaviour should be an acceptable lifestyle.

Revisionist theologian, Nelson (1977), served as professor of Christian ethics at United Theological Seminary in Minnesota. He asserts and supports propagating the following (erroneous) revisionist ideology:

1) Seek the church's full acceptance of homosexuality without prejudgement on the basis of a sexual orientation—given that they had no basic choice.
2) Espouse fresh insights from feminist theologians and gay Christians… who frequently manifest God's "common grace".
3) Some stories in the Bible are based on a biological misunderstanding of man.
4) The Sodom story in Genesis refers to the men of Sodom wanting to show hospitality and not sexual perversion toward Lot's guests.
5) In the Pauline letters, Paul does not claim that homosexual practices are the cause of God's wrath.
6) "Perhaps we should accept Paul for what he was—a peerless interpreter of the heart of the gospel and one who was also a fallible and historically conditioned person."
7) "Sexuality is not intended by God as a mysterious and alien force of nature, but as a power to be integrated into one's personhood and used responsibly in the service of love."

For the past two decades, the question of moral authority has been seriously eroded in our society and churches. As evidenced above, even Christian leaders and teachers are granting moral legitimacy to what God condemns. The prevailing ethic in the minds of many scholars and teachers, has sadly become a genetically-based morality.

To base morality on scientific study is to relegate the scriptures to an outmoded moral law that needs revision and is irrelevant to address the complexity of human needs in the 21st century church. To do so is to commit the suicide of Christian theology. It seems clear that the Old and New Testament scriptures, when correctly interpreted, consistently condemn

homosexual practices while repeatedly affirming that God can forgive any repentant sinner.

5. Implications for pastoral ministry in the 21st century

Proponents of homosexuality struggle with the church accepting their humanness as homosexuals and their need to feel human within the context of the church. Their premise is that within the household of God, there are no aliens.

What are appropriate responses by the church to the issue of homosexuality? If same sex marriages are legally permissible should pastors be obliged to conduct homosexual unions? Should homosexuals be given full rights among church leadership in preaching, teaching and leading? What about gay Christians who are celibate? Should celibate homosexual Christians be eligible for ordination? How does one respond to the person who says he/she is homosexual and a follower of Christ? Should evangelical congregations welcome and accept sexually active homosexuals? Should pastors defend the rights of homosexuals as a persecuted minority and evidence support by participating in gay parades, marches, etc.? Each of these are salient issues facing today's pastoral leader.

5.1. The church's balanced response

Simply put, homosexual behaviour, or any other lifestyle that is contrary to God's law, is absolutely incompatible with Christ's call to holy living and constitutes disobedience to the known laws of God. Therefore, a pastoral response to a homosexual should be the same response offered to anyone caught in the web of sin (e.g., adultery, fornication). One cannot legitimise that which God clearly labels sinful behaviour.

Condoning a behaviour that is strictly forbidden in scripture lends to one's own disobedience to God's clear mandates. Pastoral counsellors are under an obligation to call a brother or sister to repentance by speaking the truth in love (Craven 2007:1). Pastors must seek a balanced response from the church which should include two key components: biblical teaching and meaningful support.

First, firm biblical teaching on the subject will ensure that confusion does not rest with Christians who are influenced by media and the behavioural sciences. Pastoral counsellors are responsible to God to sound forth to society a clear word from God. The Bible does not teach that homosexuality is an unforgivable sin: offer them hope and help. Reject the sin while embracing the sinner.

Second, meaningful personal support for the homosexual who is seeking change from the orientation is vitally important. Christian supportive fellowships can be established to support people in their brokenness and desire to change their sinful behaviour. Homosexuals must be faced with a caring and compassionate church to assist them in seeing a God who reaches out to them even through condemnation of the behaviour. At the same time, the church must teach that homosexuality is contrary to the divine purpose for human sexuality.

The old sin nature can be transformed through repentance and faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit within the depths of every personality. There is no such thing as a "powerless grace". If behavioural scientists, Masters and Johnson, can achieve a 66 percent success rate in dealing with homosexuals, how much more can pastoral counsellors accomplish with the power of the Holy Spirit? It is a biblically-based hope which pastors and churches should hold forth as a tangible possibility for delivering people from the bondage of destructive homosexual behaviour (NARTH 2001).

Dr Russell Waldrop (2001) is a pastoral counsellor, psychiatric chaplain and a licensed professional counsellor. He provided this warning to the church:

> There is a real threat here to the church and it comes from both within the church and outside it. From outside the church, secular licensing and training groups could withhold licenses from people who do not believe in gay-affirming counselling . . . and they might be able to withdraw the licenses from those who still do not agree with gay-affirming counseling.

The divisive issue of whether to ordain homosexual clergy has received centre attention in many Christian churches throughout the 21st century world. It has been clearly stated: the scriptures give very clear guidelines for the appointment of ecclesial leaders. Churches seeking to align themselves with the authority and inerrancy of scripture cannot ordain avowed and practicing homosexuals to positions of leadership. If unrepentant sexual practices bar one from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9), surely it must prohibit one from leadership in the church (Davis 1993).

Another issue facing pastoral leadership today is: Should churches support the drive to ensure "civil rights" for homosexuals? Christians cannot consistently support making a civil right that which has been condemned in scripture to be morally wrong. Equally wrong, would be for Christians to participate in campaigns to physically harm and persecute homosexuals (Davis 1993).

5.2. Care and counselling resources for homosexuals

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) has offered three well-defined guidelines for the care and counselling to homosexuals: education, friendship, and healing and counselling resources.

- *Education*. They recommend that the church provide education on the biblical understanding of human sexuality through sermons, study, and support groups in order to lay a foundation for understanding. Those seeking answers to their sexual confusion may work toward wholeness in Christ.
- *Friendship*. The basis of friendship must be a recognition of our common need for the grace of Christ. Evidence the incarnation of Christ by identifying those we are trying to reach. There is a need for homosexuals to experience an acceptance of their person apart from their sexual concerns.
- *Healing and counselling*. It is essential that the church provide resources for healing in the area of sexual identity through Christian counselling or other ministries to homosexuals. These could include: pastoral counselling, Christian psychologists, worship and prayer. As homosexuals move away from their behaviour, they need supportive

> and caring Christians to assist them toward wholeness in Christ (EPC 2005).[10]

In counselling homosexuals, Matheson (2006) has developed a counselling paradigm that incorporates four principles of change. He believes the reason that many homosexuals become discouraged when their feelings and attractions do not change quickly is because their efforts at change are not broad enough. Therefore, he suggests using the acronym M-A-N-S: masculinity, authenticity, need fulfilment and surrender.

Masculinity:	men in the change process need to feel masculine and bond with other men.
Authenticity:	getting out of the false self and facing feelings in open relationships.
Need fulfilment:	develop relationships, experiences, and opportunities that strengthen, nurture, and lead to joy and personal satisfaction.
Surrender:	letting go of everything that prevents change from happening and letting in the things that restore the growth processes.

Matheson (2006) developed these principles of change in order to counsel homosexuals to live in freedom from homosexual behaviour. Although he does not give scriptural mandates against homosexual behaviour, the fourth change principle—*surrender*—could be effectively developed by pastoral counsellors from a biblical paradigm of change through transformation by the Holy Spirit.

6. Conclusion

This research explored four critical components involved in homosexual behaviour: history, causes, the witness of scripture, and implications for pastoral ministry in the 21st century Christian church. These are some of the most significant conclusions of the study.

[10] For a comprehensive listing of resources to assist homosexuals in reversing their sexual orientation to heterosexuality, see Appendix A.

- Anti-homosexual predilection did *not* originate with the Western Christian church's teaching; on the contrary, many pagan cultures abhorred the practice.
- A thorough literature review of scientific research reveals that there are multiple factors that cause homosexuality, but there is no empirical evidence to suggest that genetic or biological determinism is one of them.
- Both the biological (illness) and environmental models fail to consider the aspect of free agency as a constituent factor of homosexuality; that God designed humankind with the cognitive capacity to make autonomous decisions for or against any human behaviour. Behavioural scientists have confirmed this often neglected aspect of homosexuality (Byne & Parsons 1993; Warner 2001; Needlemen 2004).
- In sum, then, homosexuality does not have a genetic basis; neither is it determined by hormonal imbalances. Rather, multifactorial causes point to its origin: environmental and psychosocial factors (e.g., previous sexual abuse and/or poor parent-child relations). Furthermore, the free will agency of choice in choosing homosexuality as a lifestyle must not be discounted as a causation.
- Failure on the part of the media to communicate the findings of empirical research accurately can lead the non-scientific community to believe unsubstantiated claims. Critical investigation is paramount when anatomising behavioural science research, paying particular attention to vague statements such as "there may be a gene…", "we think we have discovered…" or "the possibility exists that…".
- If the scriptures are soundly interpreted, both Testaments clearly and consistently condemn homosexual behaviour. The revisionist gay interpretation of key texts does not conform to sound hermeneutical principles.
- Empirical studies have indicated that homosexuality can be reversed. Importantly, one cannot dismiss the Holy Spirit as a powerful and final change agent for same sex behaviours. Treatment of homosexuals within the body of Christ should be the same as anyone who is caught in the clutches of sin's grip. Gentle restoration is the example of Jesus Christ's ministry, which he calls us to follow.

Further research should include a comprehensive study of the role of free agency in sexual identity development, particularly homosexuality. A more complete review of the literature is required. A valid understanding of the role of choice in homosexual behaviour is essential when counselling homosexuals who desire to reverse their sexual desires from same sex to healthy heterosexuality. This is a critical component of which pastoral counsellors need to be cognizant.

Works Cited

Abbott D 1995. *The role of free agency in sexual identity development*. Received by private email from the author, 2007-05-05.

ACUTE. Evangelical Alliance's Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals. 1998. *Faith, Hope, and Homosexuality*. Evangelical Alliance.

American Family Association Journal. 2005. New study undermines gay gene theory. Accessed from www.crosswalk.com, 2007-05-03.

American Psychological Association (APA). 2007. Answers to your questions about sexual orientation and homosexuality. Online pamphlet. Accessed from www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html, 2007-04-30.

Homosexuality and church unity. 1998 (11 March). *The Christian Century*. Online article. Accessed from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_n8_v115/ai_20417122, 2007-05-11.

Anglican body could rupture. 2006 (4 April). *The Christian Century*, 15.

Ashton M n.d. [2007]. Homosexuality and the church. Online book. Accessed from www.christadelphia.org/pamphlet/homosex.htm, 2007-03-20.

Austriaco FPG 2003. The myth of the gay gene. Accessed from www.narth.com/docs/mythgene.html, 2007-04-04.

Bailey JM, Gaulin S, Agyei Y, & Gladue BA 1994. Effects of gender and sexual orientation on evolutionarily relevant aspects of human mating psychology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66:1081-1093

Bailey JM & Pillard RC 1991. A genetic study of male sexual orientation. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48:1089-1096.

Bailey JM & Pillard RC et al. 1993. Heritable factors influence sexual orientation in women. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50:217-223.

Bailey JM, Pillard RC, Dawood K, Miller MB, Farrer LA, Trivedi S & Murphy RL 1999. A family history study of male sexual orientation using three independent samples. *Behavior Genetics* 29:79-86.

Bergin A 2002. *Eternal values personal growth: a guide on your journey, to spiritual, emotional, and social wellness*. Brigham Young UP.

Burr WR, Day RD & Bahr KS 1993. *Family science*. Prentice-Hall.

Byne W & Parsons B 1993. Human sexual orientation: the biologic theories reappraised. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50(3):228-229.

_____. 1998. Scientists challenge the notion that homosexuality is a matter of choice. *The Charlotte Observer* 1998-08-09.

Craven M 2007. Responding to a gay Christian. Accessed from www.crosswalk.com/spirituallife/11538283, 2007-05-02.

Dailey JJ 2007. *The Bible, the church, and homosexuality*. Family Research Council.

Davis JJ 1993. *Evangelical ethics: issues facing the church today*. Presbyterian & Reformed.

D'Emilio JD 1983. *Sexual politics, sexual communities: the making of a homosexual minority in the United States 1940-1970*. Accessed from www.googlescholar.com, 2007-04-30.

Duncan J 1989. *Hope for the homosexual*. Impact Books.

Dr. E. 2002 (Nov-Dec). Ask Dr. E. *Psychology Today*. Online article. Accessed from www.findarticles.com, 2007-03-25.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 1999-2001. Report on conversations about homosexuality and the church: churchwide report for 1999-2001. Accessed from www.elca.org/faithjourney/resources/2001report.html, 2007-03-15.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) 2005. On homosexuality. Accessed from www.epc.org, 2007-04-09.

Fischer L 2004. The nature of law. In A Jackson & L Fischer (ed), *Turning Freud upside down: gospel perspectives on psychotherapy's fundamental problems*. Brigham Young UP.

Frankl V 1985. *Man's search for meaning*. Pocket Books.

Friedman RC & Downey J 1993. Neurobiology and sexual orientation: current relationships. *Journal of Neuropsychiatry* 5:131-153.

Fryrear M 2006. Homosexuality: are people born gay? Online article. Accessed from www.family.org/lifechallenges/A000000186.cfm, 2007-05-02.

Gallagher J 1998. Gay for the thrill of it: genetics and homosexuality researcher Dean Hamer —interview. *The Advocate,* 1998-02-17.

Glock CY 2004. Accounting for behavior scientifically and in everyday life. Unpublished paper available from the author: 319 South Fourth Avenue, Sandpoint, Idaho, USA 83864.

Goldberg S 1994. *When wish replaces thought: why so much of what you believe is false*. Prometheus Books.

Gonsiorek JC 1990. Psychological and ethical implications of causal theories of sexual orientation. A paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, 10-14 August 1990.

Greenberg DF 1998. *The construction of homosexuality*. Chicago UP.

Grünbaum A 1984. *The foundations of psychoanalysis: a philosophical critique*. California UP. Accessed from www.cmmunity.washburnlaw.edu/gin/movsovitz.htm, 2007-04-10.

Hamer. Dean, et al. 1993. A linkage between DNA markers on the chromosome and male sexual orientation. *Science* 261:321-327.

Heim D, Stackhouse M, Johnson L & Matzko D 1998 (1 July). Homosexuality, marriage and the church: a conversation. *The Christian Century*. Online article. Accessed from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_n19_v115/ai_21003284, 2007-04-30.

Hine P n.d. [2007]. Ancient Germanic and Celtic Cultures. Accessed from www.philhine.org.uk, 2007-04-30.

Hubbard R & Wald E 1999. Exploding the gene myth: how genetic information is produced and manipulated by scientists, physicians, employers, insurance companies, educators, and law enforcers. Beacon Press.

Jones SL 1999 (4 October). The incredibly shrinking gay gene. *Christianity Today* 43:11, 53.

Kane J 2007 (20 February). *The Christian Century,* 4, 18.

LeVay S1991. A difference in hypothalamic structure between heterosexual and homosexual orientation. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48:1089-1096.

Levay S 1996. *Queer science*. MIT Press.

Matheson DA 2007. Origins of male homosexuality. Accessed from www.genderwholeness.com/origins, 2007-05-05.

McFadden D 1998. Scientists challenge notion that homosexuality is a matter of choice. *The Charlotte Observer*, 9 August 1998.

Murray SO 1996. *The American Gay: Worlds of Desire: The Chicago series on sexuality, gender, and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.

NARTH 2004. "Is there a gay gene?" Adapted article 21 Sept. 2004. Accessed from www.narth.com, 2007-04-02.

Needleman J 2004. The American soul: rediscovering the wisdom of the founders. National Public Radio Programme, Morning edition: 23 February 2004.

Nelson J B. 1977. Homosexuality and the church. Article first appeared in *Christianity and Crisis,* 1977-04-04. Accessed from www.religiononline.org, 2007-04-27.

Nicolosi J 1991. *Reparative therapy of male homosexuality*: *A new clinical approach*. Jason Aronson.

_____ 1993. *Healing homosexuality: case stories of reparative therapy*. Jason Aronson.

Nicolosi J, Byrd AD & Potts RW 2000. Retrospective self-reports of changes in homosexual orientation: A consumer survey of conversion therapy clients. *Psychological Reports, 86:*1071-1088.

O'Brien D 2004 (27 January). A more perfect union. *The Christian Century,* 27.

Oosterhuis H 1996. Christian social policy and homosexuality in the Netherlands, 1900-1970. *Journal of Homosexuality* 32:95-111.

Homosexuality in the Netherlands (April 18,2007). Oxford,

Oxford W 2000. Review of S De Gruchy & P Germond, *Aliens in the household of God: homosexuality and Christian faith in South Africa* (Johannesburg: David Philip, 1997). *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 106:94-96.

Robinson, B. 2006. *Roman Catholics and homosexuality*. Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.

Rossi HL 2006. Conservative Jews seek middle on gay issues. *The Christian Century,* Vol 123 (30 May 2006) 11:16.

Sanders G 1980. Homosexualities in the Netherlands. *Alternative Lifestyles* 3:278-311.

Schuklenk U, Stein E, Kerin J and Byne W 1997. Ethics of genetic research on sexual orientation." *The Hastings Centre Report* 27(4):6-13.

Spitzer RL n.d. Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? 200 subjects reporting a change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation. *Archives of Psychiatric Behavior,* forthcoming.

Strauss GH 2006. Sexual identity development. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34:296-301.

Throckmorton W 1998a. Gay-to-straight. Research published in the APA Journal. Accessed from www.narth.com/docs/throkarticle.html, 2007-05-05.

Throckmorton W 1998b. Efforts to modify sexual orientation: a review of outcomes. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 20:283-304.

Valenstein ES 1998. *Blaming the brain: the truth about drugs and mental health*. Free Press.

Waldrop R 2001. *The church and homosexuality: recent developments.* Accessed from www.narth.com, 2007-04-10..

Warner CT 2001. *Bonds that make us free*. Deseret Book.

Fischer L (ed), *Turning Freud upside down: gospel perspective on psychotherapy's fundamental problems*. Brigham Young UP.

Zyga L 2006. Is there a homosexuality gene? Accessed from www.PhysOrg.com, 2007-03-25.

Direct Translation:
Striving for Complete Resemblance[1]

Kevin Gary Smith[2]

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide a readable description of direct translation, an approach that emerges logically from a relevance theoretical perspective on communication. Direct translation is an approach that strives to attain the highest possible level of resemblance to the source text. It does this by transferring the source's communicative clues and requiring readers to familiarise themselves with the its context, an assumption that minimises the need to provide contextually implicit information, explicate figurative language, adopt inclusive language or remove ambiguities. It values a good balance between naturalness and literalness, prioritising naturalness when these two conflict.

1. Introduction

Basing his views on a communication model known as *relevance theory* (Sperber and Wilson 1986; 1995), Ernst-August Gutt (1991; 2000) proposed two approaches two translation based an analogy with direct and indirect

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Kevin Smith is the Vice-Principal and Academic Head of the South African Theological Seminary. He holds an MA (New Testament) from Global University, DLitt (Biblical Languages) from the University of Stellenbosch and recently completed a DTh (Old Testament) from the South African Theological Seminary.

reported speech; he called the two approaches *direct translation* and *indirect translation*. Failing to understand Gutt's framework completely, early critics labelled direct and indirect translation as just new names for the age-old distinction between formal and functional equivalence (e.g., Wendland 1997).

Although Gutt objected to equating direct translation with formal equivalence, to my knowledge he never attempted to spell out what a direct translation should look like. Van der Merwe (1999), exploring the possibility of producing a concordant (direct) translation in Afrikaans, made a helpful contribution to understanding what such a translation might look like. In my doctoral dissertation (Smith 2000), I tried to explore the principles that would be applied to produce a direct translation. Unfortunately, relevance theory is so complex and littered with technical jargon that most presentations of the translation approaches based on it are difficult for most readers to follow.

The objective of this article is both modest and ambitious, namely, to describe how direct translation works and to do so with minimal technical language. This goal is modest in that it does not attempt to break new ground. It is ambitious because a readable presentation of a translation model based on relevance theory, keeping technical jargon to a minimum, is no simple task.

2. The purpose of direct translation

There are two kinds of reported speech, namely, direct and indirect quotation. Direct quotation records exactly what another said. If interpreted with the original context in mind, it enables a third party to retrieve the original speaker's exact meaning. Indirect quotation only offers an approximation of what another said, often filtered in terms of what the reporter deems most relevant or interesting; there is usually some loss or distortion of the speaker's intent. Direct and indirect translation are analogous to direct and indirect quotation. Direct translation attempts to translate exactly what the original writer said, while indirect translation filters the message so as to make it more immediately relevant and understandable to the target reader, accepting some loss in meaning.

Every translator knows it is not possible for a translation to convey everything in the original. Complete equivalence cannot be attained. In choosing the

translation approach, translators must decide on the level of resemblance required between the original and the translation. Their decision should take into account that there is a trade-off between the level of resemblance that can be achieved and the amount of effort a reader needs to invest to benefit from greater resemblance. If translators require *complete* resemblance, they should attempt a direct translation realising it will require more effort for readers to understand it. If a lesser level of resemblance will suffice, an indirect translation is preferable because it provides instant "payoff" to readers.

The goal of a direct translation of the Bible is to make accessible to its modern readers as much as possible of the meaning the original would have conveyed to its readers. An indirect translation, by contrast, has a much more modest goal—to produce immediate contextual effects. Indirect translation accepts some loss of resemblance in exchange for instant impact on the reader. These two approaches operate on a continuum (see diagram 1) in which direct translation is a limiting case, striving for complete resemblance, while indirect translation covers the remainder of the continuum covering varying degrees of resemblance. As a translation moves towards the left, it trades interpretive resemblance for instant impact.

Diagram 1: Target level of interpretive resemblance in direct and indirect translation

Stated differently, the goal of a direct translation of the Bible is to enable its readers access to the same interpretation(s) they could infer if they could read the Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek New Testament. It attempts to provide its readers with as many of the verbal clues present in the source text as is possible in the receptor language. The translation is accurate to the extent that it allows its readers to infer and evaluate all the communicative clues available to a modern reader of the original text. This also serves as the measure of success for a direct translation.

In essence, then, direct translation is an approach that prioritises maximum resemblance over instant impact. It strives for complete resemblance between

source and translation. It aims to provide its readers with exactly the same communicative clues they would have if they could read the original text.

3. The foundation of direct translation

Relevance theory emerged in the late 1980s as an attempt to describe how communication works (see Sperber and Wilson 1986; 1995; Wilson and Sperber 1987). At the time, the prevailing theory was the code model, which assumed that we communicate by encoding and decoding messages. Recognising that the code model provided a hopelessly inadequate explanation of the complexities of communication, Dan Sperber and Diedre Wilson devised an alternate model in which encoding and decoding were only one part. At the simplest level, they suggested that a speaker provides evidence of her intention. A recipient can infer her meaning from the evidence she provides. The evidence (called a stimulus) often takes the form of words (a verbal stimulus). Words on their own do not clearly represent the speaker's meaning (the weakness of the code model); the context in which they are spoken helps to remove ambiguities and thus provide clear evidence of the speaker's intent.

The crucial point here is that the words are not identical with the message. They point to the message, but they need to be contextually enriched to be the message. There is a gap between the words people speak (or write) and the message they intend to convey. The context shared by the speaker and hearer fills the gap so as to make the message clear and complete. If a woman tells her husband, “I'm going upstairs to shower”, her words may seem to send a clear message. If, however, you know they have a one-year old child, her real meaning becomes “honey, won't you please watch baby for the next 15 minutes”. Similarly, on a cold winter's day, your guest might *say,* “it is cold in here”, but his real *intention* is to ask you to close the window (Unger 1996:19). Words function as a clue to the speaker's intentions, but they must combine with contextual factors to produce a complete message.

We can look at a verbal stimulus from two perspectives (Gutt 1991:126). First, we can observe its intrinsic properties and how it functions as a communicative clue to the speaker's intent. Second, we can explore the interpretation it produces when contextually enriched. Direct translation

focuses on the intrinsic properties of the utterances in the source text. It attempts to formulate equivalent communicative clues in the receptor language. To the extent that it succeeds in producing equivalent communicative clues, readers of the translation will reach the same interpretations as readers of the original provided they use the same contextual assumptions to complete the message.

The concept of *communicative clues* is critical. Direct quotation can retain the exact properties of the message it reports. This is not possible across languages. No two languages share their intrinsic properties so closely as to permit a direct transfer of structures and forms. If, however, one can correctly identify how the parts of the original message functioned as communicative clues helping the audience to deduce the writer's intent, then formulating equivalent clues in the receptor language enables readers to recover the full message (at least in theory). The reformulated communicative clues need to interact with the original context in a manner equivalent to the way the original's clues would have done.

4. The principles of direct translation

What are the baseline principles a Bible translation must follow if it hopes to achieve the greatest possible level of interpretive resemblance to its source? Relevance theory provides a framework for determining these principles. There are three essential ones.

1. Direct translation values both the form of the original and the naturalness of the translation. Relevance theory provides a fresh perspective on the quest for balance between literalness and naturalness, between form and meaning. As a result, a good directe translation "is both literal and natural—literal in that it translates what was said rather than what was meant; natural in that it uses forms of expression that are natural in the receptor language" (Smith 2000:70).

A direct translation aims to provide clear communicative clues from which its readers can infer the author-intended meaning. To achieve this, its style needs to be as natural in the receptor language as the original was in the source language. Therefore, direct translation genuinely values a translation using an

idiom natural to the receptor language. A standard, middle-of-the road modern idiom is most appropriate. For modern English, something in the order of the ESV or the NIV seems most appropriate. In my opinion, the KJV is too formal, the NASB too awkward and the Message too colloquial.

At the same time, direct translation also values the form of the original and will remain as close to it as is possible while still providing clear communicative clues in natural idiom. For example, the semantic range of the Greek genitive case overlaps substantially with the way English uses the preposition "of" to join two nouns, and English speakers are comfortable with this usage. Therefore, it is seldom necessary for a direct translation to alter the form of so-called objective or subjective genitives. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, "the fear of the Lord" (NIV) is just as natural to English speakers as was τὸν φόβον τοῦ κυρίου to ancient Greek speakers; a direct translation would not change the form to "what it means to fear the Lord" (GNB).

What should translators do when they face a choice between literalness and naturalness? They should provide clear communicative clues—as clear and natural as the ones in the source text. Naturalness takes priority over literalness. The maxim is, translate literally to the extent that it is clear and reader-friendly in the receptor idiom. In Romans 8:17, it would be inappropriate to translate the Greek phrase συγκληρονόμοι . . . Χριστοῦ literally as "fellow heirs of Christ"; for the sake of clarity, the form should change to "fellow heirs with Christ" (ESV), but need not go as far as "we will possess with Christ what God has promised for him" (GNB).

2. Direct translation requires that translators interpret the original correctly in order to translate it effectively. Due to the mechanical nature of producing a literal version, translators can cope with a relatively shallow grasp of the source text by simply matching glosses and forms between two languages. When it comes to the depth of the translators' understanding of the original, direct translation resembles functional equivalence. Translators need a thorough grasp of its intricacies, far beyond the lexical and grammatical level (see Winckler and Van der Merwe 1993:54-55; cf. Gutt 1991:164; Van der Merwe 1999).

The translators' task is to identify the communicative clues the source text provided for its readers and translate them into equivalent clues for the receptor audience. These clues may emerge from any level within the discourse features of the source text. They also depend on the interplay between text and context for their effectiveness. Therefore, producing a good direct translation requires skilful exegesis of the source text, taking into account its "discourse features, rhetorical devices, and social conventions" (Smith 2000:228; cf. Van der Merwe 1999).

3. Direct translation requires readers to interpret it with the original context in mind. Winckler and Van der Merwe's (1993:54) definition makes this point well:

> A direct translation is a receptor language text which the translator intends the receptor audience to interpret in the context envisaged (by the original author) *for the original audience*. And in making a direct translation the translator has the informative intention to communicate to the receptor language audience *all* the assumptions communicated by the original in the context envisaged for the original.

All communication acts are context-dependent. This is a fundamental principle of relevance theory. If communication is context-dependent, then it is impossible to keep a complex message fundamentally unaltered while permitting the target audience to interpret it using a completely different contextual framework.[3] Functional equivalence fails here—it is based on the code model, which wrongly assumes that any message that can be encoded in one language can also be encoded in another. This simply is not true. If messages could be fully encoded, it might be true. But messages are encoded *in context* in such a way that the interplay between code and context produces the full meaning.

A corollary of the content-dependent nature of communication is that a translation which allows readers to assume a contemporary context will suffer

[3] Many have protested the legitimacy of requiring readers of a translation to be familiar with the context underlying the original. Gutt (2000) responded persuasively on this point; I shall not rehash his arguments here.

greater loss of resemblance to its source than one which requires them to be familiar with the original context. It follows, therefore, that a translation which strives for maximum resemblance must require readers to interpret it with the original context in mind.[4]

These three principles emerge directly from relevance theory. To produce a translation that achieves maximum resemblance to its source, translators must (a) value both naturalness and literalness, (b) interpret the original correctly and (c) assume readers will interpret the translation with the original context in mind. Translators can use these principles as guidelines for making difficult translation decisions.

5. The application of direct translation

Now we need to grapple a little with how a direct translation should handle some of the most common and important translation problems modern Bible translators face. I have selected four for discussion: (a) implicit information, (b) metaphorical language, (c) inclusive language and (d) ambiguous texts.

5.1. Implicit information

How should a direct translation of the Bible handle information that is implicit in the original, but will be lost in a literal rendering? To what extent should it add clarifying words or phrases in an attempt to make explicit to the reader what is implicit in the original?

Relevance theory offers a satisfactory account of the role implicit information plays in communication, but that account is to complex to explain here (cf. Gutt 1996; Unger 1996). All I shall attempt here is a simplified account of how direct translation handles implicit information.

Firstly, we need to distinguish between *linguistically* and *contextually* implicit information. Linguistically implicit information is required for the sake of

[4] One means of helping to reduce the burden on readers to familiarise themselves with the context of the source is by including notes containing essential background information. This option is more feasible for translations that will published electronically than for printed Bibles.

grammatical correctness and completeness. For example, 1 Timothy 1:3 begins with καθώς ("just as"), "a construction that needs a 'so now' to complete it" (Fee 1988:48). Although "so now" is omitted in the Greek text, grammatical correctness requires it to be supplied. The "so now" clause is linguistically implicit because the sentence is not grammatically complete without it. From a relevance theoretic perspective, the missing words are judged to be part of the communicative clue, so a direct translation should supply them.

Contextually implicit information is information that is derived purely from the external context; in other words, it is not implied by the syntax of the language. In Revelation 3:15, the Laodicean church is rebuked for being "neither cold nor hot" (NIV). To appreciate the force these words had on the original readers, one needs to know that Laodicea had no water source of its own, but received its hot and cold water from nearby water sources. All their water was lukewarm by the time it reached them. Although the author surely had this information in mind when he penned 3:15-16, it is not implicit in the text itself, but in the external context. Because direct translation presupposes readers will use the original context to interpret it, it does not explicate contextually implicit information.

This distinction between two main types of implicit information tends to simplify and polarise the situation too much. We cannot always draw a line neatly between the two. Nevertheless, the general principle would be for direct translation to lean towards making linguistically implicit information explicit, but leaving contextual clues implicit.

5.2. Metaphorical language

Functional equivalence permits and, in certain situations, actively encourages translations to convert figures of speech that will not be easily understood by modern readers into literal statements. In the case of metaphors, this usually means identifying the main point of comparison and spelling it out for readers, converting a metaphor into a proposition. Relevance theory's view of metaphors makes this method incompatible with a translation that strives for complete resemblance with its source.

Whereas literal expressions make a single, direct statement about a subject, figurative language tends to project a range weak implications upon it (see Sperber and Wilson 1986:231-237). The famous words of Psalm 23:1, יהוה רֹעִי, usually translated literally as "the Lord is my shepherd", illustrate the point well. What is the main point of comparison the psalmist intends between Yahweh and a shepherd? Is it protection, guidance, care, nourishment? The answer is *none* of these . . . and *all* of them. The Lord does for his people many of the things a shepherd does for his sheep. If a translator, judging that modern city dwellers know nothing about ancient shepherding, chose to explicate the statement as "the Lord takes care of me", she would rob the reader of access to a whole range of ways in which the Lord shepherds his people.

Converting metaphors into propositions seriously distorts the message, overemphasising certain implications and completely disregarding others. Direct translation, therefore, must render metaphors literally, expecting readers to familiarise themselves with culture and context from which the metaphor derives its force.

5.3. Inclusive language

Many early twenty-first century cultures have become highly sensitive to gender-related issues, especially any perceived gender bias. This has led to a proliferation of recent Bible translations (or revisions) adopting inclusive language where the Hebrew or Greek text uses masculine language to refer to both men and women. The goal is to produce gender-neutral translations that do not cause unnecessary offence or misunderstanding on the part of gender-sensitive modern readers. The NRSV, NLT and TNIV are examples of major English translations that employ inclusive language. Even recent translations that do not formally adopt inclusive language show much greater sensitivity to the matter than was the case 30 years ago; the ESV is a good example (see Decker 2004).

There are two questions of importance to this article: (a) Should a direct translation use inclusive language at all? (b) If yes, to what extent?

When interpreted with the original context in mind, a direct translation should provide clear communicative clues to the author's intended meaning. “The test of a good direct translation is that when interpreted in the context envisioned for the original readers it yields the author-intended interpretation” (Smith 2000:82). In the vast majority of cases where the original biblical text uses masculine language with the intent of including both genders, it will make no difference whether or not the translation uses inclusive language. If a modern reader were to use a first-century worldview to interpret Matthew 12:30, it would hardly matter whether ὁ μὴ ὢν μετ’ ἐμοῦ κατ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστιν were rendered “he who is not with me is against me” (NIV) or “whoever is not with me is against me” (NRSV). The suggestion I made eight years ago seems even more appropriate today than it did then:

> In general, a direct translation should not depart from the form of the original unless that is required for the sake of preserving its communicative clues. However, if translating for readers who are known to be sensitive to feminist issues and lacking the space to provide explanatory notes that alter the readers’ cognitive environment, translators are free to employ inclusive renderings so as to prevent communication breakdowns (Smith 2000:82).

The answer to the first question—should a direct translation use inclusive language at all?—is that it is free to do so if this does not distort the meaning. However, for a translation assuming an ancient context, inclusive language is not essential and should be avoided if it may distort the interpretation in any way.

Critics of inclusive language point out many examples where a general policy of changing masculine language into gender-neutral language can cause subtle distortions (see Grudem 2002a-b; 2005; Cole 2005; Poythress 2005; Marlowe 2006). Cole's (2005) examination of Psalm 1 sounds a caution regarding a hidden danger. The NIV translated verse 1 “blessed is the man who . . .”; the TNIV altered it to “blessed are those who . . .”, a seemingly harmless instance of changing from masculine to neutral language. The traditional identification of “the blessed man” of Psalm 1 is as a righteous human being. However, a rising tide of scholarly opinion is open to the idea that “the blessed man”

could have been identified with the Messiah by ancient Israelites. The switch from "blessed is he . . ." to "blessed are those . . ." denies modern readers access to a Messianic interpretation of the verse, which violates one of the primary goals of direct translation—to allow modern readers access to the same range of interpretations that were available to the original's audience.

The New Inclusive Translation of the New Testament and Psalms (NIT) provides a more obvious and extreme example of inclusive language changing the meaning of the original. The NIT chose to refer to God not as "Father", but as "Father-Mother". If this title were interpreted with the first-century context it mind, it would evoke in the minds of its readers a totally different array of images to what the ancients would have associated with the Greek title *patēr*. Thus it would make a poor direct translation.

In essence, then, direct translation permits cautious use of inclusive language, but generally favours maintaining the gender of the original so as to minimise the potential for subtle changes in meaning. Since the goal of direct translation is maximum resemblance (in the original context), avoiding inclusive language minimises the risk of unintentional distortions.

5.4. Ambiguous texts

We have established that a direct translation is dependent on the quality of the exegesis underlying it. Since we are so far removed from the biblical writers, many aspects of these ancient texts are ambiguous to us. This raises an important translation question: If a direct translation relies on sound exegesis of the source text, how should should it handle elements in the source text that are exegetically ambiguous, that is, elements which could be interpreted in more than one way?

Ambiguities fall into two categories—those that can be reproduced in the receptor language and those that cannot. Psalm 5:3 contains an example of an ambiguity that cannot be retained in translation. The clause אֶֽעֱרָךְ־לָ֝ךְ could mean "I prepare a sacrifice for you" (ESV), "I lay my requests before you" (NIV) or "I will present my case to you" (NET). There is no English construction that makes all three of these interpretations accessible. The age-old dispute about whether to translate πνευματικῶν in 1 Corinthians 12:1

"spiritual gifts", "spiritual things" or "spiritual ones" also falls in this category. Does the figure of speech καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἅπτεσθαι in 1 Corinthians 7:1b mean "it is good for a man not to marry" (NIV text) or "it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman" (NIV margin)? In this case, a translation can sit on the fence by translating the figure literally as "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" (NASB). It is unclear whether ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ in 2 Corinthians 5:14 refers to our love for Christ or Christ's love for us. A translation need not take a stance, though, since the English "the love of Christ" retains the ambiguity.

Since direct translation assumes the reader will use the author-intended context to interpret its statements, it does not *need* to alter the wording of the text in an attempt to remove ambiguities. If a statement is grammatically ambiguous in the Hebrew or Greek text, presumably the context would have removed the ambiguity for the original readers.[5] In direct translation, the translator's task is to provide clues which, when interpreted with the original context in mind, will lead modern readers to the same interpretation as the original would have led its intended readers.

Therefore, where it is possible to leave a verbal ambiguity in the translation, permitting readers to interpret it in the same range of ways someone might interpret the source and relying on the original context for clarity, this is the approach most consistent with the principles of direct translation.

What about cases in which the main text of the translation cannot retain an ambiguity? How should a direct translation handle a problem like the one in Psalm 5:3? The verb ערך means "to get ready, set out in order" (HALOT 1999:884). The ambiguity stems from the fact that no direct object is stated, so the Hebrew text literally reads, "I will set my . . . before you". To complete the sentence, English translations must supply an object from the context. Some attempts include "requests" (NIV), "sacrifice" (ESV) and "case" (NET). These are supplied based on the translators' attempts to reconstruct the context of the psalm so as to infer what the psalmist had in mind. Since we are so far

[5] In ordinary communication, it is possible the speaker or author did not provide a clear clue to his/her intended meaning. For those who hold a high view of biblical inspiration, this argument does not apply to the Bible. We believe the Holy Spirit superintended the writing process to ensure the human authors of Scripture recorded his message properly.

removed from the psalmist, the best we can manage is a plausible reconstruction. Each of the three example translations above represents a plausible reconstruction. We do not have enough information to remove the ambiguity.

Since a direct translation strives to give its readers access to the same range of interpretations that were accessible to the intended readers of the original, the best way to manage these kinds of problems is to place one option in the text and the others in explanatory notes. *The NET Bible* (2006, Ps 5:3, n. 6) does this quite well here by adding this note:

> **tn** *Heb* "I will arrange for you." Some understand a sacrifice or offering as the implied object (cf. NEB "I set out my morning sacrifice"). The present translation assumes that the implied object is the psalmist's case/request.

This at least gives studious readers access to the interpretations open to modern readers of the psalm in Hebrew, which is the best a translation can hope to achieve.

6. Conclusion

Two different kinds of translation emerge from relevance theory: direct translation, which strives for complete interpretive resemblance, and indirect translation, which prioritises instant impact on readers. Direct translation seeks to retain the linguistic properties of the source text in translation. It cannot do so literally because no two languages share the same formal properties, so instead it transfers them value as communicative clues. In producing equivalent communicative clues, translators should strive to balance naturalness and literalness, prioritising naturalness when these values clash.

The most important principle of direct translation is that it assumes readers will use the original context to complete its communicative clues and recover the author's intended meaning. As compared with indirect translation, this requires extra effort from readers wishing to understand it correctly, but offers the promise of greater resemblance to the source. This assumption minimises

the need to provide contextually implicit information, explicate figurative language, adopt inclusive language or remove ambiguities.

Works Cited

Cole RL 2005. (Mis)translating Psalm 1. *JBMW* 10(2):35-46.

Decker RJ 2004. The English Standard Version: a review article. *JMAT* 8(1):5-56.

English standard version. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Fee GD 1988. *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. NIBC. Hendricksen.

Good news Bible (2nd ed). 1992. American Bible Society.

Grudem W 2002a. The "gender-neutral" NIV: what is the controversy about? *JBMW* 7(1): 37-40.

_____ 2002b. A brief summary of concerns about the TNIV. *JBMW* 7(2):6-14.

_____ 2005. Changing God's Word. *JBMW* 10(2):19-27.

Gutt E-A 1991. *Translation and relevance: cognition and context*. Blackwell.

_____ 1996. Implicit information in literary translation: a relevance-theoretic approach. *Target* 8:239-256.

_____ 2000. *Translation and relevance: cognition and context* (2nd ed). St. Jerome.

King James Version. 1995 [1779]. Logos Research Systems.

Marlowe M 2006. Review of *Today's New International Version*. Accessed from www.bible-researcher.com/tniv.html, 2008-01-04.

The NET Bible. 2006. Electronic edition: Galaxie Software. Accessed from www.bible.org.

New American standard Bible (1995 update). 1995. Lockman Foundation.

New international version. 1984. Zondervan.

New revised standard version. 1989. Thomas Nelson.

New Living Translation (2nd ed). 2004. Tyndale.

Nicolle S 1999. On the translation of implicit information: experimental evidence and further considerations. *Notes on Translation* 13(3):1-12).

Peterson EH 2002. *The message*. NavPress.

Poythress VS 2005. Small changes in meaning can matter: the unacceptability of the TNIV. *JBMW* 10(2):28-34.

Smith KG 2000. Bible translation and relevance theory: the translation of Titus. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stellenbosch, South Africa: University of Stellenbosch.

Sperber D and Wilson D 1986. *Relevance: communication and cognition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Sperber D and Wilson D 1995. *Relevance: communication and cognition* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Today's new international version. 2005. Zondervan.

Unger CJ 1996. Types of implicit information and their roles in translation. *Notes on Translation* 10(4):18-30.

Van der Merwe CHJ 1999. 'n Konkordante vertaling van die Bybel in Afrikaans: Is dit hoegenaamd verantwoordbaar, en hoe sal dit lyk? *NGTT* 40:293-306.

Wendland ER 1997. A review of "relevance theory" in relation to Bible translation in South-Central Africa, part 2. *JNSL* 23:83-108.

Wilson D & Sperber D 1987. An outline of relevance theory. *Notes on Linguistics* 39:5-24.

Winckler WK & Van der Merwe CHJ 1993. Training tomorrow's Bible translators: some theoretical pointers. *JNSL* 19:41-59.

Evaluating the Changing Face of Worship in the Emerging Church in terms of the ECLECTIC Model: Revival or a Return to Ancient Traditions?[1]

Noel B Woodbridge[2]

Abstract

The desired approach to worship in the Emerging Church is a revival of liturgy and other ancient traditions, brought back with life and meaning. The aim of this paper is to answer the question: Is Emerging Worship a modern-day revival or is it merely a return to ancient traditions? In particular, an attempt will be made to evaluate some of the common values or characteristics of Emerging worship gatherings in terms of the ECLECTIC model. The paper concludes with a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of Emerging Worship and provides recommendations regarding the application of Emerging Worship in today's church.

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] Noel Woodbridge holds a DEd from UNISA and a DTh from the University of Zululand. Noel was a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at UNISA for 13 years, serving the last few years as an Associate Professor before joining the faculty of the South African Theological Seminary in 2003.

1. Introduction

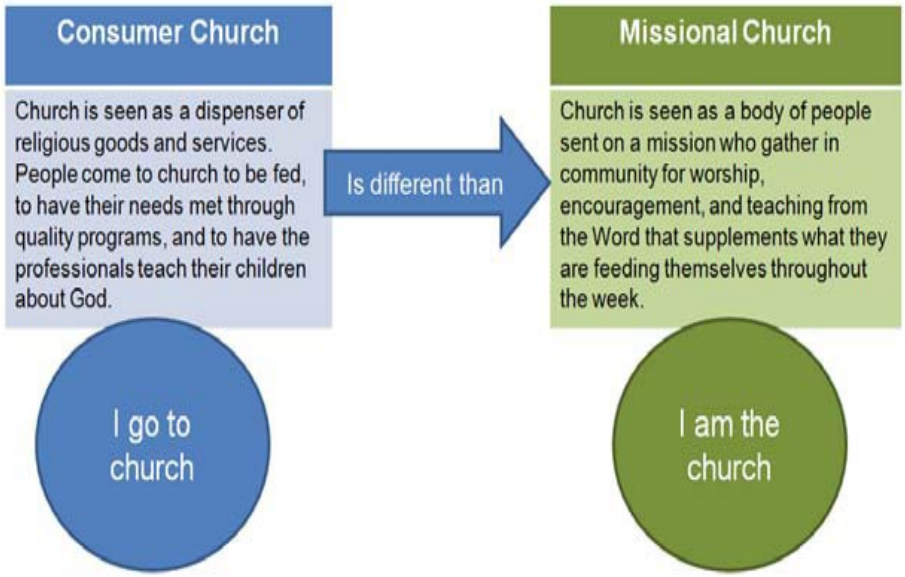
1.1. The Emerging Church Movement

The Emerging Church Movement (or the Emergent Church Movement) is described by its own proponents as, "a growing generative friendship among missional Christian leaders seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (*About Emergent Village* 2007).

While practices and even core doctrines vary, most emergents can be recognised by the following values (Taylor 2006):

- *Missional living:* Christians go out into the world to serve God rather than isolate themselves within communities of like-minded individuals.
- *Narrative theology:* Teaching focuses on narrative presentations of faith and the Bible rather than systematic theology or biblical reductionism.
- *Christ-likeness:* While not neglecting the study of Scripture or the love of the church, Christians focus their lives on the worship and emulation of the person of Jesus Christ.
- *Authenticity:* people in the post-modern culture seek real and authentic experiences in preference over scripted or superficial experiences.

In the diagram below Kimball (2003:95) clearly points out the difference between today's "Consumer Church" and the "Missional Church" of the Emerging Church Movement:



1.2. Understanding Emerging Generations

To understand the characteristics of worship in the Emerging Church, one needs to know, in advance, who are the major players of the Emerging Church. In other words: Who are the emerging generations? The emerging generations have been variously described as: The post-modern generations, the next/young generations, the generation X, or the baby busters who follow the baby boomers (see Table 1 below).

Factors	Builders	Boomers	Busters
Ages	52+ years	33 to 51	14 to 32
Formative years	1920s, 30s, 40s	1950s, 60s, 70s	1980s, 90s, 2000s

Table 1: Generations (Kim 2007:3)

What are the characteristics of the emerging generations with regard to worship? McKnight (2007:37) indicates the following:

- The emerging generations want to experience the truth through feeling and emotion rather than mere reason.
- They want to experience the presence of God through worship.

- They want to take part in worship as positive participants, not passive spectators.
- They respect relationships and are image-centred.
- When it comes to faith, they are praxis oriented, not doctrine oriented. For example, the definition "*how a person lives is more important than what he or she believes"* is their main concern.
- They are also hungry for symbols, metaphors, experiences, stories, and relationships that reveal greatness.

1.3. Understanding Emerging Worship

Leonard Sweet (2000) in his book *Post-modern Pilgrims* sums up this stream or movement of emerging churches, as *First Century Passion for the 21st Century*. He helps us see the need for an EPIC church for EPIC times. Using the EPIC (theory) acronym, he describes the ideal worship for an Emerging Church. He points out four categories, which post-modern churches should pursue to prepare the twenty-first century future church for new generations (Caldwell 2006):

- **E** – *Experiential*. It is not just about listening and thinking, but the idea of "let's enter into worship as an experience."
- **P** – *Participatory*. The idea that worship is not just something you observe, like watching television. You really participate. For example, an important part of worship might be a period of about 20 minutes in which there are stations around the room where people might go to write down a prayer, make their financial offering, or have Communion.
- **I** – *Image-based*. The idea here is not just words for the ears, but an increased emphasis on things you can see. Because of digital technology you have the capacity to project images, show artwork, use film and video.
- **C** – *Communal*. A strong emphasis on community. People are saying, "We don't just want to attend a service and look at the back of people's heads."

The worship style, which emerging churches pursue, is described as *"Vintage-Faith Worship."* To understand more deeply the character of the emerging

worship, we need to be aware of the unique term, *Vintage Faith*. Vintage Faith looks at what was vintage Christianity and goes back to the beginning and looks at the teachings of Jesus with fresh eyes and hearts and minds. It carefully discerns what it is in contemporary churches and ministry that perhaps has been shaped through modernity and evangelical subculture, rather than the actual teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures (Kimball and Fox 2007).

The return to Vintage Faith is illustrated below as a church paradigm shift from Modern to Post-modern, which in itself represents a shift to Ancient traditions (see Table 2):

Church Paradigm Shift				
Ancient	Medieval	Reformation	Modern	**Post-modern**
Mystery **Community** **Symbol**	Institutional	Word-oriented	Reason Systemic Analytical Verbal Individualistic	**Mystery** **Community** **Symbol**

Table 2: Church Paradigm Shift (Kim 2007)

In this paper, an attempt will be made to answer the following question: Is *Emerging Worship* a modern-day Revival or is it merely a Return to Ancient Traditions?

The author has arranged the following eight characteristics/elements of *Emerging worship* into an acronym to form the ECLECTIC model:

- **E**ngagement
- **C**onversation
- **L**iberty
- **E**xperience
- **C**ommunion
- **T**raditions
- **I**mages
- **C**ontemplative Prayer

In the next section an attempt will be made to evaluate these eight characteristics of *Emerging worship gatherings* in terms of the ECLECTIC model – an appropriate name, since it represents the Emerging Church's acceptance of several ancient traditions and worship practices from various sources.

2. Evaluating emerging worship in terms of the ECLECTIC model

2.1. Engagement: Positive participation in the *worship gathering*

Sally Morgenthaler cited in Kimball (2003:155) indicates that, "The problem is, we are living in a culture that breeds spectators. . . . Spectator worship has been and always will be an oxymoron."[3]

The normal church service today is like a congregation watching a "show" at the theatre:

> People patiently scan the church bulletin and read the names of the pastoral staff and an outline of the sermon … Then the moment everyone is waiting for begins! People look up to the stage and sit as they watch Act I start with the band and the band leader cheerfully singing a few songs. Act II includes announcements and promotion about various upcoming church events. . . . Act III features the main star (the preacher), who comes out and gives the sermon. . . . The show ends, and then we are dismissed (Kimball 2004:75).

Most emerging churches sufficiently recognise the danger of this type of worship, and try to plan and practise a new worship style, which incorporates the positive participation of the congregation, as opposed to a passive worship. In this regard, emerging churches prefer to use the term '*gathering*' or '*worship gathering*' instead of the term of 'worship service' (Kim 2007:8).

The Pauline approach to worship encourages maximum participation. Guided by the Spirit, everyone in the body is encouraged to make a contribution (Liesch 1993:73). Paul provides a good illustration of this approach in 1

[3] A phrase, which combines two words that seem to be the opposite of each other.

Corinthians 14:26 (NIV): "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, *everyone* has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (own emphasis).

2.2. Conversation: Evangelism as an interfaith dialogue rather than a verbal message

Proponents of the Emerging Church Movement refer to evangelism as a *conversation,* because of its emphasis on interfaith dialogue rather than verbal evangelism. The movement's participants claim they are creating a safe environment for those with opinions ordinarily rejected within modern conservative evangelicalism. Non-critical, interfaith dialogue is favoured over dogmatically-driven evangelism in the movement. Emergents do not engage in apologetics or confrontational evangelism in the traditional sense, preferring to allow persons the freedom to discover their faith through conversation and witness (*Emerging Church* 2006).

Kimball (2003:201) explains how in the past many churches have focused their evangelistic efforts on getting people (pre-Christians) to attend services. However, if post-Christians are not interested in attending our services, then we need radical changes in our evangelistic strategy. He summarises these changes as follows:

Modern Church	Emerging Church
Evangelism is an event that you invite people to.	Evangelism is a process that occurs through relationship, trust and example.
Evangelism is primarily concerned with getting people into heaven.	Evangelism is concerned with people's experiencing the reality of living under the reign of his kingdom now.
Evangelism is focused on pre-Christians.	Evangelism is focused on post-Christians.
Evangelism is done by evangelists.	Evangelism is done by disciples.
Evangelism is something you do in addition to discipleship.	Evangelism is part of being a disciple.
Evangelism is a message.	Evangelism is a conversation.
Evangelism uses reason and proofs for apologetics.	Evangelism uses the church being the church as the primary apologetic.
Missions is a department of the church. Jesus died for your sins so that you can go to heaven when you die. (Modern church focus of the gospel message.)	The church is a mission. Jesus died for your sins so that you can be his redeemed coworker now in what he is doing in this world and spend eternity with the one you are giving your life to in heaven when [you] die. (Emerging church focus of the gospel message.)

Table 3: Paradigm Shift in Evangelism Strategy (Kimball 2003)

Brian McLaren is among those who vigorously advocate of the “Emerging Church” approach to evangelism. However, it could be argued that he goes too far when he states the following:

> I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and

> remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts … rather than resolving the paradox via pronouncements on the eternal destiny of people more convinced by or loyal to other religions than ours, we simply move on (McLaren 2004:260, 262).

Oakland's (2007b) expresses his concern about the Emerging Church's evangelisation programme. He indicates that walls that once separated biblical Christianity from pagan religions are being demolished. The narrow way that Jesus proclaimed leads to heaven through faith in Him alone has now been broadened to permit open access for the sake of establishing the "kingdom" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Steve Addison cited in Wayne (2006) summarises evangelism in the Emerging Church as follows:

- Evangelism has more to do with presence than proclamation; more to do with lifestyle than words; more to do with engagement than conversion.
- Evangelism is redefined as remaining open to God at work in other religions. Remaining open to being evangelised by other faiths.

2.3. Liberty: Liberty of movements in *worship gatherings*

In most emerging worship gatherings, people aren't forced to remain stationary in their seats for the whole meeting. During the service people are allowed to leave their seats to go to prayer stations to pray on their own, write out prayers, pray with others or go to an art station, where they can artistically express worship, while worship music plays in the background (Kimball 2004:89-90).

In some Emerging Churches people are encouraged to walk the *labyrinth*. The labyrinth is a structure that is growing in popularity, used during times of contemplative prayer.

Walking the labyrinth has been described as follows: The participant walks through the maze-like structure until he or she comes to the centre, and then back again. Often prayer stations with

candles, icons, pictures, etc., can be visited along the way. The labyrinth originated in early pagan societies. The usual scenario calls for the *pray*-er to do some sort of meditation, enabling him or her to center down (i.e., reach God's presence), while reaching the centre of the labyrinth (Oakland 2007a: 67).

The questions arises: Should a Christian be involved in such "walking meditation" or should this practice be regarded as suspect by the Christian? From a Biblical perspective, in Deuteronomy 12:1-14, God commands us clearly not to participate in anything that has ever been used in pagan ritual for worship. From early times the labyrinth has been used as a tool of divination, a gateway to communicating with other spirits. It was incorporated into the Roman Catholic experience at a time when there was little understanding of the Bible (Muse 2007).

2.4. Experience: Multi-sensory oriented worship gatherings (Creating as Created Beings)

Henri Nouwen (cited in Kimball 2003:156) states that, "more and more people have realized that what they need is much more than interesting sermons and prayers. They wonder how they might really experience God."

Stimulating images that provide spiritual experiences are an essential part of the Emerging Church. Many churches are darkening their sanctuaries and setting up prayer stations with candles, incense, and icons (Oakland 2007a: 65).

God created us as multi-sensory creatures and chose to reveal Himself to us through our senses. Therefore, it is only natural that we should worship him using all of our senses (Kimball 2003:128). In 1 John 1:1 (NIV) we read, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

The emerging church embraces multi-sensory worship. Participation and experience are very important to people in emerging generations, in all areas of life. Kimball (2004:81) indicates that multi-sensory worship involves

seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and experiencing. This means that our worship of God can involve singing, silence, preaching, and art, and hence encompasses a wide spectrum of expression.

According to Sweet, a "spiritual awakening" is impacting the post-modern generation and is characterised by a hunger for experience. He writes:

> A spiritual tsunami has hit postmodern culture. . . . The wave is this: People want to *know* God. . . . Post-moderns want something more than new products; they want new experiences of the divine (Sweet 1999:420).

Julie Sevig claims that post-moderns prefer to encounter Christ by using all their senses. She argues that the following aspects of classical liturgical or contemplative worship appeal to them: "the incense and candles, making the sign of the cross, the taste and smell of the bread and wine, touching icons and being anointed with oil" (Sevig 2001).

Mark Driscoll cited in Oakland (2007a: 66) summarises multi-sensory worship as, "Everything in the service needs to preach – architecture, lighting, songs, prayers, fellowship, the smell—it all preaches. All five senses must be engaged to experience God."

Kimball (2003:185) offers the following suggestions that show how the "modern church" should adjust and move towards a "no-holds-barred approach" to worship:

- Services designed to be user-friendly and contemporary must change to services that are designed to be experiential and spiritual-mystical.
- Stained-glass windows that were taken out of churches and replaced with video screens should now be brought back into the church on video screens.
- Lit up and cheery sanctuaries need to be darkened because darkness is valued and displays a sense of spirituality.
- The focal point of the service that was the sermon must be changed so that the focal point of the service is a holistic experience.

- Use of modern technology that was used to communicate with a contemporary flare must change so that church attendees can experience the ancient and mystical (and use technology to do so).

From the above it appears that the Emerging Church is more experience-based than Bible-based. It is also apparent that in the Emerging Church the Word of God takes a secondary position to the worship of God. Oakland indicates his concern about this trend in worship. He states that deviating from the Word of God for extra-biblical experiences could open the door to deception. While worshipping God is an essential part of the Christian faith, there can be problems, if worship supersedes the Word of God (Oakland 2007c).

2.5. Communion: The Eucharist as a Core of the Emerging *Worship Gathering*

Before the Reformation, the Eucharist was central to worship. In modern churches today, communion has become so formal that it has lost its beauty. The wonder of remembering, what Jesus did, has faded away. However, there is a growing desire among emerging generations for the Lord's Supper to become the centre of worship once more (Kimball 2004:94).

There is a lack of agreement in today's Church regarding the nature of the Communion. For example, the Catholic position regarding the Eucharist is as follows:

> According to the Roman Catholic Church, when the bread and wine are consecrated in the Eucharist, they cease to be bread and wine, and become instead the body and blood of Christ. . . . The mysterious change of the reality of the bread and wine began to be called "transubstantiation" in the Eleventh Century (*Eucharist* 2007).

On the other hand, many Protestants do not believe that Christ's body and blood are *physically* present in the Lord's Supper. Rather they believe that Jesus is *spiritually* present:

> Many Reformed Christians, who follow John Calvin hold that Christ's body and blood are not physically present in the

> Eucharist. The elements are only symbols of the reality, which is spiritual nourishment in Christ (*Eucharist* 2007).

Dr. Webber (2005:10) states that to be a successful part of the Emerging Church Movement, one needs to "rediscover the central nature of the table of the Lord in the Lord's Supper, breaking of bread, communion and Eucharist." However, Dr Webber's reference to the rediscovery of the Eucharist reminds one of the Roman Catholic "new evangelisation program" presently underway to win the "separated brethren" back to the "Mother of All Churches".

According to Oakland (2007a:122), the Catholic Church plans to establish the kingdom of God on earth and win the world to the Catholic Jesus (The Eucharistic Christ). He claims that this will be accomplished when the world comes under the rule and reign of Rome and the Eucharist Jesus. The Eucharist Jesus is supposedly the presence of Christ, through the power of *transubstantiation*, which is the focal point of the Mass.

2.6. Traditions: Reflecting on Liturgy, Ancient Disciplines, Christian Calendar, and Jewish Roots

Many modern churches have basically ignored the worship practices of the historical church. They have limited discipleship by focusing on the disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, giving, and serving. They have neglected many of the disciplines of the historical church, such as weekly fasting, practising silence, and *lectio divina* [4] (Kimball 2003:223).

Dr Webber claims that to be a successful part of the Emerging Church there needs to be a rediscovery of congregational spirituality through the Christian celebration of Traditions, such as Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost (Webber 2005:10).

According to Dan Kimball, the *Emerging Worship* is often called *Vintage-Faith Worship* for the following reason. Ironically, emerging generations living in post-modern times tend to love and admire ancient tradition. Hence the desired approach to worship in the emerging church worship is a revival of

[4] *Lectio Divina* means "Divine Reading" and refers specifically to a method of Scripture reading practised by monastics since the beginning of the Church.

liturgy and other ancient disciplines, brought back with life and meaning (Kimball 2004:92).

Oakland (2007c) confirms this trend in the worship style of the post-modern generation. He indicates that while purpose-driven evangelists removed crosses and other Christian symbols from church services to be seeker-friendly, the post-modern generation, are apparently attracted to crosses, candles, stained glass, liturgy, and sacraments (Oakland 2007c).

It appears that the goal of the Emerging Church is to reintroduce an "Ancient-Future" faith based on the ideas, dogmas, traditions and views of the Early Church Fathers, rather than going back to the inspired Word of God (Oakland 2007c). However, Oakland (2007a: 80) issues the following word of caution:

> If the church that emerged from the New Testament was based on ideas and beliefs foreign to Scripture, why would we want to emulate a previous error? When doctrines of men replace the doctrine of Scripture, many are led astray. It has happened in the past, and it is happening now. Following doctrine not based on the Word of God always results in the undoing of faith.

2.7. Images: Making a sacred space for the worship gathering

Images and the visual arts are considered very important in the worship gathering of emerging churches, as they pursue a sacred space of worship. "Emerging generations are very visual. They crave a sense of mystery and wonder as they worship God" (Kimball 2004:78).

The emerging generation desires a spiritual environment for worship. In emerging worship candles are often placed all around the room, so as not to focus on the stage. They are used for decorating worship spaces to create a sense of mystery. The value of worship in emerging worship gatherings is seen in the décor and layout of the room. Usually candles are used to portray the seriousness of worship. They all represent the light of Jesus in a dark world (Kimball 2004:80).

As an expression of worship the Emerging Church provides numerous art forms and visuals to create a sacred space for the worship gathering. These

visuals may include still images, video clips of symbols. There may be a sequence of images of the cross reminding people that the reason they are there is to remember and focus on the risen Jesus (Kimball 2004:84).

It appears that the Emerging Church is in the process of converting their culture from word-centred to image-centred. In this regard, it would be wise for them to reflect on the following Mosaic injunction:

> Certainly the Old Testament, that is with regard to the instruction that God mediated through Moses to the nation of Israel, is categorically opposed to both any visual representation of God and the resultant worship of God by means of such an idol (Exod. 20:4-6) (Horner 2007).

2.8. Contemplative Prayer: Stressing prayer and participation in spiritual activities

Another common theme woven throughout emerging worship gatherings is the emphasis on prayer. Much time is given for people to slow down, quiet their hearts, and then pray at various stations and with others. Each person needs to allow the Spirit to convict or encourage his or her heart after a message – rather than rush out the door (Kimball 2004:94). Prayer is therefore an important element in the Emerging Church. The Emerging worship gathering is well planned and provides plenty of time for people to slow down.

Contemplative prayer is a vital element of the Emerging Church and openly integrates the spiritual practices of other religions. Many involved in contemplative and centering prayer find their influence and practices from eastern mystics and Roman Catholic mystics (monks) (*The Issue of other Religious Practices* 2006).

Brian McLaren (2004:255) elaborates:

> Western Christianity has (for the last few centuries anyway) said relatively little about mindfulness and meditative practices, about which Zen Buddhism has said much. To talk about different things is not to contradict one another; it is, rather, to have much to offer one another, on occasion at least.

It is clear that McLaren is promoting is an exchange of spiritual practices. Being open to other spiritual practices often translates into incorporating other religions into the Christian Faith. Although he does not openly reject the fundamentals of Christianity, it appears that they lie deeply buried beneath the new teachings and practices of a new spirituality for their post-modern outreach (*The Issue of other Religious Practices* 2006).

Centering prayer is a method of prayer, which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence. It is supposed to lead a person into contemplation. The person tries to ignore all thoughts and feelings - the thinking process is suspended. It is a spiritual process that is supposed to put the ordinary person into direct contact with God - to enter and receive a direct experience of union with God (Feaster 2007; *The issue of other Religious Practices* 2006).

It appears that the underlying premise of contemplative spirituality is panentheism - the belief that God is in all things and in all people (Oakland 2007c). This explains why mystics say, all is one. At the mystical level, they experience this God-force that seems to flow through everything and everybody. All creation has God in it as a living, vital presence. It is just hidden (Yungen 2007).

The theological implications of this worldview put it at direct odds with biblical Christianity. The Bible makes it clear that only one true God exists, and His identity is not in everyone. Furthermore, the fullness of God's identity, in bodily form, rests in Jesus Christ alone (Col 2:9). The Bible clearly teaches the only deity in man is Jesus Christ who dwells in the believer. Jesus also made it clear that not everyone will be born again and have God's Spirit (John 3). However, the panentheist believes that all people and everything have the identity of God within them (Yungen 2006).

3. Conclusion

It is clear that the Emerging Church Movement cannot be ignored. It has the potential to reshape Christianity. What can Today's Church learn from the Emerging Church with regard to worship? In Matthew 9:17 (NIV) Jesus indicates that: "Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do,

the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Kimball (2004:9) applies Matthew 9:17 to *Emerging worship* in the following way:

> Jesus used a metaphor of new wineskins to describe the different approaches to God that he introduced. The emerging church provides new wineskins for worship. These new wineskins are needed in response to our new postmoden culture.

On the other hand, appropriate contextualisation *also* implies, "adapting my communication of the gospel without changing its essential character" (Keller 2004). In short, we must retain the essentials and adapt the non-essentials.

According the Kim, culture is like the wineskins, not an object to be neglected and destroyed by new wine, the gospel. As the gospel of Matthew indicates, both the new wine (gospel/worship/Christ) and the new wineskins (culture/context) should be preserved. In this respect, it seems that the emerging church is endeavouring to practise this teaching of Jesus regarding worship (Kim 2007:17).

In this paper an attempt was made to answer the question: Is *Emerging Worship* a modern-day Revival or is it merely a Return to Ancient Traditions? From the above evaluation it appears that *Emerging Worship* has the following strengths and weaknesses (See also the Table at the end of the paper):

Strengths

1. Emphasis on the Lord's Supper
2. A commitment to contextualising the gospel, especially amongst post-moderns.
3. A wide scope of experiences in the expression of worship is provided.
4. Emphasis on authentic spirituality and reverent prayer.
5. A commendable example of lifestyle evangelism and emulating Christ.
6. Positive worship through Liturgy and Ancient Church Traditions.

Weaknesses

1. Worship is based more on Experience and Ancient Traditions than on the Word.
2. Tends to confuse cultural accommodation with cultural immersion.
3. Tends to promote synchretistic spiritual beliefs and practices.
4. An increased use of images in worship can easily lead to idolatry.
5. Greater freedom in worship tends to downplay the role of church leadership.
6. The major purposes of the church are regarded as worship and edification, rather than the proclamation of the gospel.

What can Christians learn from Emerging Worship? Amongst other things, Christians need to learn how to contextualise their worship services to meet the needs of our post-modern culture by adopting new approaches to God. However, in this process believers need to be careful to remain biblical and retain the essential character of the gospel in their worship practices.

Characteristic of Emergent Church Worship	Strengths (Revival)	Weaknesses (Regression)
Engagement	Positive participation in worship	Lack of preaching The Word of God takes a secondary position to corporate worship
Conversation	Interfaith dialogue Contextualises the gospel Cultural *accommodation*	Open access to the Kingdom of God Syncretises the gospel Cultural *immersion*
Liberty (of movement)	Free and dynamic movement between elements of worship	The use of eastern mystical practices (e.g., the labyrinth) A search for one's own identity
Experience	Multi-sensory oriented worship Wide scope of expression in worship (e.g., singing, silence, preaching, arts)	Worship is more experience-based than Word-based
Communion	The centrality of the Lord's Supper (thanksgiving and remembrance)	Protestants led back to Rome The Eucharistic reign of Christ The doctrine of transubstantiation
Traditions	Return to ancient traditions Positive worship through liturgy	Worship is based more on ancient traditions than on the Bible
Images	Using symbols (e.g., the cross) to create a sacred space for worship (the ancient feeling of reverence)	The danger of idolatry Worshipping the image (an idol) instead of God
Contemplative prayer	Emphasis on prayer	Synchretistic spirituality Using eastern meditative practices (e.g., centring prayer)

Works Cited

About Emergent Village. 2007. Accessed from www.emergentvillage.com/about/, 2007-04-30.

Caldwell N (ed.) 2006. New times call for new churches: Q&A with Leonard Sweet. *Virginia Advocate* 174 (10):6. Accessed from http://www.vaumc.org/repository/UMCom/AdvocateOnline/AdvOct2006-LowRes72.pdf, 2007-12-24.

Emerging Church. 2006. Accessed from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church, 2006-05-30.

Eucharist. 2007. Accessed from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucharist, 2007-12-27.

Feaster MA 2007. *A closer look at centering prayer*. Accessed from www.catholicculture.org/library/view.cfm?recnum=6337, 2007-12-07.

Horner, B E 2007. *Mel Gibson's Passion of Christ: reasons why it is an invalid gospel medium*. Accessed from www.bunyanministries.org/articles/passion_of_christ.pdf, 2007-12-27.

Keller T 2004. *Advancing the gospel into the 21st century, part 3*. Accessed from www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/feb/advancingthegospel_3.html, 2007-12-27.

Kim NJ 2007. *The changing face of worship: emerging church and worship gathering*. Accessed from http://doingtheology.co.kr/jboard/download.php?file_name=Final%20Paper-Emerging%20Church.pdf&file_size=1391736&code=otherpaper, 2007-11-07.

Kimball D 2003. *The emerging church: vintage Christianity for new generations*. Zondervan.

_____ 2004. *Emerging worship: creating worship gatherings for new generations*. Zondervan.

Kimball D and Fox J 2007. *Vintage faith: exploring the emerging church and vintage Christianity*. Accessed from www.vintagefaith.com/whatis.html, 2007-11-07.

Liesch B 1993. A structure runs through it. *Leadership* 14:100-105.

McKnight S 2007. Five streams of the emerging church. C*hristian Today* 51(2):1-6.

McLaren BD 2004. *A generous orthodoxy*. Zondervan.

Muse S 2007. *The Labyrinth: a walk of life or a walk to death?* Accessed from www.crossroad.to/articles2/04/labyrinth-muse.htm, 2007-11-27.

Oakland, R 2007a. *Faith undone*. Silverton, Oregon: Lighthouse Trails Publishing.

_____ 2007b. *The inclusive gospel*. Accessed from www.understandingthetimes/commentary/c66.shtml, 2007-12-03.

_____ 2007c. *The emerging church: revival of return to darkness*. Accessed from www.understandthetimes.org/commentary/c29.shtml, 2007-12-07.

Sevig JB 2001. Ancient new. *The Lutheran,* September. Accessed from www.thelutheran.org/0109/page36.html, 2007-12-27.

Sweet, L 1999. *Soul tsunami. Sink or swim in new millennium culture*. Zondervan.

_____ 2000. *Post-modern pilgrims: first century passion for the 21st century world*. Broadman and Holman.

Taylor J 2006. *An emergent church primer*. Accessed from http://9marks.org/, 2007-04-29.

The issue of other religious practices as worship in the church. 2006. Accessed from www.letusreason.org/current74.htm, 2007-12-27.

The NIV Bible. 1985. Zondervan.

Wayne, D 2006. *Evangelism and the Emerging Church*. Accessed from http://jollyblogger.typepad.com/jollyblogger/2006/04/evangelism_and_.html, 2007-12-27.

Webber R 2005. Wanted ancient-future talent. *Worship Leader* 10.

Yungen R 2006. *God in all things? The premise for contemplative spirituality*. Accessed from www.kies.co.za/god%/20in%20all%20things.pdf, 2007-12-31.

_____ 2007. *God in everything? The premise of contemplative prayer*. Accessed from www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/interspirituality.htm, 2007-12-27.

Book Review
A Letter to Africa about Africa

Kevin Gary Smith

Munza K 2008. *A letter to Africa about Africa*. Johannesburg: Trans-World Radio. (78 pages)

The objective of this short book is to argue that the root cause of the social evils that afflict Africa have their roots in an unbiblical worldview, and the appropriate treatment is "theotherapy", helping African Christians to embrace a biblical worldview.

The author begins with a brief chapter outlining the technological, economic, social and medical ills of Africa. Turning to the common reasons for these problems, he rejects colonialism, a spiritual curse, lack of education and poverty as candidates for the primary cause of these ills, regarding them as symptoms rather than the disease itself. He proposes that the traditional African worldview is the primary cause.

Much of the remainder of the book is devoted to exploring the traditional African worldview and its implications. Munza summarises the African worldview as a cycle of life between two worlds, the temporary physical world and the spiritual world (home). Birth and death are gateways between these two worlds. He explains how these beliefs promote lack of development, spread of disease and rejection of western medicine, power struggles and wars, fatalism, cannibalism, and other ills.

After briefly describing his conversion and personal change of worldview, Munza offers his interpretation of a biblical worldview, focusing on a biblical perspective on the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms, and a linear view of life and death. Much of the latter half of the book addresses

the question, “How can we help African Christians develop a biblical worldview?”

A Letter to Africa about Africa is a short, reader-friendly book[let] that can be read in an hour. The book's presentation of the traditional African worldview and how it limits peace and progress is enlightening. This is its greatest value; it is worth reading just for this insight. I found the analysis of complex problems in the latter half of the book simplistic and unconvincing, littered with sweeping, unsubstantiated claims.

Does the book achieve its purpose of arguing for a change of worldview as the solution to Africa's problems? Although philosophically I agree with this premise, I think the argument for it is weakened by the simplistic analysis of complex problems. Munza does expose that without a change of worldview, the ills of the continent will continue, but I was disappointed with his case for “theotherapy”.