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Contents

Panel of Referees

Liberty of Conscience and the Doctrine of Scripture in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA)[1]

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Abstract

This essay examines two questions. First, what is the nature of the Baptist principle "liberty of conscience" or "religious liberty," and how is the principle meant to be understood in the context of the church's ongoing mandate to "defend the faith"? Second, how, if at all, has the principle of liberty of conscience impacted on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA? Based on the authors' examination of the data, they conclude that formulating a doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture to defend relevantly the authority of the same, does not threaten liberty of conscience. Also, they argue that it is theologically erroneous and out of line with the historic Baptist understanding of religious liberty to assert that defining a doctrine of Scripture will undermine the latter principle. Moreover, the authors maintain that to insist otherwise is fundamentally inconsistent, as the BUSA has adopted definite views on other doctrines, such as church government.

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[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.

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1. Introduction

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) consists of over 650 churches in the Southern Africa region. The majority of churches are from South Africa, but other countries include Zimbabwe and Zambia. The 1877 Constitution of the Baptist Union included a Declaration of Principle, which states that the basis of the Union is the unique and absolute authority of Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It also states that each of the churches has liberty to interpret Christ's laws for themselves (BUSA 1989:5). This declaration highlights two cherished Baptist principles, namely, the primacy of the Scriptures and liberty of conscience.

Baptists have generally been characterized as upholding the supremacy of the authority of Scripture in all matters of life and faith (Hudson-Reed 1983:357). BUSA has historically also sought to uphold this tradition. A 1986 survey of the BUSA (a sample of pastors, ministerial students at the Baptist Theological College, and lay people) showed that the overwhelming majority of members believed the doctrine of Scripture to be of "primary importance" (Miller 1987:167). This statement reflects the belief that the doctrine of Scripture is absolutely essential to the spiritual health of the BUSA. The BUSA has, however, had to grapple with the doctrine of Scripture, and the issue of inerrancy in particular. In brief, the term "inerrancy" refers to the fact that Scripture is "wholly true and without error" in all that it speaks to (Geisler and Nix 1986:52).

Since 1930, a number of controversies have erupted in the BUSA over the doctrine of Scripture. Some of these controversies are discussed later. These controversies and debates have resulted in numerous proposals to clarify and define the doctrinal statement on Scripture. These attempts, however, have not been successful.

One of the main Baptist principles that has hindered updating the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA is the second one noted earlier, namely, that of "liberty of conscience" (Miller 1987:68, 152). For example, during the 1957 attempt by the Executive to introduce stricter standards to be applied to ministerial applications, it was objected that it violated "the Baptist Principle of Freedom of Conscience or individual liberty" (Miller 1987:68). Again, in the 1986

survey of the Union, 16 percent of the respondents believed that requiring a particular view of Scripture would restrict the liberty of the churches in the Union to interpret the Bible for themselves (Miller 1987:101). Thus, the main issue was that some members of the Union were concerned that the proposed doctrinal formulations would restrict their liberty to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, and so violate one of the basic founding principles of the Union.

The primary subject investigated in this essay is the apparently conflicting principles in the BUSA, namely, the need to promote doctrinal orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of Scripture and yet uphold liberty of conscience. In this regard, two questions need to be explored. First, what is the nature of the Baptist principle "liberty of conscience" or "religious liberty"? Expressed differently, what are its theological and historical foundations, and how is the principle meant to be understood in the context of the churches' ongoing mandate to "defend the faith" relevantly in each generation? Second, how, if at all, has the principle of liberty of conscience impacted on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA? Put another way, what are the attitudes in the BUSA regarding "liberty of conscience," the doctrine of Scripture, their respective priorities, and the need to promote orthodoxy?

2. Understanding liberty of conscience

Theological discussions on religious liberty are often complicated and confused by a lack of precision. Terms are either used interchangeably or given differing meanings. The terms and definitions proposed by De Albornoz (1963, ch. 2) are adopted in this essay, as they provide clearly defined terminology for distinguishing between concepts that facilitate the complex debates raised by religious liberty.

Accordingly, "liberty of conscience" means "pure religious liberty," which is a "supreme value," and denotes man's essential relations with God (De Albornoz 1963:22). Thus, liberty of conscience is a social (or external) religious freedom that allows individuals to determine their faith freely (an activity in the inner being or soul of man, called "soul competency"). General religious liberty coupled with "basic human rights," such as right of expression, right of association, and right of corporate freedom, give rise to

"liberty of religious expression," "liberty of religious association," and "corporate and institutional religious freedom" (de Albornoz 1963:23-25).

These distinctions allow "pure religious liberty" (or liberty of conscience) to be seen as a supreme right that must be unlimited and unrestricted, while yet allowing for other religious liberties such as freedom of expression and association to be limited to some extent by the state to protect society from abuse (de Albornoz 1963:25). These terms and concepts were adopted in an attempt to reconcile those who saw all aspects of religious liberty as a fundamental right that should be unrestricted, and those who believed that there are necessary restrictions on some aspects of religious liberty. In the following section, the biblical basis for understanding liberty of conscience and Christian liberty will be briefly articulated. This will be followed by an overview o the early Baptist view of liberty of conscience.

2.1. Scriptural foundations

2.1.1. Liberty of conscience

Romans 14:10b-12 states that each person shall appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of himself or herself to God. These verses highlight a number of points that are essential for the discussion at hand. First, the passage introduces the concept of the final judgement (Murray 1965:184), which will result in God assigning each person to either heaven or hell (Matt 25:31-46). Heaven is represented as an "eternal kingdom" prepared for God's people, and hell as "everlasting fire." These concepts of everlasting bliss or eternal torment stress the overwhelming, ultimate significance of the judgement seat of Christ, and thus the ultimate significance of every person giving an account of himself.[4]

Second, Romans 14:10b-12 indicates a strong individualism, namely that every person will give an account of himself to God. Regardless of whatever corporate or communal themes are also reflected in Scripture, in the final judgement every person will stand alone before their Maker. Third, at this

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[4] Because of the absence of an English common gender, third person singular pronouns, masculine forms are used where both genders are included.

final judgement, every person will give a personal account of all his deeds to God (2 Cor 5:10). No aspect of their lives will be exempt from divine scrutiny. The passage also emphasises that this account will be rendered *to God*, and not to people (Murray 1965:185). Fourth, and most importantly, those who judge believers (keeping in mind the context of Romans 14:10b-12) usurp the authority that belongs to God alone and "put themselves in the place of God" (Dunn 1988:809). Those who do this will themselves come before the judgement seat of Christ. This indicates the serious nature of people trying to interfere in the relationship between God and people.

In light of the preceding information, Romans 14:10b-12 teaches that every person has a responsibility to walk before God (termed "soul competency") and to give an account of himself to Him. Because the issue involves the most fundamental and ultimate relationship (between God and man) and results in an ultimate destiny (heaven or hell), each person should be given the freedom by society to exercise this responsibility according to his conscience (termed "liberty of conscience").

2.1.2. Religious liberty and the state

Romans 13:1-7 states that human governments are ordained by God and are His servants. Thus, every person is to be subject to them. However, this subservience is not unqualified. For instance, the state is the servant of God, and the Scriptures delineate its sphere of authority and function, namely, to promote "good" and punish "evil." The latter notwithstanding, "good" and "evil" in this context must be qualified to mean maintaining general law and order (Murray 1965:151) and ensuring justice for all (Dunn 1988:771; Waldron 1989:286). The main reason for this conclusion is that the sword is the instrument the state has been given to punish "evil." A sword is not an instrument to mould the conscience of people, but to punish external acts of evil against others (Waldron 1989:294).

The preceding statements are made against the backdrop of a complicating factor, namely, that the state exercises its function in a world tainted by sin. This is a circumstance in which rights and liberties are often perversely abused to the harm of society. Thus, the state has to impose limits on outward religious acts to provide some protection against abuse, which could obviously

deprive others of their liberties. From a Christian (and particularly a Baptist) perspective, the governing principle in the matter is that the state must "preserve civil justice and peace and protect men from violence to their bodies and property" (Waldron 1989:294).

Consequently, the state must allow not only allow full liberty of conscience for each individual, but also allow general religious liberty for all people. The latter is particularly so in terms of outward religious acts, communication, association and institutions, *as long as they do not jeopardise civil peace and justice*. Of course, "civil peace" and "justice" are terms that need to be carefully defined. From this Christian perspective, the church and state are both servants under God, and must allow each other to operate in their respective spheres, with the Word of God governing the relationship between the two.

2.1.3. Christian liberty

Galatians 5:13-14 teaches that Christians have been called to liberty. However, this liberty should not be used as an opportunity to indulge the sinful nature, but rather to serve one another in love. Importantly, this love fulfils the *law* of God. The first and most obvious point arising from these truths is that unbelievers do not enjoy the liberty spoken of in the biblical text. It is a liberty purchased by Christ (Gal 5:1), and only those spiritually united to Him by faith enjoy the benefits thereof.

The context indicates that this Christian liberty consists of a freedom from servile bondage to the law (v. 1), and by implication the legalistic teachings of people on the law (cf. 4:17). A more systematic study of Christian liberty shows that it consists (amongst other things) in freedom from the law as a means of salvation, from the doctrines of people, and from the guilt and dominion of sin (Rom 3:19-26; 1 Cor 7:23; Col 1:13).

That being the case, a careful study of Galatians 5:13-14 leads to the seemingly paradoxical view that Christian liberty is not without limits. It has clear boundaries. In particular, true liberty never leads to the indulgence of the sinful nature, but rather to serving one another in love. Thus, Christian liberty is not unrestricted. The Bible indicates that sin and error lead to bondage (John

8:32-34). Accordingly, true Christian liberty, by definition, should never lead to spiritual bondage. Expressed differently, it must never be seen as freedom to indulge in sin or to believe any doctrine.

The preceding truths have important implications for the church. The role of the state with reference to liberty of conscience and religious liberty was discussed earlier. The role of the church can now be delineated with respect to Christian liberty. To reiterate an earlier point, Christian liberty does not consist in freedom to indulge sin or believe any doctrine. Consequently, Christ has mandated the church to exercise discipline against professing believers who deviate significantly from the faith or who practice open sin. For that reason, the church is tasked to defend the faith (1 Tim 6:20) and uphold Christ's moral values (Gal 5:19-21). This does not conflict with Christian liberty, but rather protects Christian liberty, for sin and error lead people into spiritual bondage.

2.1.4. Summary

Liberty of conscience and religious liberty are issues that primarily need to be seen from the perspective of *the state*. Liberty of conscience should be seen as an ultimate value by the state and it should be extended it to every person without restriction. Liberty of conscience refers to the freedom every individual should enjoy to exercise his responsibility to walk before God as his conscience dictates. Liberty of conscience, however, finds expression in outward religious acts, which impact on society. As the state has a God-given responsibility over society, certain restrictions may be placed on these external acts. These restrictions should relate primarily to maintaining civil obedience and justice. Anything beyond these restrictions would impact negatively on liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

In light of these truths, the church has a responsibility to defend the faith relevantly and exercise biblical discipline. In doing so, Christian liberty is protected, for true spiritual liberty is undermined by sin and error. Christian liberty can never biblically be understood as the right believers have to do or believe whatever they please. In pursuing this mandate of defending the faith, liberty of conscience is not undermined, especially as long as church membership is voluntary.

Furthermore, the discipline that the church has been mandated to impose is separation, not physical punishment. Each Christian church or organisation would also need to differentiate carefully between essential doctrines and secondary issues, which allow differences of belief on issues not essential to the Christian faith. These observations indicate there is no conflict in Scripture between the state granting full liberty of conscience to every individual, and the church defending the faith and exercising discipline against those who have voluntarily joined a church and professed to follow Christ.

The following section gives a brief analysis of the early Baptist views on the relationship between liberty of conscience and promoting doctrinal orthodoxy. For the purposes of this essay, only the writings of some of the Anabaptists and the early English Baptists will be analysed.

2.2. The early Baptists

2.2.1. The Anabaptists

In 1524, Conrad Grebel wrote to Thomas Müntzer concerning church practice. He expressed the view that a church should not be formed with "command or compulsion," but by following the word of God and prayer. Scripture was sufficient to instruct and govern all types of people. Those believers that would not follow the rule of the word of God were to be admonished and then excommunicated. Grebel expressly taught that excommunication was the only form of discipline for the church, as those disciplined "should not be killed" but left alone (Bender 1970:6-7). It is important to note that Grebel saw liberty of conscience primarily in relation to the role of the state, and the maintenance of scriptural standards (either doctrinal or moral) as the role of the church.

Felix Manz held similar views. In his petition to the Zurich *Council* in 1524, he requested that those of other faiths be left undisturbed, and specifically that those holding to other beliefs (such as on baptism) should not be suppressed with force. Rather, if the word of God would be allowed to "speak of itself freely and singly," no one would be able to withstand it (Bender 1970:8).

Hans Denk, described by Bender (1970:9) as one of the gentlest and most attractive figures of the Reformation period, gives greater insight into the

theological understanding of religious liberty and liberty of conscience in Anabaptist thought. He believed that in matters of faith "everything should be voluntary and uncompelled" (Bender 1970:10). The very nature and essence of faith was that it could not be forced upon a person, but rather had to be a voluntary act. This view of faith was fundamental to the Anabaptist justification for religious liberty. However, it must be cautioned that Denk did not have a high regard for Scripture, but rather favoured the "inner word" of the Spirit as the basis for Christianity (Needham 2004:287).

Kilian Aurbacher elaborates further on the grounds of religious liberty. In a letter dated 1534, he believed that it is never correct to compel people in matters of faith, as every person would bear his own guilt before God when He came to judge (Bender 1970:10-11). This is a clear belief of the doctrine of "soul competency" upon which liberty of conscience and religious liberty rests.

Menno Simmons argued for religious liberty from three main perspectives. First, he understood faith to be a gift from God. From this understanding, he concluded that faith could not be forced, and that the *state* should therefore not use force to compel faith. Rather, he frequently pleaded for tolerance and religious liberty (Bender 1970:16-17). Second, he argued from the example of Christ. Simmons often challenged his opponents to show where Christ either taught the use of the sword or practiced it (Hudson-Reed 1989:89). Third, Simmons justified religious liberty from the fact that Christians are called to love others, even their enemies. This is incompatible with the use of the sword to compel faith (Bender 1970:15).

While upholding religious liberty, Simmons nevertheless believed in upholding orthodoxy and church discipline. For example, he believed that when a person joined the church, they were to accept the "group discipline" *according to the New Testament*. Simmons also severely criticised the state churches for their beliefs and practices, though he acknowledged that they could include many genuine believers (Bender 1970:15). It has to been noted, however, that legitimate criticism can be raised against Simmons and many of his followers for "excessive strictness" at times. They would exercise discipline for issues that had no scriptural precedent, such as details of shaving, dress codes, and the like (Vedder 1969:191-192). Nevertheless, it is

clear that Simmons did not consider maintaining Christian standards to be in conflict with liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

The pastoral covering letter of the Schleitheim Confession (produced by the Anabaptists in 1527) captures many of the sentiments expressed earlier. The Confession was produced to protect the true children of God from "false brethren" among them who had turned aside from "the faith" in the way they exercised their "*freedom* of the Spirit of Christ." According to the letter, these false brethren thought that "love and faith may permit and do everything." (Needham 2004:303-304). The Confession was therefore produced to warn and protect believers. Clearly, the Swiss Anabaptists did not believe that Christian's could believe or practice anything they pleased under the pretence of freedom. Biblical Christian freedom is bound by the truth and moral purity. Thus, the Swiss Anabaptists produced a Confession to formally express what they believed Scripture taught on various issues.

The clear conclusion to be drawn from the belief and practice of the Anabaptists is that the essence of religious liberty in their understanding was the absence of the threat of physical force in matters of faith. Faith and church membership should be uncompelled. This religious liberty, however, because it was seen primarily in relation to the state, could exist even when the *church* insists on biblical standards and exercises church discipline.

2.2.2. English Baptists

This section will be limited to the English Baptists. However, because of the influence of the English Baptists on the Baptist movement in the Colonies, the views of the English Baptists are consistent with Baptists in the Colonies regarding liberty of conscience. This section will be further limited to some general observations of the movement as a whole.

The first observation concerns the development of a distinct Baptist identity in a society already permeated by churches and denominations. The point, though obvious, needs some elaboration, as it is fundamental to the discussion. Many of the early Baptists acknowledged other churches and denominations to be essentially Christian and to contain true believers (Nettles 2001:10). Why did they not join these churches and denominations and seek to influence

them? The obvious answer is that they saw the need to maintain a distinctive Baptist witness. They saw Baptist distinctives, such as believer's baptism and the nature of the church, of sufficient importance to maintain a degree of separation from the other denominations and churches. *In other words, they believed that their distinctive witness to biblical truth took precedence over visible, outward unity with other denominations.* The latter statement is equally valid for General and Particular Baptists, and has remained true from the earliest Baptist church to the present day.

It is important to remember that some of these doctrinal distinctives, such as the administration of the ordinances and church government, though important, are not fundamental issues of the faith. This point shows that Baptists have historically stood for and insisted on scriptural belief and practice. Nonetheless, the early Baptists also argued for religious liberty in order to have the freedom to maintain this distinctive witness without persecution or harassment (Adams 1982:95, Nettles 2001:9). In practice, this distinctive witness meant that only those who professed Baptist doctrine and practice could join a local church. Importantly, they did not see this witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as threatening religious liberty, liberty of conscience, or Christian liberty in society or in the church. Membership in Baptist churches and associations was voluntary, and people could withdraw at any stage (Meredith 2001:148). Again, these early Baptists argued for religious liberty in relation to the *state*, yet within the church insisted on maintaining biblical standards (Adams 1982:95).

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from what has been said. First, the early Baptists believed doctrine was important—certainly important enough to maintain a distinctive witness at the expense of a corporate Christian witness with the other denominations. This doctrine extended not only to issues fundamental to the faith but also secondary issues, such as the administration of the ordinances and church government. Second, the early Baptists did not see this distinctive witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as in any way violating liberty of conscience, religious liberty, and Christian liberty. They certainly made no apologies for the fact that those who wanted to join a Baptist church must submit to Baptist doctrine and practice. Third, and most importantly, any assertion that formulating doctrine violates the principle

of liberty of conscience is at variance with the understanding and practice of early Baptist churches.

2.2.3. The testimony of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

The main reason for exclusively focusing on the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is due to its popularity and large influence amongst Baptists. Though it can be rightly argued that because it is Calvinistic, it only represents Particular Baptists, yet on Liberty of Conscience and the Civil Magistrate, the Calvinistic influence is much less distinctive. In terms of these two doctrines, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith represents general early Baptist belief that adequately represents both Particular and General Baptists.

At the outset, it needs to be noted that the early Baptists saw no contradiction in formulating a detailed Confession of Faith, including a detailed doctrine of Scripture, that spoke to many contemporary errors. Also, in that very same Confession, they insisted on Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. In their minds at least, the former did not inherently threaten the latter. In conjunction with that, chapter twenty-one of the Confession contains three paragraphs that deal with the composition of Christian liberty, liberty of conscience, and the perversion of Christian liberty (Waldron 1989:254-255).

Paragraph one describes Christian liberty mainly in terms of its spiritual dimensions, such as freedom from the guilt of sin, freedom from God's wrath, freedom from the curse of the law, and freedom from bondage to Satan and sin. Both Old Testament and New Testament believers enjoyed this freedom, though the New Testament believers' enjoyment thereof is "enlarged" and "fuller."

The second paragraph describes liberty of conscience. "God alone is Lord of the conscience," and it is therefore free from the commandments of people that in any way contradict or are not contained in God's word. Those requiring blind, absolute obedience or an implicit faith destroy liberty of conscience. Though this paragraph is generally stated in the negative, its positive assumption is that people's conscience is most certainly bound by God and His word. People are not "free" to believe anything they wish.

The latter is one of the main reasons why these early Baptists believed that producing a Confession that clearly articulated biblical doctrines did not threaten liberty of conscience in the least, but rather was consistent with it. The preceding statement on liberty of conscience also needs to be seen in the context of Baptist belief that churches comprise those who "*willingly* consent to walk together" (chapter 26, paragraph 6). In other words, Christians would have the freedom to assess a particular church's belief and practice before voluntarily joining it, or they would have the freedom to leave a church or group if they felt that the doctrine or practice was inconsistent with Scripture (Waldron 1989:14-15). Hence, the voluntary nature of Christian associations further protected liberty of conscience.

The third paragraph of chapter twenty-one deals with the perversion of Christian liberty. The latter is perverted when it is used to justify the practice of sin. The whole objective of Christian liberty (as described in paragraph one) is to free believers from the guilt and dominion of sin, not to allow them to freely indulge in it. Believers are called to a life of holiness and obedience, though this will never be perfect in this life (cf. chapter 13, paragraph 2). That being the case, this understanding of Christian liberty is entirely consistent with churches exercising discipline against those who hold to serious "error" or "unholiness of conversation" (chapter 26, paragraphs 2, 5-7).

The preceding brief historical survey of how religious liberty was understood and applied by early Baptist movements shows a general consistency. The early Baptists saw religious liberty primarily as a liberty granted by the state. They consistently called for the state to tolerate other faiths and religious views. The early Baptists argued for religious liberty in order to have the freedom to maintain a distinctive witness to Scripture without persecution or harassment. Put another way, religious liberty would provide a social and political framework within which religious groups could enjoy liberty of conscience and practice their beliefs.

Moreover, the early Baptists believed doctrine was important—certainly important enough to maintain a distinctive witness at the expense of a corporate, united Christian witness with the other denominations. In practice, this distinctive witness meant that only those who professed Baptist doctrine and practice could join a local church. Importantly, they did not see this

witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as threatening liberty of conscience in society or in the church. This was due to the fact that people's faith was not coerced by the state, and church membership was voluntary. Thus, there was no conflict in their understanding between standing for liberty of conscience in *society*, and yet defending the faith in the *church*.

3.   The doctrine of Scripture

The controversies and debates in the BUSA on the doctrine of Scripture need to be discussed and evaluated against a standard. This essay is based on the view that the original autographs of Scripture are the very word of God. They are completely inspired by God and authoritative. This inspiration and authority extends to the very words and smallest details of Scripture, so that the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant in all that they speak to, including matters of science, history, and geography. Thus, Scripture cannot contradict itself and is doctrinally consistent.

It is beyond the scope and limitations of this essay to demonstrate that the preceding view is faithful to Scripture. Be that as it may, some points require further careful elaboration, beginning with the doctrine of inerrancy. Specifically, it is limited to the original autographs, and takes into account irregularities of grammar and spelling, commonly observed descriptions of nature, rounding of numbers, and a lack of modern day technical or scientific precision. Such approximations and "vagueness" in the language of Scripture, however, far from detracting from its value, are essential for effective communication (Frame 1987, ch. 7).

Numerous arguments against inerrancy have been raised, including the following:

- The assertion that other views such as "limited inerrancy" and "conditional inerrancy" fall within the ambit of "evangelicalism," and thus any insistence on complete inerrancy is narrow and unnecessarily divisive (Railey 2001:57, 127, 175).
- The contention that modern evangelicals are too conditioned by philosophical frameworks that were foreign to the authors of Scripture.

> This has led to an overestimation of the importance of a Scripture that is factually correct (Perry 2001:¶9-10).

- The concept of inerrancy is out of line with historical reformed theology, as notable Reformers such as Luther and Calvin did not hold to the form of "detailed" inerrancy that some modern evangelicals hold to.

- The argument that because the original autographs no longer exist, the debate on their inerrancy is senseless, as at the end of the day it makes no practical difference for the church.

Briefly, in response, it can be argued that the presence of errors of any kind in the original autographs require some external "sieve" that can be applied to the Scriptures to determine what the errors are and how far they extend. Practically speaking, such a sieve would be more authoritative than Scripture, as it is used to assess the trustworthiness of Scripture (Poythress 1967:100). Furthermore, errors in the original autographs, regardless of their insignificance, do detract from the authority of the Scripture. It is unconvincing to speak of the Scriptures as being "authoritative," "completely trustworthy," or "infallible" on the one hand and admit on the other that they contain errors. Theological truths are often rooted in real history and observable facts. If the historical or observable facts of the Scriptures can be wrong, it must cast doubt on the associated theological truths, and hence detract from their authority (Geisler 1986:59). It is only an inerrant, infallible, and sufficient Scripture that can effectively function as the completely authoritative word of God in a Christian church or group.

4. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa, liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture

The 1877 Constitution of the Baptist Union includes a Declaration of Principle, which forms the basis of the Union. The basis of the Union is:

> that the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each church has liberty to interpret and administer His laws (Miller 1987:51).

The two Baptist principles of the authority of the Scriptures and liberty of conscience are clearly revealed in this statement. Some reflection on this statement is required. First, the Lordship of Christ and His authority over all aspects of faith and practice are mediated through the Scriptures. In other words, the Scripture is the authority for the church, because it is the word of Christ. There does not appear to be any indication in the preceding statement that Christ's authority can in any way be separated from the Scriptures. This provides the primary reason for the Baptist emphases on the primacy and authority of the Scriptures, as without the Scriptures Christ's will cannot be known with any degree of certainty. Hence, any depreciation of the Scriptures must impact on the knowledge and application of Christ's will and authority for the church.

Second, it is obvious that the liberty given to each church to interpret Scripture was not intended to be unrestricted. The Declaration of Union was after all to establish a *Baptist* Union, and therefore only Baptist churches could join. The more detailed statement of faith of 1924 was an attempt to define more precisely what it meant to be Baptist. Also, the BUSA has since its inception exercised some degree of discipline over deviating pastors or churches, indicating that some "liberties" were deemed unacceptable to the Union.

Third, and related to the second point, the fact that a Statement of Faith was required several decades later, after a few controversies, indicates an initial weakness in the formation of the BUSA. There was a lack of definition and clarity on the doctrinal standards to be applied in the BUSA. The claim of any professed Christian group to follow the Scriptures does not exempt it from clearly stating what it believes the Scriptures teach. As has already been argued, the early Baptist movements certainly did not consider it to be fundamentally "un-Baptist" to produce statements and confessions of faith to clarify what they believed the Scriptures taught (Estep 1987:602-603).

4.1. Some key historic debates

This section will focus on only a two of the most relevant historic debates on the doctrine of Scripture and liberty of conscience in the BUSA. These two debates illustrate the tensions in the Union between liberty of conscience and doctrinal orthodoxy on Scripture.

4.1.1. Standards for ministerial candidates

The first incident relates to acceptable standards for ministerial candidates. During the period 1955 to 1958, an attempt was made to include "verbal inspiration" and the 1924 Statement as a minimum requirement for ministerial candidates. After receiving numerous objections, one of which was that the liberty of conscience of the individual churches would be compromised, and a legal opinion that such a policy could not be adopted except by *unanimous* consent because of the constitution, the proposal was not upheld (Miller 1987:68). The following year, in order to at least exercise some control, the Executive of the BUSA introduced a compulsory interview for ministerial applications, as it was within their mandate to make a recommendation on every case. They were determined to protect the Union from "theological liberalism" (their words) in the area of the doctrine of Scripture (Miller 1987:69).

During this period, the claim that liberty of conscience and the autonomy of the local church would be compromised by such an act was forcefully articulated, with the result that no resolution was passed that clarified the doctrine of Scripture. A plea during this period was that liberty must prevail and churches must be able to interpret the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit guided them, and not blindly accept any "decision of a Pope or Council" (Miller 1987:68). Also, the original constitution and basis of the Union could not be undermined. Claims were made that the BUSA was behaving in an "un-Baptist" way in trying to make "verbal inspiration" mandatory (Miller 1987:68).

A number of crucial observations need to be made in this regard. First, as noted earlier, this incident highlights the real tensions that the BUSA faced with the competing principles of maintaining and defending orthodoxy, yet allowing each church liberty of conscience. On the one hand, there was extreme unhappiness concerning an earlier incident with the principal of the Baptist Theological College (in 1952), and it was acknowledged that some doctrinal clarification was required to prevent a similar occurrence. On the other hand, the BUSA was not able to achieve this due to the principle of liberty of conscience. It clearly demonstrates that unless the two principles are correctly understood and prioritised, the BUSA will never effectively progress

in relevantly maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy in an ever-changing theological world.

Second, the claim that adopting a statement that clearly articulated a doctrine of Scripture would violate liberty of conscience was spurious and inconsistent. The question that needs to be asked is why the BUSA could maintain some doctrines and not others. For example, why was it acceptable to maintain the doctrines of congregational church government and believer's baptism (even to the point of excluding churches from the Union in 1984) and yet the doctrine of Scripture could not be clarified? In what sense were the doctrines of church government and believer's baptism "guided by the Spirit," but not a biblical doctrine of Scripture? This is especially important, as the very basis of the BUSA was the authority of Christ mediated through the Scriptures. A relevant defence of the doctrine of Scripture to protect its effective authority for the BUSA could hardly be more important. The objection was clearly inconsistent, as the BUSA had adopted other doctrinal formulations.

4.1.2. Inerrancy considered (1986)

The second incident that will be mentioned concerns the Statement of Baptist Principles. In 1986, a Statement of Baptist Principles was presented to the Assembly for consideration and discussion. The first paragraph, on the subject of Scripture, read as follows:

> We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is our God and only Saviour and that He has absolute authority. The Holy Scriptures are the inspired word of God, and their authority is inextricably linked with that of Christ; they are therefore the final authority for the Church and its members in all matters of faith and practice (General Secretary's Memorandum to Ministers and Church Secretaries, 1987:3)

Holdt proposed that the term "inerrancy" (or alternatively, a phrase such as "truth without any mixture of error") be included in the first paragraph of the Statement. Opposition to this amendment was voiced, and after some discussion, it was not included. While the rest of the Statement of Principles

was still subject to change and discussion, "the question on the inspiration of Scripture was regarded as no longer open to debate" (Miller 1987:83).

Clearly, the BUSA was not prepared to define the doctrine of Scripture beyond the fact that Scripture was "inspired." This term had already been included in the 1924 "semi-official" Statement of Belief, and had not clarified exactly what was meant by it. Thus, despite the previous controversies, and the subsequent attempts to define the doctrine of Scripture, the BUSA made little progress (if any) since 1924.

In the same Statement of Principles, a declaration on religious liberty was adopted the following year:

> The Principle of Religious Liberty, namely that no individual should be coerced either by the State or by any secular, ecclesiastical or religious group in matters of faith. The right of private conscience is to be respected. For each believer this means the right to interpret the Scriptures responsibly and to act in the light of his conscience (*South African Baptist Handbook*, 1988:164).

Two points need to be made regarding this statement. First, in its wording, this principle is in agreement with the early Baptist understanding of liberty of conscience. Religious liberty is established when there is no external coercion by the state or any other body. This has, however, always existed in the BUSA, as membership was and is voluntary and no external coercion or threat of physical punishment was applied to any who left the BUSA for whatever reasons. The statement also rightly indicates that every believer must have the freedom to interpret Scripture for himself and to act in accordance with it (in other words, to enjoy full liberty of conscience).

Second, the *application* of this principle in the BUSA must be questioned. The historic debates show that some in the BUSA opposed any theological definition of the doctrine of Scripture on the basis that it would restrict liberty of conscience. Similarly, from a survey conducted in 1987 in the BUSA, 16 percent of the respondents believed that any attempt to officially adopt a particular view of the inspiration of Scripture "would be a contradiction of our

Baptist Principle of individual liberty of conscience" (Miller 1987:174). This is clearly inconsistent. In the very same Statement of Principles, congregational church government was adopted, which led to nine churches being excluded from the Union. Why could a particular view of church government be adopted, but not a particular view of the inspiration of Scripture? Why does the one and not the other violate liberty of conscience?

It could be argued that congregational church government has always been a historic Baptist principle, and "verbal inspiration" or inerrancy has not. In response, it needs to be pointed out that the BUSA has to defend the faith relevantly in every age. The early Baptist movements made stands and statements on issues that were *currently* controversial and relevant. It would be most "un-Baptist" to adopt only doctrinal formulations on the basis of their historicity. If the early Baptists only stood for what had *historic* precedence, they would never have championed believer's baptism and religious liberty, as these were generally considered "new" ideas.

In any event, the view that inerrancy (or at least "implicit" inerrancy) was not a historic Baptist position is open to serious challenge. For example, an analysis of chapter one of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith indicates that while the term "inerrancy" was not used, it displays an implicit view of inerrancy (Waldron 1989:51-52). To illustrate, it affirms that the Scripture evidences itself to be the word of God by the "consent of all the parts," by "incomparable excellencies," and by its "*entire perfections*." As a result of the debates on the doctrine of Scripture from 1930 to 2007, the BUSA was only able to assert that the Scriptures were "inspired." This term was ambiguous in the debate on Scripture, and therefore did not settle any of the disputes.

4.2. Impact on the doctrine of Scripture

In 1986, a detailed, five-page altitudinal survey of the BUSA was undertaken by GG Miller. It mostly focused on the inspiration and authority Scripture. The survey was distributed to some "500 Baptist pastors, students at the Baptist theological colleges, laymen and laywomen throughout Southern Africa" (Miller 1987:95). A response rate of 43 percent was received, which equates to some 215 individual responses. The questionnaire was completely anonymous, and could not distinguish at all between respondents.

It should be noted that respondents were not constrained to select only one option. Consequently, Miller reported that while 93 percent of the respondents indicated that they supported full inerrancy, 15,5 percent of them also selected contradictory options. The options presented and percentage responses were as follows:

Options	Percentage responses
Full inerrancy	93,3 (but 15,5% of these selected contradictory responses)
Bible contains the word of God	6,1
Neo-orthodox view of inspiration	8,0
'Limited inerrancy' – spiritual message only inspired	13,2
Inerrancy futile due to absence of autographs	6,6
All Scripture inspired but not of equal value	61,3
Jesus accommodated His knowledge to error	0,47

Table 1: Responses to options regarding the inspiration of Scripture

A number of comments need to be made on these results. First, there has definitely been a negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture within the BUSA. Views that allow for errors in Scripture must impact on the veracity of Scripture as a whole, and therefore on its authority. Errors in the verifiable data of Scripture must cast doubt on the closely linked spiritual truths, which cannot be verified. The fact that in 1987 up to 30 percent of the respondents within the BUSA (i.e., the summation of options 2-5) held to errancy views is problematic for the BUSA, especially if it wants to maintain the authority of Scripture as a cornerstone and the basis of the Union.

The negative impact can also be seen in the worsening tend. For example, while in the 1950's Barnard was dismissed for "Barthian views" on Scripture, in 1987 some 8 percent of respondents held to such views. Another example is that in 1958 the BUSA Executive wanted to ensure that "verbal inspiration" was a standard for ministerial acceptance, but in 1987 up to 30 percent of respondents (most of which were existing or future pastors) held to views incompatible with verbal inspiration.

Second, it is clear that the 1924 Statement of Belief is insufficient to protect the BUSA from unacceptable views of Scripture that will detract from its authority. The survey results conclusively show the existence of groups who hold to views that undermine biblical authority. The individual pastors would most likely have had to indicate their acceptance of the 1924 Statement of Belief before ordination. It is simply a historical reality that in the current debate on the doctrine of Scripture, many people with widely divergent views of Scripture can nevertheless subscribe to the view that the Scriptures are "inspired." The theological debate has progressed to such an extent that "inspiration" is hopelessly inadequate as a standard of orthodoxy. The experience in the BUSA has confirmed this.

5. Conclusion

There has clearly been a negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture within the BUSA. Views that allow for error in the Scripture must impact on the veracity of Scripture as a whole, and therefore its authority. The fact that in 1987 around 30 percent of the respondents within the BUSA held to errancy views is problematic for the BUSA, especially if it wants to maintain the authority of Scripture as a cornerstone and the basis of the Union.

The fact that the doctrinal formulation on the doctrine of Scripture within the BUSA has not kept abreast of theological developments, means that in practice the BUSA is tolerating "limited inerrancy" and "Barthian views." The survey results are clearly evidence of this. The de facto situation is that in *not* updating its doctrine of Scripture, the *BUSA has in fact adopted a position.* This position is that "limited inerrancy" and "Barthian views" are acceptable in the BUSA, as those who hold to such views are under no form of censure.

The preceding observations notwithstanding, this essay has argued that the careful formulation of a doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture to defend relevantly the authority of Scripture in the current theological climate will not threaten liberty of conscience. The assertion by some in the BUSA that defining a doctrine of Scripture will undermine liberty of conscience is theologically erroneous and out of line with the historic Baptist understanding of the term. It is also fundamentally inconsistent, as the BUSA has adopted definite views on other doctrines, such as church government.

The BUSA needs to carefully consider the recent debates on the doctrine of Scripture and define a position on inspiration that it believes will uphold the authority of Scripture in the BUSA. The views put forward in this essay are based on the belief that inerrancy is both biblical and necessary to ensure that Scripture remains the authoritative basis of the BUSA. The research has clearly shown that significant minority groups holding to errancy views already existed in 1987. Such views can only undermine the authority of Christ being exercised in the BUSA through the Scriptures, and will result in the spiritual decline of the Union.

Two errors need to be avoided. The first would be the temptation to try and reconcile all the differing positions in the Union on the doctrine of Scripture. The 1986 survey clearly demonstrates that the views are too divergent for this to happen. Certainly, it will not be possible to please everyone in the BUSA. The second error would be to try and avoid dealing with some of the contentious issues, such as inerrancy. Another ambiguous statement that does not address the current issues in the BUSA will be ineffective. Miller's warning needs to be stressed. Unless the issues are dealt with, they will always resurface in the future (Miller 1987:141).

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An Examination of the Consistency of the *New World Translation* with the Stated Philosophy of the Translators[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the extent to which the The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures' *(NWT) rendering of selected Christologically significant texts is consistent with its own philosophy of translation. To test the NWT's consistency with its own philosophy of translation, the authors selected nine Christologically significant texts, namely, John 1:1, 1:18, 20:28, Acts 20:28, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8-9, 2 Peter 1:1 and 1 John 5:20. Each of these nine texts arguably uses the Greek term θεός in reference to Jesus Christ. The authors conclude that in seven of the nine sample texts, the NWT violates one or more of its stated translation values and principles. The most common violation is its pervasive tendency to subvert the most natural understanding of the Greek text in favour of a 'preferred religious view'.*

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the extent to which the *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures'* (NWT) rendering of selected Christologically significant texts is consistent with its own philosophy of translation. To test the NWT's consistency with its own philosophy of translation, we have selected nine Christologically significant texts, namely, John 1:1, 1:18, 20:28, Acts 20:28, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8-9, 2 Peter 1:1 and 1 John 5:20.

In selecting a set of texts for consideration, the issues of manageability of the sample size and significance of the texts themselves are equally relevant. A random sample may not accurately reflect inconsistencies. The sample set must (1) adequately represent the breadth of New Testament documents, (2) involve a theological issue that has a probability of influencing the translators, and (3) be small enough to be manageable.

The nine texts that arguably use θεός in reference to Jesus Christ meet all three criteria. The size and scope of the sample are self-evident. As for the theological significance, the sample speaks to the essential ontology of Jesus Christ, an issue of supreme scholarly import, as well as conflict for the Jehovah's Witnesses translators, who deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

2. The NWT's philosophy of translation

The Forward of the NWT opens with the declaration that the Greek autographs were inspired and are therefore sacred, and that no copy or translation of the autographs can be considered inspired (NWT 1950:5). Since it is generally accepted that none of the New Testament autographs still exist (Metzger 1992:201), one may infer that all source material used by Bible translators, as well as all Bible translations, are to varying degrees imperfect.

After acknowledging that any and all translations of the text will be less than perfect, the committee first commends those who have sought to bring the Bible to people in their native tongues, and then criticises them for interweaving "religious traditions, hoary with age . . . into the translations to color the thought . . . in support of a preferred religious view" (NWT 1950:6).

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In opposition to this practice, the committee declares its first philosophical value: "The endeavour of the New World Bible Translation Committee has been to avoid this snare of religious traditionalism" (NWT1950:6). Furthermore, the committee members implied the importance of allegiance to the text when they wrote, "Our primary desire has been to seek, not the approval of men, but that of God, by rendering the truth of his inspired Word as purely and as consistently as our consecrated powers make possible" (NWT 1950:7).

A second value is related to the first, namely, *consistency*. To maintain this consistency, the translators claim to have "assigned one meaning . . . [t]o each major word" and to have "held to that meaning as far as the context permitted" (NWT 1950:9). This consistency in use of vocabulary is intended to facilitate distinction in English between different Greek words.

The third philosophical value expressed by the translators is the use of the "everyday languages" of the intended audience. The committee stated, "The translation of the Scriptures into a modern language should be rendered in the same style, in the speech forms current among the people" (NWT 1950:9). The use of contemporary vernacular is intended to make any translation as accessible to the layman as were the original texts.

The fourth expressed value is literal, word-for-word translation (rather than thought-for-thought rendering), as much as possible.

> We offer no paraphrase of the Scriptures. Our endeavour all through has been to give as literal a translation as possible, where the modern English idiom allows and where literal rendition does not for clumsiness hide the thought. That way we can best meet the desire of those who are scrupulous for getting, as nearly as possible, word for word, the exact statement of the original (NWT 1950:9).

The fifth principle is to take no "liberties with the texts for the mere sake of brevity or short cuts" and to make no "substitutions of a modern parallel, where the original idea makes good sense" (NWT 1950:9). Where value four protects the original wording of the texts, value five guards the original

manners of expression, wherever they are still recognisable and comprehensible to a modern audience. To disregard this value would, by definition, result in paraphrase, earlier rejected by the committee.

So, to be consistent with the committee's expressed philosophy of, and aims for, their translation, the renderings reflected in the NWT should meet these five criteria:

a) They should not be affected by the controlling influence of any "preferred religious view". Allegiance to the text must override allegiance to a theological point of view.

b) The translation should be consistent in its application of Greek grammar, syntax and vocabulary in order to render "the truth of his inspired Word as purely and as consistently as our consecrated powers make possible" (NWT 1950:7).

c) It should consistently hold one translation for each major Greek word, to allow for distinction between Greek words, as much as context will allow, without changing the meaning of the text.

d) It should employ English vernacular common to the 1950's, rather than theological jargon. The text should be as understandable to the modern reader (contemporary to its publication) as the original was to its original audience.

e) It should maintain the use of first-century figures of speech without alterations or updating, unless to do so would obscure their meaning to a modern reader.

3. The NWT's treatment of the sample texts

3.1. John 1:1

Table 2: John 1:1 in the Westcott-Hort GNT and the NWT

Westcott-Hort's GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.	Originally the Word was, and the word was with God, and the Word was a god.	In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.

By rendering ἐν ἀρχή as 'originally', the 1950 edition broke three of its stated values. This rendering stretches the semantic range of the prepositional phrase ἐν ἀρχή beyond its accepted uses. It also alters a first-century figure of speech—'in the beginning' being an established biblical idiom (see Gen. 1:1, LXX)—obscuring the Old Testament allusion and thereby influencing the meaning for a modern reader. Obscuring the allusion to the Old Testament creation story may represent a preferred religious view, minimising the intimation in John 1:1 that Christ was uncreated. The change to 'in [the] beginning' in the 1970 edition brings the rendering of this prepositional phrase in line with the translation committee's stated values.

The translators' decision to render θεός in the final clause as 'a god' has drawn extensive scholarly attention. The NWT's case for translating θεός as 'a god' is based upon the premise that anarthrous nouns are indefinite (or qualitative, yet translated as indefinite) and articular nouns are definite (1950:773-777). In John's prologue, there are eight occurrences of θεός, in various cases and constructions (Countess 1982:55). The NWT renders the two which are articular (vv. 1-2) as 'God'. It translates four of the six anarthrous occurrences of θεός 'God', one 'a god' (v. 1), and one 'the [only-begotten] god' (v. 18). Therefore, the translators concretely applied the rule they espoused in only one of eight occurrences. This inconsistency is magnified by the fact that all eight examples occur with the same noun in the space of just eighteen verses (John 1:1-18). For their inconsistency to be justifiable, John would need to have used θεός with a remarkable degree of

variability. Such variable usage is unattested to by the body of published comment on the prologue. Wallace (1996:267) suspects a controlling theological bias as the basis of this inconsistency.

We believe the translators' preferred religious view that Christ is a created being inferior to Almighty God motivated them to render the predicate nominative θεός as 'a god' in John 1:1c, treating it as an indefinite-qualitative noun. Translations such as 'the Word was divine' or 'the Word was God' are equally consistent with their observation that the anarthrous θεός expresses a quality of the subject, and are more consistent with their general handling of the noun θεός in John's prologue.

The NWT advocates one translation for each major Greek word, without changing the meaning of the text. Countess (1982:54-55) notes that of 282 anarthrous occurrences of θεός in the New Testament, the NWT only translates 16 of these occurrences "a god, god, gods, or godly". This means that in regard to what is arguably the most "major word" (NWT 1950:9) in the New Testament, the NWT was inconsistent with its stated philosophy 94 percent of the time.[4]

In its treatment of John 1:1, the 1950 NWT violates every aspect of its stated philosophy and values of translation. The revised edition corrects the issues related to John 1:1a, but does not remedy the (a) preferred religious view, (b) inconsistent application of Greek grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, and (c) inconsistent translation of major Greek words (θεός) observed in the treatment of John 1:1c.

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[4] The remaining 266 occurrences are translated Jehovah; a practice wholly unjustified by the manuscript evidence and Greek grammar. See Countess (1982) for a complete treatment of the subject.

3.2. John 1:18

Table 3: John 1:18 in the Greek and two editions of the NWT[5]

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.	No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten god who is in the bosom [position] with the Father is the one that has explained him.	No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten god who is in the bosom position with the Father is the one that has explained him.

In John 1:18a, Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε, the NWT correctly treats the anarthrous θεόν as definite in semantic force ('God'), and not indefinite ('a god', as in John 1:1c). While this treatment is consistent with the rules of Greek grammar and translation, it is inconsistent with the NWT's previously noted position that anarthrous nouns are indefinite or qualitative (1950:773-777). This may seem like hair-splitting, but to apply their espoused principle rigidly in the case of John 1:1c, but not to apply it in this case, requires an explanation. The translators do not provide any explanation.

As for its treatment of the phrase μονογενὴς θεὸς ("the only-begotten god"), the anarthrous construction is correctly translated as semantically definite. While this translation is inconsistent with the NWT's stated position on anarthrous nouns, the articularity and definiteness of the epexegetical phrase ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς may have been seen as justifying the translators' deviation from their stated principles. In the absence of explicit comment within the NWT, we cannot be certain of the deciding factors behind this slight inconsistency.

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[5] The only difference between the rendering of the 1950 edition and the 1970 revision is that the revision removes the brackets from the word 'position'. Whether bracketed or not, "position" is an interpolation, adding nuanced meaning not lexically native to the noun τὸν κόλπον. While in this context, κόλπος most certainly signifies 'closest fellowship' (Meyer 1964:826), such inference is best left to the reader.

3.3.   John 20:28

Table 4: John 20:28 in the Greek and two editions of the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ὁ κύριος μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου.	In answer Thomas said to him: "My Master and my God."	In answer Thomas said to him: "My Lord and my God!"

When the NWT was revised, 'Master' was replaced with 'Lord', which had been footnoted as an alternative translation of κύριος in the 1950 edition, making the verse more consistent in regard to assigning a single translation to each major Greek word. On the surface, the translation of this verse appears to be consistent with the translators' stated principles and values.

However, it seems that the translation of θεός as 'God' with a capital 'g' is a sign of a preferred religious view, specifically a bias against viewing Jesus Christ as God, which would violate the principle of faithfulness to the original text over any theological bias. A survey of the sample texts shows that when the NWT interprets θεός as referring to God the Father, the 'g' is upper case (God), but when interpreted as referring to the Son (see John 1:1, 18), the 'g' is lower case. If this inference is correct, the subtle intimation is that the text refers to two people, that is, 'my Lord' refers to Christ and 'my God' to the Father. This would be a most unlikely interpretation of Thomas' exclamation.

3.4.   Acts 20:28

Table 5: Acts 20:28 in the Greek and the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950
προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιεποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου.	Pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the holy spirit has appointed *you* overseers, to shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own [Son].

For anyone wishing to produce "as nearly as possible, word for word, the exact statement of the original" (NWT 1950:9), which usually has as its goal the hope of leaving difficult exegetical ambiguities unresolved so that readers of the translation have access to the same interpretive options as the readers of the original had, Acts 20:28 poses a serious challenge. The difficulty relates to the rendering of διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου, since the relationship between the two genitive nouns is ambiguous. If the author intended τοῦ ἰδίου as an attributive modifier of τοῦ αἵματος, then the correct translation would be 'with his own blood'; this translation carries the inference that the verse calls Jesus θεός. On the other hand, if the author intended τοῦ ἰδίου as a substantive, the literal translation would be 'with the blood of his own [one]'; this means the Father purchased the church with the blood of his own [Son]. The exegetical choice between these two options is close and no translation can sit on the fence.

Along with several major translations (e.g., RSV; NRSV), the NWT interprets τοῦ ἰδίου as a substantive and renders it "his own [Son]". Countess (1982:60-61) believes the addition of 'Son' to the verse "irrefragably stems from a 'preferred religious view,' a Socinian view of Jesus Christ." While the decision to treat τοῦ ἰδίου as a substantive rather than an attributive may have been made on doctrinal grounds, it is consistent with sound exegesis of the Greek text. The NWT's employment of brackets when adding 'Son' to the verse is laudable. It alerts readers that 'Son' has been supplied by the translators. If complete objectivity were the translators' goal, they might have added a footnote containing the alternate rendering and/or a note explaining the ambiguity, but this is not a requirement for consistency with the translators' values.

3.5. Romans 9:5

Table 6: Romans 9:5 in the Greek and the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.	to whom the forefathers belong and from whom the Christ sprang according to the flesh; God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.	to whom the forefathers belong and from whom the Christ [sprang] according to the flesh; God, who is over all, [be] blessed forever. Amen.

The exegetical difficulty in this verse concerns how to punctuate the Greek text. If a comma follows σάρκα, the implication is that rest of the verse stands in apposition to Χριστὸς, describing Christ as the one 'who is over all, God blessed forever' (e.g., JB; KJV; NASB; NRSV). If the Greek text is punctuated with a period or semi-colon after σάρκα, then the rest of the verse functions as a new sentence, a eulogy addressed to God the Father.

The NWT's punctuation and translation of the verse shows the translators' belief that θεός is the subject of 9:5b and not a predicate of ὁ Χριστὸς. In the Appendix, the translators state plainly, "We take the passage as a reference to God and as pronouncing a blessing upon him for the provisions just named which he has made . . ." (NWT 1950:779). Two pieces of supporting evidence for this conclusion are (a) a supposition that ὁ ὢν is perhaps the equivalent of 'I am' and (b) that four translations (Moffatt 1922; Ballantine 1923; Goodspeed 1923; RSV) agree with their rendering. Amongst the many translations that disagree with their rendering, only the KJV is mentioned.

The NWT's comments on Romans 9:5b make an important statement about the translators' philosophy of translation. First, the Appendix (1950:778-779) acknowledges the two schools of thought on this issue, and quotes both Moulton (1906) and Robertson (1947) as stating that ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων and θεὸς is more naturally taken as in apposition to ὁ Χριστὸς. Then, however, the Appendix rejects this interpretation in favour of taking it as an independent clause, saying, "The grammar of the Greek text admits of this". It seems that

when dealing with texts that may refer to Jesus Christ as God, the NWT translators take the grammatical and semantic *allowance* of an alternate interpretation as the equivalent of an *endorsement* of that interpretation (John 1:1c; 20:28; Rom. 9:5). Although seemingly recognising that this is grammatically the less likely interpretation, the NWT adopts it without giving adequate reasons for overruling the grammatical evidence. This violates two principles stated in the Foreword, namely, avoiding a "preferred religious view" and of providing as accurate a "word for word" translation as is possible.

3.6. Titus 2:13

Table 7: Titus 2:13 in the Greek and two editions of the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ	while we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of our Savior, Christ Jesus	while we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus

The great Christological debate regarding this verse hinges on whether the genitive chain τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ refers to one person ('our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus') or to two persons ('the great God and our Saviour, Christ Jesus'). A large majority of scholars find the weight of the grammatical evidence strongly favours the genitive chain referring to one person (see Smith and Song 2006 for a detailed treatment).

The NWT rendering indicates that the translators believe τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος refers to two different persons. The Appendix states, "we render 'the great God' as separate from 'our Savior Christ Jesus'" (1950:782). The argument given in the Appendix for this treatment begins by citing Moulton, "We cannot discuss here the problem of Titus 2:13, for we must, as grammarians, leave the matter open" (NWT 1950:781). This quote is given without defining 'the problem' of Titus 2:13, rather presuming the reader has

discerned a problem from the alternate translation offered in the footnote to the verse.

Next, Moulton's (1906) *Grammar* is described as citing five papyri from the seventh century "which attest the translation 'our great God and Saviour' as current among Greek-speaking Christians" (NWT 1950:781-782, quoting Moulton 1906). The NWT rejects this evidence on two bases: (a) the relative youth of seventh-century manuscripts makes them an unreliable indicator of first-century usage; and (b) the theological implications of the cited materials, specifically apotheosis ('mother of god', and evidence of secular parallels which apply 'god and saviour' to deified kings), renders it incredible.

As to the age of the papyri, it has not gone unnoticed that the NWT heavily relies on fourteenth-century manuscripts to justify the practice of inserting Jehovah into the text of the New Testament (Countess 1982:25). To reject seventh-century manuscripts while embracing a small group from the fourteenth-century requires explanation, which the NWT does not provide.

As for the content of the seventh-century papyri, the theological implications of the papyri caused the NWT translators to (a) disregard any grammatical or syntactic evidence that might be gleaned, and (b) to make an unsupported statement to justify rejecting Moulton's evidence: The inspired Word of God is against any suggestion that his consecrated people borrowed or annexed anything from the impious pagans who apotheosized or deified their rulers (1950:782). Evidence for New Testament borrowing from pagan culture and practices is partially illustrated by (a) Christ being described in Colossians as leading a victory parade, much like a Roman general or emperor, making a spectacle of the powers and authorities; (b) Paul's appropriation of the pagan temple to the unknown God to evangelise those who worshipped there; and (c) Paul's frequent quoting of Greek slogans and poetry, and his application of them to instruct his readers in the Christian life.

While the rejection of the theological implications of the content of the papyri is well within the rights of any and all readers, it seems to have prejudiced the NWT translators against relevant information on Greek syntax and usage. The NWT translators' professed distaste for the theological content of the papyri cited from Moulton, has resulted in the ignoring of grammatical and

syntactical evidence that may have had bearing on the accuracy of the translation. The apotheotic elements in the papyri were coincidental to the syntactical evidence. The rejection of this evidence, on theological and not on grammatical grounds, may be reflective of a preferred religious view exerting a controlling interest. Furthermore, the resulting rejection of 'God and Saviour' as a stereotyped formula may be considered a violation of the NWT's stated principle of maintaining the use of first-century figures of speech. By separating this title into a reference to two persons, the original meaning is obscured for a modern reader.

3.7. Hebrews 1:8

Table 8: Hebrews 1:8 in the Greek and two editions of the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν, Ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [τοῦ αἰῶνος], καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ·	But with reference to the Son: "God is your throne forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is the scepter of straight principles.	But with reference to the Son: "God is your throne forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is [the] scepter of straight principles.

The major point of debate regarding this passage is whether ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς must be translated 'your throne, O God' or whether the NWT rendering, 'God is your throne' is a viable alternative. If the phrase is examined in isolation, either rendering is legitimate, that is, in conformity with the rules of Greek grammar. 'God is your throne' interprets ὁ θεός as the subject in a verbless clause, while 'your throne, O God' takes ὁ θεός as an example of a nominative used in place of a vocative.

The phrase does not, however, occur in isolation. When the immediate context is allowed to bear on its intended meaning, there are compelling reasons for favouring the translation 'Your throne, O God'. Verses 7-9 form a μέν . . . δέ construction which contrasts what God says about the angels (v. 7) with what he says about the Son (vv. 8-9). Interpreting ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς as 'God is your throne' obliterates the contrast and destroys the force of the argument,

since this could just as easily apply to the angels (Wallace 1996:59). For the argument to make sense, ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς must be making a statement about that Son that could never be made about the angels. This demands the translation, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever'.

This is another example, reminiscent of Romans 9:5, of the NWT exploiting grammatical licence to conceal reference to Christ as θεός. While the rules of Greek grammar may permit ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς to mean 'God is your throne', the context of statement in Hebrews 1 does not. Once again, the translators' preferred religious view seems to overshadow their allegiance to sound exegetical handling of a grammatical ambiguity.

There are two lesser issues of consistency in the NWT's treatment of Hebrews 1:8b. First, by rendering καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου as "and the sceptre of your kingdom is the scepter of straight principles", the NWT has moved the predicate (ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου) to the head of the sentence, allowing an English reader to assume that the Greek predicate is actually the subject. As a result, the NWT has obscures the fact that the writer of Hebrews deliberately reversed the order of the subject and predicate in the LXX, making ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος the subject, parallel with ὁ θρόνος (v. 8a). Second, much of the NWT's Appendix for John 1:1c is dedicated to the principle that the translation should reflect the fact that anarthrous nouns are indefinite. In Hebrews 1:8b, however, the NWT renders the anarthrous ῥάβδος as "the scepter" instead of 'a scepter', which is inconsistent with the translators' espoused principle.

3.8.   2 Peter 1:1

Table 9: 2 Peter 1:1 in the Greek and two editions of the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950	NWT 1970
Συμεὼν Πέτρος δοῦλος καὶ ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῖς ἰσότιμον ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν πίστιν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,	Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained the faith, held in equal privilege with ours, by the righteousness of our God and the Savior Jesus Christ: . . .	Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained the faith, held in equal privilege with ours, by the righteousness of our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ: : . . .

The issue here is almost identical to that in Titus 2:13, namely, whether τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ refers to one person, Jesus Christ, who is addressed as 'God and Saviour', or to two persons, the Father being addressed as 'God' and Jesus Christ as 'Saviour'. The NWT rendering shows that the translators believe the phrase refers to two separate persons, 'our God (the Father)' and 'the saviour Jesus Christ'.

In a footnote to the verse, the translators disclose that the choice of a 'two-persons' treatment was made "to agree with the distinction between God and Jesus in the next verse". Agreement between verses 1 and 2 is irrelevant, however, because the texts are not structurally analogous. Any perceived analogy overlooks the application of Sharp's Rule to the qualifying grammatical construction that is present in verse 1, but absent in verse 2 (the second substantive in the chain is Ἰησοῦ; proper names are disqualified for consideration under Sharp's rule). Verses 1 and 2 only appear to be analogous. 'God and Saviour' was a well-recognised formula, generally used when referring to an individual. 'God and Jesus', on the other hand, was not an established formula and cannot be treated as analogous to 'God and Saviour'. A large number of translations recognise this difference and translate verse 1 with a single referent and verse 2 as referring to two persons (e.g., Goodspeed; Berkeley; GNB; NAB; NASB; NEB; NIrV; NIV; NRSV; REB; RSV; RV; TCNT; TNIV).

The NWT's rationale for treating 1 Peter 1:1 in such a way that θεός does not refer to Jesus Christ is weak. Its fails to recognise that 'God and Saviour' is a stereotyped formula, but 'God and Jesus' is not. Rather than taking the grammar of verse 1 at face value by applying Sharp's rule, it elevates a perceived parallel construction in verse 2 over the grammatical evidence of verse 1. The result is a rendering of 2 Peter 1:1 in which the "NWT has adduced a disjunction between God and Christ ... where no necessary disjunction exists in the Greek" (Countess 1982:69).

The rejection of 'God and Saviour' as a stereotyped formula violates the NWT's stated principle of maintaining the use of first-century figures of speech, while failing to apply Sharp's rule (on dubious grounds) looks like prioritising a preferred religious view over the grammar of the original text. We consider the NWT rendering of this verse to be inconsistent with its stated principles and values of translation.

3.9. 1 John 5:20

Table 10: 1 John 5:20 in the Greek and two editions of the NWT

Westcott-Hort GNT	NWT 1950
οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἥκει καὶ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκομεν τὸν ἀληθινόν, καὶ ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος.	But we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us intellectual capacity that we may gain the knowledge of the true one. And we are in union with the true one, by means of his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and life everlasting.

The ambiguity in this verse concerns whether οὗτός in the final clause refers to Jesus Christ or to God the Father. If to Jesus Christ, then John is calling him 'the true God'. Although it is possible οὗτός refers to Christ here, there are convincing arguments for taking it with reference to the Father. We believe the NWT rendering of this verse is consistent with the translators' stated philosophy and values of translation.

4. Conclusions

In seven of the nine texts examined, the NWT has shown inconsistency with its stated values and philosophy. In six of the nine texts, there is evidence that it has been affected by the controlling influence of a 'preferred religious view', allowing a theological point of view to override allegiance to the biblical text (see John 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1). There are several examples of downplaying allusions to Christ as θεός, such as the strained effort to justify calling the incarnate Word "a god" in John 1:1, the NWT's treatment of John 20:28, in which "my God" refers to God the Father, despite Thomas' utterance being a direct response to Jesus, and the separation of the conjoined 'God and Saviour' in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, resulting in references to two separate persons (God the Father and Jesus) rather than the grammatically natural single referent.

In five of the sample texts, the NWT has been inconsistent in its application of Greek grammar, syntax and vocabulary (see John 1:1, 18; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1). For example, in John 1:1, the NWT's case for translating θεός as "a god" is based upon the premise that anarthrous nouns are indefinite (1950:773-777), but the translation fails to apply this premise consistently. Its handling of θεός also reveals that it has not held one translation for each major Greek word. Finally, its handling of the noun phrase 'God and Saviour', in particular, alters a first-century figure of speech, obscuring its meaning for a modern reader (see Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1).

In conclusion, then, the NWT's treatment of nine Christologically significant texts demonstrates pervasive inconsistency with the five values and principles for translation described by the translators. Any translation that consistently violates its own espoused principles and values must be deemed untrustworthy. We believe this theory is born out by the changes to the Forward and notes in the revised editions. The 1950 edition has a twenty-two page Forward, copious footnotes and over 30 pages of relevant appendices. The revised editions have a two page Forward and no notes or appendices. It would seem that rather than re-examining and remedying inconsistencies (brought out in various critical reviews), the Watchtower Society removed the statements which delineated the translators' working philosophy and specific reasons for

the translations of certain verses which fall outside the mainstream. No explanation is given for this change.

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A Review and an Evaluation of Diverse Christological Opinions among American Evangelicals:

Part 2: The Eternal Role Subordination of the Son[1]

Bill 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 major position is provided. Evaluations are made. The first article focused primarily on the ancient doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son as held by some American Evangelicals but denied by others. This second article will be used to discuss the issue, within the perimeters of evangelicalism in America, of whether 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 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 among Trinitarians regarding the doctrines of God and Christ, it is hoped by the writer that these articles might also provide material useful

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[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.

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to some to better understand the blessed Person of Jesus Christ our God, our Lord, and our Savior. To Him be glory forever.

1. Introduction

1.1. Word-Man Christology

Although, as later hopefully will be convincingly shown, eternal relational subordination may not be so easily separable from essential subordination, the issue is said by proponents of the former to be whether the Son as God is eternally and ontologically relationally, but *not essentially*, subordinate to God the Father or whether the Son only is temporally and economically role subordinate. The important related issue is whether the earthly submission of Christ occurs in Christ's humanity only or occurs in Christ's divine nature as well. While the integrity, completeness, and distinctiveness of Christ's Manhood, and how that relates to Christ's Godhead, will be discussed more fully in the last article of this series, for now the writer allows himself the premise that Christ has both a true and complete divine nature and a true and complete human nature.

The writer accordingly avers, admittedly as yet without providing evidence, that each of these two natures includes in itself, not in common with the other, but always attributable to the one Person, the faculties necessary to be in one case true God and in the other true Man; that is, each nature has in itself, not from the other, mind, will, and emotion. It follows that this writer opines that the integrity and distinctiveness of each nature in Christ allows that nature to think, experience, will, and act in manners not ascribable to the other nature. It is understood, for example, that in John 4:6 it is not the nature of God that is tired or in Luke 2:52 it is not the nature of God that increases in knowledge. Those are experiences of Christ as Man, not as God.

Likewise, other conditions apply only to Christ as God. In Colossians 1:16-17, it is not the humanity of Christ which created and sustains the universe, and in John 17:5 it is not the human nature which before the creation shared the Father's glory. Those are experiences of Christ as God, not as Man. Yet the experiences described in all four passages, and the many others too, are all

those of the one Person who is the "God-Man" with all of the implications that such a title implies.

This premise that each nature experiences in distinction from the other, if correct, provides the opportunity for the earthly obedience of Jesus to be seen as an act only of and only in Christ's humanity. But this distinguishing between the two natures of our Lord is not conceded to be a dividing of Christ into two Persons. Neither is such a dividing the confession or admission of those ancient and modern Christologists whose teachings reflect the incarnational Christology of the Antiochenes of the fifth century.

In distinguishing between the attributes and acts of Christ's natures, this writer will not go beyond the understanding of incarnational Christology as directly taught or at least clearly implied by such fathers as Tertullian, John of Damascus, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret of Cyprus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Leo, and Agatho and as formulated in the Creeds of Chalcedon of 451 and Constantinople of 680-681 in their reactions to perceived heresies.

That necessary cognate and substantial discussion of the two natures in the one Person and how the natures relate to each other and to the one Person as variously understood by modern North American theologians, both of the so called "Word-flesh" variety and of the so called "Word-man" conviction, follows in the third and final article of this series.

1.2. The Importance of the Issue

What might be the reasons for the study of intra-Trinal and economic Trinal relationships, and why should we even concern ourselves with the issue of whether the Son is eternally as God or temporally only as Man obedient?

First, Scripture contains many passages which concern these questions. The correct interpretation of Scripture should be a priority, but it is only to the extent that one's understanding of God and Christ is true that such Scriptures relating to God and Christ can be rightly understood.

Second, John tells us that the Son has revealed God. This revelation is surely given for us to understand, not to ignore.

Third, if our doctrine of God allows such apparent attributional dissimilarity between the Father and the Son, making One the ontological Sovereign over the Other, which Other is eternally subject and eternally submits His will to the will of the First, then can we consistently maintain the view that each Person in God is perfect and infinite and that the Three have in common only one nature and therefore only one set of attributes? Can One be the absolute authority over the Other and both have the same, identical qualities? If we say a difference in authority between the Father and the Son is eternal and ontological, how can we say that there is no eternal and ontological difference in nature?

Fourth, our Lord has said that He is to be honored just as the Father is honored. But if we honor God the Father as the supreme authority and God the Son as His loyal subject, a fair question may be, "Are we giving the Persons equal honor?"[3]

Fifth, defining in which nature, divine or human, the obedience of Christ occurs relates as well to our living the Christian life. If the earthly obedience of the Son, including His perfect rejection of temptation to sin, is but an extension of an intra-Trinal relationship wherein it is the very infinite nature of God the Son which obeys, then how can Christ's earthly perfect life of obedience be any example for us limited humans to try to follow? We are not God, and we do not have the resistance to temptation which God has—the precious, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us not withstanding. Scripture says that God, unlike us, cannot even be tempted. God in Christ resisting temptation as One who cannot be tempted is not therefore a practical example for men to follow. But the perfect obedience of Christ as a limited man would be a fine example for us in our limited capacities to try to emulate.

Sixth, since it is not uncommon, as will be shown below, for some North American theologians to use a supposed hierarchy of authority in God as a premise for distributing authority in familial and ecclesiastical contexts on the

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[3] May God forgive this writer for any misrepresentation of Scripture which he most surely in some places and in some capacities has made regarding the subject of Christ. As far as the writer knows, however, it is only a passion to honor the Son that drives the writer to argue such tenets as found in this article.

basis of gender, the issue of Christ's relational subordination has been made by some to concern gender roles in marriage and church as well. This writer believes that there are several Biblical passages on those subjects which should be exegeted with an open mind (obviously outside the purpose of this article) to determine how, or even if, gender relates to positions of authority in marriage and church, but this writer denies that a supposed relationship based on authority between God and God is a viable correlation to make in order to support a hierarchical doctrine about the authority of one gender over the another (see the discussion in section 2.13 below).

Nevertheless, despite these significant reasons for carefully studying the important question of the eternality or temporality of the Son's role subordination, and disregarding the need to proceed cautiously and respectfully through the large quantity of Biblical and theological material related to this sensitive subject, it has become quite popular among theologians in North America to assert too hurriedly and too dogmatically, in this writer's view, a number of "proofs" of questionable validity in order to establish that God the Son is eternally obedient to God the Father and that this same obedience continues uninterrupted in the divine nature of the incarnated God the Son. Then some, as well, apply that conclusion to societal issues in ways it should not be done. This article is written in response to that view and practice.

Understand that this view of relational subordination is not simply that each Trinal Person has a personal, particular role in the economic works of creation and salvation. No, that is not the issue at all! Who could deny that? The issue is rather whether or not the obedience of Christ on earth is merely an extension of an eternal hierarchy of authority in God wherein God obeys God. The Father is seen as the eternal Sovereign over the Son as God who always gives the Father dutiful submission. This article will be used to identify some North American theologians who assert that God the Son eternally is obedient to God the Father and to state their reason(s) for holding that opinion. Then an evaluation of the reason(s) of each theologian will be offered. Of course, the arguments next to each of the 20 numbers are those of these theologians, and below each is this writer's response.

1.3. Hypothesis

It is the opinion of this writer that the Son as God is the relational equal of God the Father. The Son is not eternally role subordinate to the Father, but only is economically in submission. That submission is only in His humanity, not in His deity.

2. Evaluating 20 Arguments for the Eternal Role Subordination of God the Son

While it is true that each author-theologian mentioned below may offer a number of evidences for his position, and that the evidences of each are not exclusively his but may be asserted by many, this writer will usually attach to each theologian discussed just one to three arguments so that the reader can see just how widespread this tenet is in North American theological literature. This writer has attempted to faithfully mention and respond to all the major arguments advanced in the literature for the eternal, relational subordination of the Son as God to the Father. As Dahms seems especially ambitious to prove the role subordination of the Son, more than three of his "proofs" will be mentioned. A total of twenty reasons will be evaluated.

2.1. Why would the Son have been the one to incarnate unless the Son were eternally role subordinate (Ware 2004)?

This question has its context in an article which attempts to support gender roles. Trinal relationships are taken by Ware to be evidential of the need for gender roles in church and family. In order to show that there is a hierarchy of authority among the Trinal Persons, Ware asks, if the Son is not under the authority of the Father, then why was it the Son who incarnated and not the Father? But Scripture is silent on why the Son incarnated. We do not know why the Son was the One, do we? The things to us revealed belong to us (Deut. 29:29), but things that are not revealed may not belong to us. Doctrine should not be built on silence.

Yet theories of why it was the Son who incarnated have been advanced. Anselm (1998:251) suggested that it was more proper for the Son to incarnate

because to our human mind it would seem more appropriate for the Son to be pleading for the salvation of humanity than it would be for the Father. Another theory is that of B.B. Warfield (2003:166), who denied the eternal role subordination of the Son. Warfield suggested that there is an existing "covenant" between the Trinal Persons as to who would do what in the creative and salvific acts of God. Brown (1966:25) sees the personified Wisdom and Torah of God as being in John's background of meaning for the Logos. If so, why would not the Logos, who is the Son, be the One to incarnate since by the Son's incarnation God is revealed (John 1:14, 18)? The Logos then is about both written and personified divine revelation. Even so, John 1:1 portrays the Logos as equal to God as He is God and is Creator. No subordination there! And, yes, Barth (2002:63) finds in the emphatic pronoun in Philippians 2:6 a reason to doubt that the Father's will was the ground of the incarnation. The Son chose, without duress, to do that!

No subordination is required in any of these suggestions. Since we do not really know why it was the Son who incarnated, Ware's argument based on virtual silence has a very weak voice in this discussion, at least it does in this writer's opinion.

2.2. Unless there were in God a hierarchy of authority, there would be no way tell the Trinal Persons apart (Horrell 2004:417).

Why must authority be the only clue to identity? In our societies, cannot persons be distinguished by many other means, rather than just by authority? As for God, if Scripture names One as the Father and says that He loves a second, the Son, are we not provided with sufficient data by that simple statement to tell one Person from the Other? But there is in such a statement no subordination. Love need not imply any difference of authority at all. Cannot love, and not authority, be both the basis on which persons may be told apart and the basis of relationships as well? The "only begotten God" (NASB) is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), and that is sufficient to tell them apart without adding "God obeys God".

2.3. One called "Son" would be subordinate to one called "Father" (Grudem 1994:250).

Yet Gregory Nazianzen (Fourth Theological Oration XX, 1999:316) says, "He is called 'Son' because He is identical with the Father in essence." And, it has been well-argued by Bess (1965:17-24) that "son of" is a Hebraic idiom meaning "of the same kind." So, for example, "the sons of the prophets" are not subordinate to prophets, but are themselves prophets. When Christ claimed that God was His Father, the Jews took that to mean an equality with God (John 5:18). Mowery (2002:100-110) has evidenced that the title "Son of God" in a particular construction in three places in Matthew exactly parallels the syntax of the Roman imperial title as found on coins, public baths, bridges, and elsewhere. Perhaps, then, first century Christians, who certainly were aware of the attribution of deity to the emperor, understood Christ in a way similar to how the imperial cult understood the emperor. The title, as understood in the imperial cult, would seem to have evoked an identification of the emperor with the gods, not a subordination of the emperor to the gods. So, the Son of God is God, not less than God. He is equal to God.

2.4. Personal distinctions (as role subordination) are not additional divine attributes to God's being (Grudem 1994:253).

The effect of Grudem's assertion is that role subordination is not at all connected to essential subordination. Or, in other words, as Frame claims (2002:721) , a hierarchy of authority in God does not compromise an equality of nature between the Persons.

But, the writer of this article agrees with Chafer (1947:223) and Hodge (1986:440), who treated God's prerogative of sovereignty as a divine attribute, and with Berkhof (1996:76) and Grudem himself (1994:217), who definitively say that sovereignty is a divine attribute. Therefore, if the Father has sovereignty over the Son, how can the two have sovereignty in the same manner or to the same extent? Can an essential attribute of one Person in God be infinite and that same attribute in another Person in God be less than infinite?

God's essential attributes are all infinite. By "infinity" is meant that "there cannot be any limitations on God" (Berkhof 1996:259). But, were one Person the authority over the Other, the latter does not have infinite sovereignty. His sovereignty is limited. Yes, as Highfield does (2002:279-299) in the context of a debate between classical and open theism, the issue of God's self-limitation (i.e., of all the Persons in God) of His not exercising sovereignty, becomes a topic of discussion related to the issue of man's free will. The will is free, it is supposed, because God limits His sovereignty.

But for this article, the question is not really whether all who are God ever together limit themselves, but whether one Trinal Person only in God, the Son, exclusively is limited in exercising the attribute of sovereignty, while the Other, the Father, is not limited. How could this be if the divine attributes inhere in the one divine nature?

Yet, attributes are said to inhere in the undivided nature. The power of infinity which God has, says Aquinas (1920a), is due to the infinity of God's essence. Essence determines attributes. Attributes cannot be separated from essence (Shedd 1980:1:335; Wiley 1940:321). Frame insists that God cannot exist without His attributes; each attribute is necessary to God's being (2002:226). So how can the Son have a different sovereignty without having a different essence?

Erickson, observing that since each Trinal Person performs different economic roles, each Person has His own set of "properties." But Erickson defines these properties as functions or activities or acts—not as attributes (1989:265). Since the attributes are essential to the divine nature, the Trinal Persons do not each have Their own set of attributes (1989:265). Were they to, the essence of God would be divided.

So, these data occasion important questions: if sovereignty is a divine attribute and that attribute is unlimited, then how can the Son's sovereignty be less than the Father's? If divine attributes inhere in the divine nature and by having that nature the Father has sovereignty over the Son, then how can the Son by having the very same nature be ruled by the Father?

It would seem that any limitation on the Son's attributional equality would be a limitation as well on the Son's essential equality. Grudem, while teaching that there is no difference in attributes between the Persons, and that sovereignty is an attribute, can still insist, in this writer's conviction contradicting himself, that God the Father commands and the God the Son obeys. A reversal of that, Grudem adamantly, and without basis, insists would cause the Son to cease being Son and the Father to cease being Father (1994:250). Thus, what makes a Person in God is His place in the hierarchy of authority? Where does Scripture say this? Where's the proof for Grudem's bold statement? Grudem's dogmatic assertion is not only without Scriptural support, but also without logical support.

2.5. John 5:19 shows that God the Son is eternally submissive to God the Father (Lewis and Demarest 1987:277).

Is this a fair conclusion to draw from John 5:19? It is curious, but not unique (see also Westcott 1980:196; Morris 1984:312) that a text which Athanasius (1999:476) took to be evidence of the equality of the Son with the Father and which Augustine (On The Creed 5; 1995:370) used to argue that the Father is not greater than the Son, is by Lewis and Demarest wrested to mean that the Father is God the Son's Superior or that God is dependent on God. But others think John 5:19 is not teaching a dependence of God the Son on the Father; it is teaching instead a unity of nature and operation between the Two (Brown 1966:218).

Perhaps neither the unity nor the dependence approach exemplified above is attending closely to the context. Verse 20 says that the Father will show the Son greater works. Does that not restrict this dependence to time? If it does, how is that dependence eternally happening in God or existing between God and God? If the Son as God must wait around for the Father to show Him things, then does God have two minds? Does God know more than God? Does God teach God?

These propositions seem foolish views to hold in the light of God's unity in nature and attributes. So, just as Aquinas (1920b) asserts, John 5:19 refers to the humanity of Christ not to His deity. As such John 5:19 is no evidence at all of the eternal relational subordination of the Son. The vastly different

understandings of John 5:19 severely limit its value as a proof text of a supposed hierarchy of authority in God.

2.6.   Teaching in church history shows that the vast majority of Christian scholars have taught the eternal relational subordination of God the Son (Kovach and Shemm 1999:462-470).

But let's take a sampling of some Christian scholars:

- John of Damascus (1999:59) wrote that the Son is not obedient in His Godhead, but only as man. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Hilary (1999:157) chided the heretics who do not distinguish between God and Man in Christ, and Hilary says it is in Christ's condition as Man that He subjected Himself to the Father. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Gregory Nazianzen (1999:311) taught that it is not in Christ's character as the Word that He was obedient. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Augustine (1995a:25) asserted that it is in His humanity that the Son is subject to the Father. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Anselm (1998:251, 276) expressed the position that only as man did Christ suffer, and that only man's will in Christ can supplicate—not God's. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Aquinas (1920b) explained that Christ's human nature is subject to the Father, not His divine nature. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Chemnitz (1971:59), the Lutheran reformer, ascribed such subordinist passages as John 5:30, 6:38, Matthew 26:39, and Isaiah 7:15 only to the human mind and will of Christ, not to His deity. No eternal obedience of God to God here!
- Calvin (1975:416) insisted that Christ doing the Father's will, and not His own, applies "entirely to His humanity." No eternal obedience of God to God here!.
- According to Jonathan Edwards (1834:632), as God, Christ has absolute sovereignty, and the decrees of God are Christ's sovereign decrees. No eternal obedience of God to God here!

- R.A. Torrey (1933:88) was of the opinion that all passages referring to a subordination of the Son "have reference to the incarnated Christ and not to the pre-existent Word." No eternal obedience of God to God here!

- B.B. Warfield (2003:176) saw it that subordinative passages in the New Testament likely have their full explanation in the doctrines of the covenant, the humiliation, and the two natures in the incarnated Christ. No eternal obedience of God to God here!

- Charles Hodge (1981:395) asserted that none of Christ's obedience occurred in the divine nature. No eternal obedience of God to God here!

- A.B. Bruce (1905:20-21) believed that God the Son took the human nature in order to become the Father's servant; it was in that nature that He became obedient. No eternal obedience of God to God here!

- Millard Erickson (2000:90) thinks that subordinating the Son to the Father is a mistake resulting from confusing economic Trinal relationships with eternal ones. No eternal obedience of God to God here!

This sampling does not disprove Kovack and Shemm's assertion, but it does suggest that a good many Christians thinkers have questioned the veracity of the tenet that God the Son is eternally role subordinate to the Father.

2.7. As Christ's subordination was decreed, that subordination is eternal (and so, ontological) (Kovach and Shemm 1999:471).

Christ's obedience is in the decree of God (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 1 Pet. 1:20). As Chafer (1947, 3:37) and Barth (1958:35) say, the incarnational, historical life of our Lord was decreed. So, does that mean that this is an ontological relationship in God, which is decreed? How so, since God does not decree that which is in Himself? "The decrees have reference to things outside of God" (Strong 1907:353). Shedd also says that nothing pertaining to Trinitarian distinctions can be decreed (1980:395-396; see also Chafer 1947, 1:228; Klooster 1989:303). Therefore, because Christ's obedience is decreed, rather than that evidencing that God in God obeys God, it instead evidences that Christ's obedience is not in God at all; it is only is economic.

2.8. John 14:28 shows that the Son as God eternally obeys the Father (Kitano 1999:99).

Wayne Grudem, who also subscribes to the eternal role subordination of God to God, was the "first reader" on Kitano's Th.M. thesis committee at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Yet it seems no one questioned Kitano as to why, since Kitano devotes an entire chapter to "The Eary [sic] Church Fathers' Understanding of Eternal Relational Subordination," his interpretation of John 14:28 is so very different from that of some early Church fathers. For example:

- Augustine insisted that John 14:28 refers not to the Son as God but only to Christ's incarnated form of a servant (1995a:24).
- Ambrose explained that John 14:28 was written of Christ's humanity. (1999:231).
- Theodoret applies John 14:28 to "the flesh and not the Person of the Godhead" (1999:181).
- Basil suggested that the text referred to the Word made flesh (Letter 8:5 1999:118).
- Leo preached that John 14:28 refers to Christ as Man not as God (1999:192-193). [It is true that some Church Fathers took John 14:28 to be based on the eternal essentiation of the Son; One essentiated was thought unequal to One who essentiates].

The understanding that John 14:28 is about Christ's humanity or economic work is also that of many later writers as well, such as Calvin (2003:103), Hengstenberg (1980, 2:234), Hendricksen (1979, 2:288), Dods (n.d.:827), Lenski (1961:1020), Morris (1984:658), Bruce (1983:306), and others.

It would, perhaps, have been worthwhile for Kitano in the Th.M. thesis to interact with the rationale of those many who disagree with his understanding of John 14:28. God cannot be greater than God. But since Christ as Man is sent (John 13:16), Christ as Man is subordinate to God. As Augustine said, in the form of God He is greater than Himself, but in the form of Man, He is less than Himself (1995a:24).

2.9. 1 Corinthians 11:3 shows that the Father is the eternal authority over the Son (Kitano 1999:102).

Kitano's "first reader," Grudem, has, by using a University of California computer programme, researched 2000+ occurrences of *kephalē* in Greek literature (Grudem 1985; 1990). Despite Cervin's (1989) ineffective counter, Grudem's findings established beyond reasonable doubt that the noun *kephalē* ("head") in the New Testament means "authority over" not "source of."

But, must 1 Corinthians 11:3 mean that the Son as God has the Father as His authority? Why so since the title or name "Christ" need not refer exclusively to the divine nature? Ambrose thought that the term "Christ" here means "His form as a servant" (1999:266). Augustine said the text refers to Christ's human nature (1995a:329). Charles Hodge taught that 1 Corinthians 11:3 refers to "the incarnate Son" (1972:119). The virtue of 1 Corinthians 11:3 to prove Kitano's assertion is limited, therefore, as his interpretation of it is often doubted. God is Head of Christ as Man, not Head of Christ as God.

2.10. As John 6:57 shows that the Son depends on the Father for life, the Son must be role subordinate (Kitano 1999:97).

But the text clearly references the humanity of Christ, because it refers to His body and blood. The context is the cross, not a precreational relationship in God. Unless God the Son has life in Himself, as says John 1:4, then God the Son does not have the Father's attribute of aseity. Having different attributes means having a different essence. So, as Frame correctly says, "if the Son is fully God, then He has no origin or cause. . . . He is a *se*" (2002:708).

2.11. Eternal generation is the corollary of eternal role subordination (Williams 1996).

The reader is referred to the first article in this series (Grover 2008) and point 2.10 above. An unproven hypothesis makes a poor corollary.

2.12. Unless what we see in the economic Trinal relationship is true of eternal relationships, the Persons are acting contrary to their natures (Dahms 1989:497).

Dahms does not appear to have thought this through. First, what he does not correctly factor into his logic is that the Son added in His incarnation a second nature. In that nature, the Son experiences and acts in distinction from the divine nature. He does, that is, unless one chooses to imagine that God cries in his crib, increases in size, sleeps in a boat, and bleeds. It was as Man, according to Philippians 2:8, that Christ humbled Himself and became obedient. It does not say there that in the form of God He obeyed.

Second, neither has Dahm's connected to his thinking what we see in the different sorts of temporal relationships between the Trinal Persons. In Matthew 4:1, the Spirit leads the Son. But in John 16:7, the Son sends the Spirit. In which text, then, do we see the Persons acting according to Their natures? In John 17:4, the Son glorifies the Father. But in 17:5, the Father glorifies the Son. In which text, then, are the Persons acting according to their natures? The economic works of the Trinity are not intended by Scripture to dictate to us how the Trinal Persons in the ontological Trinity must act.

2.13. The hierarchy in God is a basis for personal ethics (Dahms 1989:498-499).

Dahms says that God obeying God teaches us as Christians to obey those who have authority over us in state, church, and home. While Dahms does not here give more specific examples of the application of this premise, others do. In his over 800 page book on gender roles, Wayne Grudem uses the supposed submission of God the Son to God the Father as an argument for Grudem's view of the how one gender should submit to another (2004:433-437). One of Grudem's points is that an authority of one over the other can occur even among those of the same nature. This present article is not a discussion of gender roles, but the reader should be aware that some in North America relate supposed Trinal relationships to gender roles in church and family.

However, in this writer's view, the texts which Grudem employs to evidence God obeying God and thus creating a divine corollary to gender roles can all

be understood as Christ as Man obeying God, not as God obeying God. All of the texts to which Grudem alludes, as John 5:30, easily fit into the submissive relationship of the incarnated Son to the Father, occurring only in His humanity, and do not require us to take that relationship as being an eternal one.[4]

2.14. John 17:5 implies that as the Father gives glory to Son, so the Son is subordinate (Dahms 1994:354).

But John 17:5 does not teach that in eternity God the Son receives glory from God the Father. As Wallace explains, the preposition *para* with the dative (here a pronoun), suggests nearness not agency as it does when used with the genitive (1996:378).

2.15. The Son reveals the Father (John 1:18), but unless the subordination seen in the earthly Jesus is ontological as well, that revelation of Trinal relationships is untrue (Dahms 1994:359).

What Dahms is claiming is that unless what we see in the incarnated Christ is true of God as God is, then Christ's revelation of God is not accurate. However, when Christ was tempted (Matt. 4:1), does that mean that God as God is tempted? When Christ matured (Luke 2:52), does that mean that God as God grows up? When Christ slept in a boat (Luke 8:23), does that mean that God as God takes naps? Can we not suppose that the authors of Scripture would presume that the readers of Scripture are able to separate what is true of Man from what is true of God?

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[4] The writer's comments on the efficiency of Grudem's statements about how Trinal relationships connect to human relationships are not intended to imply that the writer thinks that Grudem is incorrect about his opining on all of the other 100+ arguments he makes.

2.16. 1 Corinthians 15:24, 28 evidences the eternality of the Son's role subordination to the Father because the Son gives His Kingdom over to the Father (Dahms 1994:362).

There are some difficulties with that conclusion. First, as this text says nothing about Christ's pre-existent status, it is no proof for the eternal relational subordination of the Son. Second, as the positions of Strong (1907:314, 699) and Hodge (1972:186) show, it is not uncommon to connect the passage to Christ's humanity, not to His deity. Third, Luke 1:32-33, Daniel 7:14, Revelation 11:15, and 2 Peter 1:11 teach us that the Kingdom of Christ is everlasting, just as Chafer reminds us (1974, 2:366; 5:372-376). That is why, fourth, some such as Augustine (1995b:25), Bruce (1971:148) and Lenski (1963:684) see the text as not teaching a stepping down of the Son at all, but instead teaching a merging of the Son's Kingdom with that of the Father's.

2.17. Since the Logos was the Agent of creation, according to John 1:1, that shows an eternal subordination (Dahms 1994:358).

What Dahms is attempting to prove in his article is "the essential subordination of the Son" (1994:351). He argues that because the divine Persons have different economic roles, these roles prove essential differences between the Persons in God. Is it not curious that Grudem, who holds to the eternal role subordination of the Son, argues for that tenet, as cited above, by saying that the subordination of one gender to another does not prove that genders are essentially different. However, Dahms, who agrees with Grudem about the eternal subordination of the Son, argues for that tenet by saying that different roles in God's creative acts prove there are essential differences between the Persons in the Trinity.

But it is not proven that a difference in roles in the creative work of the Trinity is evidence of eternal differences in authority in God. How could it be when creation is, in fact, for God the Son according to Colossians 1:16? If creation was done for the Son, how does creation prove that the Son is subordinate?

2.18. As in the fourth Gospel, one who is sent is subordinate to the one who sends, the Son as sent is eternally subordinate to the Father (Cowan 2006:117-118).

Cowan argues that because the Baptist who was sent by God is subject to God and because the disciples who were sent by Christ are subject to Christ, therefore as the Son was sent by the Father, the Son as God is subject to God.

But first, it might be mentioned that it is perilous to base our understanding of how God relates to God on how humans relate to God or to other humans. Is how parents care for their children illustrative of how God the Father nurtures God the Son? Does God need nurturing? Is God disciplined by God as parents discipline their children? Does God require discipling? If you think these are foolish comparisons to make, then how can Cowan's comparison be convincing?

Second, while Augustine labors to prove that God sending God does not require an inequality (1995b:82-86) and, he may be right, this writer sees it that the Son as born of a woman (Gal. 4:4), and not as the Pre-existent God, and Who is in the form of a servant, not in the form of God (Philippians 2:6-8), is the One Who was sent. Therefore, the sending of the Son as Man by God is not proof of an inequality in authority between the Son as God and God the Father.

2.19. The articulated infinitive in Philippians 2:6 has the force of separating "form of God" from "equal with God," so the Son is not the relational equal of the Father (Burk 2000).

Burk argues that the articulated infinitive *to einai isa* (literally, "the to be equal") in Philippians 2:6, drives a grammatical wedge between "form of God" and "equal to God." Therefore, Burk opines that the Son "obeys the Father from all eternity." Burk also, as do some above, then makes subordination in God correspondent to subordination among genders.

Burk is aware that many, as N.T. Wright (1986), take the regular use of the articulated infinitive to refer back to something previously mentioned. So, as "form of God" was previously mentioned, "equal to God" is complementary to

that according to Wright. But Burk thinks Wright is wrong about that grammaticism having application to this text because the lexemes "form of God" and "equal to God" are not identical. Burk explains, for example, that in Romans 7:18 "the to wish" is identical to "the to do." So, there the articulated infinitive, he concedes, is anaphoric. But it it is not so, Burk insists, in Philippians 2:6. This is because "form of God" is not equivalent to "equal with God."

However, Burk is assuming a conclusion in his argument. He must first prove that "form of God" is not an equivalent lexeme with "equal with God." Only then can he build a grammaticism based on the infinitive being articulated in this text to evidence that the Son is not equal. *Morphē* regularly is taken to imply nature and qualities (e.g., Braumann 1967:706; O'Brien 1991:207). And so, before making his argument on grammar, Burk first must convincingly establish that Paul would not take having "equality with God" as being implied in having the "*morphē* of God."

So, a good reader of Greek, Burk seems to imply, would, when seeing that the lexemes are not identical, and the infinitive has the article, not take Philippians 2:6 to mean that God the Son is equal to the Father. Now that is a questionable implication given that experts in Greek regularly have taken the text to mean that the Son is equal.

Both ancient and modern experts in Greek have interpreted the text in that manner. Chrysostom, for example, had Greek as his native tongue, yet he said Philippians 2:6 means that the Son is equal (1983:213). Athanasius also spoke and wrote in Greek. Yet he too said that Philippians 2:6 means that the Son is equal (1999:396). Should we suppose that these know less than Burk about their own language? Moderns too, such as Barth (2002:61) Fee (1995:208), Feinberg (1980:34) and Hawthorne (1983:84-85) all see it that the Son is equal according to Philippians 2:6. How, then, can it be so very clear to Burk that the Son in Philippians 2:6 is said not to be equal? Could it possibly be that theology is controlling Burk's exegesis and not exegesis controlling his theology?

2.20. The meaning of *harpagmos* ("not robbery" KJV; "to be grasped" NIV) in Philippians 2:6 likely requires that Christ does not have relational equality with God (Wallace 1995:634-635).

It is curious that Wallace, when discussing that noun, does not refer to the findings of Hoover (1971:95-119). As the reader may know, at times theses or dissertations have very narrow topics. And such was the case with Hoover, who wrote his Th.D. dissertation at Harvard on one Greek word. And that word was *harpagmos*.

Hoover did extensive research in both Biblical and secular Greek literature. What Hoover found was that when *harpagmos* is used as a predicate accusative, as it is in Philippians 2:6, with any of a group of six verbs, it has idiomatic meaning. The meaning is, "not using what one possesses for one's own benefit." One of those six verbs is *hēgēsato* (deemed [it]), which is the very verb in 2:6. Therefore, Philippians 2:6 is saying that while God the Son is equal with God the Father, the Son did not use that equality for His own benefit.

3. Conclusion

This writer has evaluated and found wanting twenty arguments which are advanced to teach the eternal relational subordination of God the Son. In this writer's opinion, none of the twenty nor even the cumulative effect of the twenty is convincing. Therefore, it remains this writer's opinion that God is not the authority over God. As St. Augustine wisely wrote of the Son: "if He is not equal in anything, He is not equal in all" (1995b:99). May this article bring glory to God the Son our Lord.

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The Biblical Concept of Truth in the Fourth Gospel[1]

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Abstract

This journal article examines the biblical concept of truth in the Fourth Gospel. The essay provides a synopsis of the lexical data regarding the concept of truth. This is followed by an examination of the various places in the Gospel of John where the Greek noun alētheia (which is rendered "truth") occurs.[3] Based on an analysis of the information, it is determined that the author of the Fourth Gospel affirms the established notion of truth found in the Old Testament, post-canonical Jewish writings, and Synoptic Gospels. In brief, the prevailing concept is one of veracity and genuineness in stark contrast to all forms of falsehood. Additionally, it is concluded that the Evangelist refines this understanding by focusing the notion of truth on the Father's revelation of Himself in His Son. It is maintained that the divine-incarnate Messiah is both the epitome and emissary of truth. Furthermore, it is surmised that the Savior's followers come to a full awareness and understanding of the truth by believing in Him for salvation and allowing Him to transform every aspect of their lives.

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[3] In order to keep the size and scope of this investigation manageable and feasible, the study does not explore in the Fourth Gospel the use of *alēthēs* (meaning "true", "valid", and "honest"), *alēthinos* (meaning "authentic" and "genuine") and *alēthōs* (meaning "truly" and "actually"). These Greek words tend to share some of the meanings and nuances of *alētheia*, which is the dominant term in the truth vocabulary used in the Gospel of John (cf. Bernard 1962:25-26; Brown 1966:499-501; Dodd 1953:170-171; Hawkin 1987:6; Morris 1995:260; Roberts 2003:2-6).

1. Introduction

In a weblog titled "Absolute Truth" (dated 1 August 2008), the Principal of South African Theological Seminary, Reuben van Rensburg, noted that the "concept of absolute truth is coming under fire more and more". Likewise, he pointed out that "even in the Christian community" there are individuals who reject the notion of truth being absolute (cf. Hick 1981:5-7). The tragic result is a "further weakening the church in the eyes of the world" (van Rensburg 2008). These observations are confirmed in an extensive survey conducted in 2008 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. An interview of over 35,000 Americans yielded a detailed snapshot of the religious landscape in the United States (and possibly is suggestive of the situation in other industrialized countries). Within the mainline Protestant churches, 83 percent affirmed that "many religions can lead to eternal life". Even among those who claimed to be evangelicals, 57 percent registered agreement (Buchanan 2008:7).

This alarming circumstance is due, in part, to the pluralistic age in which we live. In a forthcoming article, I maintain that pluralism represents a worldview and approach to life that runs counter to Christianity. In general, it is an ideology that says there are many valid ways of understanding ultimate reality. More specifically, pluralism asserts that no one religion has the best understanding of the truth. Allegedly, this extends to understanding the infinite existence of God, the nature of the human condition, and the path to salvation. It is claimed that every religion is valid and none are to be refused. Adherents insist it is naïve, intolerant, and presumptuous to contend for the exclusivity of one religion over another (Lioy 2009; cf. Azumah 2007:294-305; Carson 1991:491-492; Hallett 2007:555-571; Köstenberger 2004:428-429).

Even in the first century of the common era, there were those who disdained the notion that there is absolute truth. Consider Pontius Pilate. In the closing hours of Jesus' earthly ministry, He appeared for questioning before the Roman governor. The Messiah explained that He was "born and came into the

world to testify to the truth" (John 18:37).4 He added that "everyone on the side of truth listens to me". In short, Jesus asserted that His goal was to bring truth into the world, not stage a revolt against Rome. Pilate, instead of talking further with the one who is "the way and the truth and the life" (14:6), cut off the conversation with a cynical retort, "What is truth?" (18:38). Köstenberger (2005:33) observed that "it is hard to imagine a more profound question with more momentous consequences".

Tragically, the governor failed to appreciate that the divine-incarnate Messiah is both the epitome and emissary of truth (cf. Roberts 2003:140). The veracity and eternal import of the latter is substantiated by an examination of the biblical concept of truth in the Fourth Gospel. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, the notion of "truth is more prominent and its language more frequently used" in the Gospel of John (Woodbridge 2000:827). Moreover, the author's usage of "truth vocabulary" is "much more complex" (Crump 1992:860) and reflects a distinctively Hebraic mindset (Thiselton 1986:889).[5] These observations provide an incentive for undertaking the study that follows.

2. The Lexical Data Regarding the Concept of Truth

The Greek noun *alētheia,* which is rendered "truth", occurs 109 times in the Greek New Testament and 25 times in the Gospel of John (cf. 1:14, 17; 3:21; 4:23, 24; 5:33; 8:32 [2x], 40, 44 [2x], 45, 46; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13 [2x]; 17:17 [2x], 19; 18:37 [2x], 38; Kohlenberger, Goodrick, and Swanson 1995:43; Moulton, Geden, and Marshall, 2002:40). The term can denote verities that are either objective or subjective nature. Objective truth refers to: what is in accord with reality or fact, regardless of the historical or metaphysical nature of the situation being considered; conditions, matters, and relations pertaining to God and the ethical duties of people; and revelation given by God, whether observed in creation, embodied in the divine-incarnate

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

[5] The present study supports the view that John the apostle most likely wrote the Fourth Gospel in the latter half of the first century of the common era (cf. Lioy 2005:18-19; Lioy 2007a:15-16).

Messiah, or articulated in doctrine arising from the Bible. Subjective truth denotes the character quality of being sincere, trustworthy, candid, and reliable (cf. Bultmann 1999:242-247; Danker, Bauer, and Arndt 2000:43; Louw and Nida 1989:1:667, 673; Spicq 1994:66; Swanson 2001). In brief, the "truth vocabulary" found in the New Testament has as its locus of meaning "veracity/genuineness" and exists in stark contrast to all forms of "falsehood" (Crump 1992:859; cf. Bultmann 1976:321, 434-436; Piper 1962:4:716; Smith 1999:59, 315; Woodbridge 2000:827). For believers, this is evidenced in a "whole life and walk in truth" (Bromiley 1988:4:927; cf. Holmes 1976:4:827).

These emphases are reflected in the tendency of the Septuagint to use *alētheia* more often than other Greek terms to render the Hebrew noun *'emet* (Hübner 1990:58; Roberts 2003:7, 25; Wildberger 1997:151), which means "faithfulness", "trustworthiness", "firmness", "stability", and "reliability" (cf. Brown, et al. 1985:54; Jepsen 1997:1:312-316; Köehler, et al. 2001, 1:68-69; Moberly 1997:428-429; Scott 1980:52-53; Wildberger 1997:135). The ancient Greeks tended to think of "truth" as an "abstract or theoretical concept" that is "located . . . in some timeless extra-historical realm." In contrast, the Hebrews of the Old Testament era and the Jews of the intertestimental period regarded "truth" as being based on God's faithfulness (cf. Ps 31:5; Isa 65:16). The latter is revealed both in His "words" and "deeds". Moreover, His "truth is proved in practice in the experience of His people". Furthermore, people demonstrate their regard for the truth "in their daily witness to their neighbor and their verbal and commercial transactions" (Thiselton 1986:881; cf. Bromiley 1988:926; Kuyper 1964:6; Schwarzschild 2007:162). In short, they prove by their actions that their lives are characterized by honesty, rectitude, and integrity, rather than hypocrisy, falsehood, pretense, and deceit (Thiselton 1986:882-883; cf. Piper 1962:713-714; Spicq 1994:67-68; Wildberger 1997:151-153, 155-156; Woodbridge 2000:826-827).

3.   The Use of *Alētheia* in John 1:14 and 17

The biblical concept of truth dominates the literary landscape of the Gospel of John. In light of the information presented in the previous section, Hawkin (1987:11) is correct in his observation that the leitmotif of "truth" presented by the Evangelist should be "differentiated from the intellectualist concept of the

Greeks". For that reason, Dodd (1953:177; cf. 435) seems off the mark in asserting that in the Fourth Gospel the essential meaning of *alētheia* primarily "rests upon common Hellenistic usage", rather than the lexical emphases found in the Old Testament and post-canonical Jewish writings. Additionally, the scholarly consensus is at variance with the claim that *alētheia* "hovers upon the meanings of 'reality', or 'the ultimately real', and 'knowledge of the real'" (cf. similar comments made by Beasley-Murray 1999:14-15; Bultmann 1976:53, 74, 190-191, 509, 533, 606, 655; Bultmann 1999:245-246; Schnackenburg 1987:1:273). Instead, the Greek noun is more closely aligned with the ideas of "integrity or covenant faithfulness" (Keener 2003:418; cf. Brown 1966:500; Smith 1995:16-17; Witherington 1995:176-177). This is especially seen in the Son's "revelation" of the Father. The unveiling of the divine "arises out of the faithfulness of God to his own character, and to his promises, of which [the revelation] is the fulfillment" (Barrett 1960:139).

An examination of the Gospel of John indicates that "truth" is not just a "theological" notion but "more accurately, a Christological concept" (Köstenberger 2005:35). This is seen in the repeated usage of the Greek noun *alētheia*, beginning with the Prologue (1:1-18, esp. vv. 14 and 17). The latter is a gateway to the rest the Evangelist's theological discourse, which has "the cosmos as its setting and eternity as its time frame" (Reinhartz 2001:34). In addition, the Prologue stands as an entry point in which key themes are broached and woven together in a liturgical celebration of the advent of the divine-incarnate Messiah (Lioy 2005:57). A pertinent example would be the claim that the Messiah is the nexus of all truth (cf. 1:17; 14:6). Valentine has noted that the Prologue is "nothing less than the theological matrix" out of which arise "the themes of the gospel". In this "seedbed of the gospel's teaching" the Evangelist showcases a "chain of inter-locking ideas" (1996:293). In turn, this helps to create a significant "christological connection" between the Prologue and the remainder of the Fourth Gospel (Cox 2000:19).

The Prologue can be divided into two main literary sections: (1) the divinity of the Son (vv. 1-8), and (2) the humanity of the Son (vv. 9-18; Lioy 2006b:135). Matthew and Luke began their accounts of Jesus' life with His birth and genealogy. Mark began with the ministry of John the Baptizer, who paved the

way for the Messiah. In contrast, the first words in the Fourth Gospel echo the first words of Genesis. Indeed, the Evangelist takes readers back to the dawn of creation with the phrase "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). John clearly identified the "Word" (or in Greek, *logos*) as Jesus in verse 14. Since the Word existed "in the beginning", the Word could not be a created being. In reality, the Word was God and with God at the same time (v. 1). Though distinct persons, God the Father and God the Son share the same divine nature (along with God the Holy Spirit). The one whom believers call Jesus was with His Father in the beginning. Moreover, through Jesus, God brought all things into existence (John 1:2-3; cf. Col 1:16; Heb 1:2).

John 1:14 and 17 are of particular interest to this study. The Evangelist declared that the one who is eternal in His preexistence and enjoys the intimate, personal fellowship of the Father and the Spirit, completely entered the sphere of time-bound existence. According to Tillich (1955:38), the Word is "the divine self-manifestation" who through His incarnation makes the transcendent Lord immanent in a personal way within the human experience. Waetjen (2001:265) builds on this thought by observing that the enfleshment of the Logos "constitutes the objectification of truth". The phrase translated "made his dwelling among" (v. 14) literally means "to pitch a tent" or "to live temporarily". Jesus left His heavenly dwelling and took up residence on earth, volunteering to live within the limitations of natural human experience. The term "dwelling" would probably be associated by Jewish readers with the tabernacle, upon which the glory of God had rested (cf. Roberts 2003:64-65).

The Evangelist could personally attest to the "glory" of the one who came from heaven. John was probably alluding to the Transfiguration, which he personally witnessed (cf. Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:29; 2 Pet 2:16-18). The idea behind the Greek noun *doxa* includes the notions of splendor and grandeur (Lioy 2005:82). This glory was that of the unique Son of God. The superlative nature of the Word is highlighted by the declaration in John 1:14 that the Messiah is full of "grace" (*charis*) and "truth" (*alētheia*). In the Old Testament, the equivalent notions would be God's enduring love (*ḥesed*) and faithfulness (*'ĕmet*, respectively; cf. Gen 24:27; Ps 26:3; Lindsay 1993:131), which were the basis for His covenantal mercy to His people through Moses and others (cf. Exod 33:18-19; 34:6-7; Ps 25:10; Jon 4:2; Kuyper 1964:3-4).

From a New Testament perspective, the Lord's grace, or unmerited favor, is the reason believers are saved (Eph 2:8).

Eternal redemption is made possible through the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, who is the truth (John 14:6). In 1:14, the use of *alētheia* in reference to the Son indicates that He is the complete embodiment and perfect manifestation of divine reality, especially as communicated through His words, deeds, and life (Hübner 1990:59). This is evident in Him becoming "flesh". The fact of the Incarnation means that the Son not only "took on human history" (O'Collins 1995:47), but also provides "an anchor in history (including its geographic and ethnic rootedness) for Christianity" (Schwarz 1998:221). Moreover, in the Word resides the "plentitude of divine glory and goodness" (Bruce 1983:43). Verse 16 provides a conceptual link back to the superlative nature of the Logos by noting that with the Son's advent, the inexhaustible grace of God the Father has been fully manifested. To those who had already been blessed by His unmerited favor, there continued to be an inexhaustible supply of grace piled on top of grace. Such was the superlative nature of being redeemed.

Verse 17 develops further the notion of the Son as both the epitome and emissary of truth by contrasting Him with Moses. "Law" (*nomos*) refers to the "body of teaching revealed to Moses" and which constituted "the foundation of the whole socio-religious life and thought of Israel" (Pancaro 1975:515). The spiritual elite of Jesus' day considered the Mosaic law to be a divine gift or blessing, for the Lord revealed Himself through it (Barrett 1975:26; cf. Heb 1:1). Ultimately, the law that Moses gave pointed to the promised Messiah of Israel (cf. John 5:46; Gal. 3:24-25), who is the supreme and final revelation of the triune God (cf. Heb 1:2-3). This view is strengthened by the theory put forward by Hanson (1991:24) that the "pre-existent Logos" should be identified with the theophany Moses encountered on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 33–34), and that the "references to sin and forgiveness in the narrative" foreshadow not only the "revelation in Christ", but also His "redemptive activity". In addition to Moses, Abraham and Isaiah foresaw the advent of the Redeemer (cf. John 8:56; 12:41; Lioy 2007a:159-160, 204-205). Despite the limited perspective of these and other Old Testament saints, they were somehow aware of the Son's humiliation and exaltation (cf. Deut 18:15, 18;

Pss 2:1-2, 22; 28:16; 118:22; Isa. 52:13–53:12; Matt. 21:42; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 4:11, 25-26; 1 Cor 10:3).

The parallelism of John 1:17 is best understood as being synthetical, rather than antithetical, in nature (Roberts 2003:72-74; Willett 1992:41-42). According to Casselli, the emphasis is on redemptive-historical fulfillment rather than displacement (cf. Thomas 1987:155-156). With the backdrop being an "eschatological framework", the "old order is, in Christ, giving way to the new aeon of fulfillment" (Casselli 1997:15). Thus, whatever "implied contrast" there is operative "in this verse, the precise nature of the contrast is ambivalent" (Casselli 1997:36). In the same vein, Ellis (1984:26) notes that the "contrast between Moses and Jesus is not meant to denigrate Moses but rather to extol Jesus". As Bultmann (1951:16) points out, "Jesus did not polemically contest the authority of the Old Testament" or call into question its validity. Ridderbos (1997:58) likewise observes that John was not talking about "the substitution of one grace for the other"; instead, the Evangelist's emphasis was on the "continuation, renewal, and maintaining of the old". Thus, the gift of the triune God's revelation in the Word stands much more in continuity than in discontinuity with the gift of the Lord's self-revelation through the law of Moses (cf. Lioy 2006a). Additionally, God's grace and truth to His covenant people in the Old Testament, which was mediated through the law (cf. Gen 24:27; Exod 34:6), foreshadowed the fullness of His blessings in Christ (Heb 10:1). In a sense, the incarnation of the Word complements and completes, rather than displaces and eliminates, what God began to reveal and do through the giving of the law at Sinai (cf. Rom 5:20-21; Lioy 2007b).

Admittedly, not even the law could convey all there is to know about God. After all, He is eternal in His existence, infinite in His presence and power, unsurpassed in His knowledge and understanding, and unlimited in His mercy, grace, and love. He is so radiant in His splendor (1 Tim 6:16) that no one can survive the direct sight of His glory (Exod 33:20; cf. Lioy 2007a:27; Lioy 2008:35, 40-41, 43, 101-102, 125-126, 128). While no one has ever set their eyes on the essential being of the triune God (John 1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12), the Son has made Him known. In point of fact, as the divine, incarnate Logos, Jesus embodies all that the Torah anticipated and declared (Lioy 2005:85). Grappe (2000:153) affirms that the Son, by "virtue of his unique nature", is

"the one who transcends the most prestigious figures and institutions of the past". Accordingly, Jesus' followers are the ones who truly submit to the law's "ultimate eschatological expression", namely, the Messiah (Keener 2003:421). Borgen (1983:104) goes so far as to conclude that John used "terminology which usually belongs to the Torah" in order to transfer "the Torah's function to Jesus".

John 1:18 states that no one has ever seen God; yet in the Old Testament there seem to have been appearances of God. Be that as it may, while people of earlier times saw special appearances of God, as Moses did on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:18-23), these encounters did not reveal God's essential being. The human eye can neither detect His fully revealed essence nor survive the direct sight of His glory. The Son, in His human form, introduced the Father to humankind. The Greek verb *exēgeomai,* which the TNIV renders "has made him known", means "to expound" or "to set forth in great detail" (Danker, Bauer, and Arndt 2000:349; cf. Louw and Nida 1989:1:340). This is the same word from which is derived the English term *exegesis*, which means "to explain" or "to interpret" (Lioy 2005:86; cf. Thomas 1987:154). What could not be previously explained about the triune God is now elucidated by the Son, who is both the epitome and emissary of truth. Moreover, He has revealed the Godhead with stunning clarity through His "ministry and proclamation" (Westermann 1998:6). In reality, the divine-incarnate Logos is "the Ultimate Fact of the universe" (Tenney 1976:63). It is no wonder that Jesus declared to Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9).

4.   The Use of *Alētheia* in John 3:21

The literary context of John 3:21 is the conversation Nicodemus had with Jesus in the winter of A.D. 27.[6] According to verse 1, Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a "member of the Jewish ruling council" (or the Sanhedrin), the latter being the religious supreme court of the day. Also, verse 10 reveals that Nicodemus was a "teacher" or rabbi. In the exchange that followed, Jesus explained to Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit brings about the new birth when a person trusts in the Messiah for salvation (vv. 4-16). The heavenly court of

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[6] The dates for the life of Christ used in this essay are based on the timeline appearing in the *Zondervan TNIV Study Bible* (2006:1656-1658).

divine justice forms the backdrop of the Father's condemnation of those who reject the Son (vv. 17-18). The fact is that God sent the one who is Light into the world (cf. 1:2-5, 9). Tragically, though, morally depraved people love the darkness of Satan and sin (John 3:19). Because their lives are characterized by disobedience (cf. Eph 2:2) and steeped in wickedness (cf. Rom 1:32), they dread the possibility of coming in faith to the Light. Also, because they realize He will expose their sins, they hate Him and His followers all the more (John 3:20; cf. 15:18-25).

In contrast are those practice the "truth" (*alētheia*, John 3:21). The verse is more literally rendered "act in such a way that truth comes into being" (Ridderbos 1997:142). Here the Evangelist used a "Semitic expression" that "means 'to act faithfully', 'to act honestly'" (Carson 1991:207; cf. Gen 47:29; Neh 9:33; Barrett 1960:182; Schnackenburg 1987:407). The focus is on God's revelation of Himself, as embodied in the divine-incarnate Messiah. Piper (1962:716) explains that "all progress in the apprehension of truth" is dependent on an individual's "willingness to accept the indwelling truth as the regulatory principle of both knowledge and actions". Accordingly, Jesus' followers demonstrate by their lives of piety and integrity that they readily come to the Light and take seriously the objective truth He makes known (cf. 1 John 1:6; Lindsay 1993:134-135). They do not fear any kind of moral exposure—not because they are free from sin, but because they want to be cleansed by God's grace. When others see that God enables them to be people of rectitude and virtue, He is glorified.

5. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 4:23-24

The literary context for John 4:23-24 is the conversation Jesus had with a Samaritan woman. The Fourth Gospel leaves as indefinite the time interval between the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus and the testimony of John the Baptizer concerning the Savior (John 3:22-36). In turn, the chronological relation between these sections and Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman (4:1-42) is not specified. Most likely, the latter occurred sometime during the winter of A.D. 27. The locale was Sychar, a small village in the province of Samaria (v. 5). As a result of the exchange between Jesus and the woman, she concluded that He was a prophet (v. 19; i.e., a divinely inspired

person with supernatural knowledge and insight). Based on this observation, the woman tried to deflect the conversation away from her sinful lifestyle by bringing up the controversy between Samaritans and Jews regarding the proper place to worship (v. 20). To her it was a suitable religious question for a prophet to give his authoritative assessment.

Jesus used the mention of the inter-racial debate to strike at the heart of the woman's problem. She was concerned with an external aspect of worship, that is, the right place to venerate God. Jesus made her focus on the internal aspect of worship, namely, venerating God with a cleansed heart. Here we see that the woman's frame of reference needed to be adjusted. Jesus began to do this by bluntly stating that in the coming day of eschatological fulfillment, it would not matter where people worshiped—be it Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion (v. 21). After all, the Messiah surpassed in importance all earthly shrines and sanctuaries, even the temple in Jerusalem. Kerr (2002:167) states that with the advent of the Messiah, a "new era" has dawned. From the post-resurrection perspective of the Evangelist, "Moses and the law, including the Temple and associated rituals and festivals, are not ends in themselves, but signposts pointing towards Jesus Christ." The Son becomes "the *raison d'être* of Judaism" in which worship is "no longer centered in a place, but in Spirit and truth".

Next, Jesus addressed the issue the woman had raised. The Samaritans acknowledged the true God, but they worshiped Him in ignorance. Since they considered only the Pentateuch as sacred, they ignored the prophets. The Jews worshiped God as He revealed Himself in the entire Hebrew Bible. The Messiah clearly sided with the Jews on this issue by identifying Himself with them through the emphatic use of the Greek word rendered "we" (v. 22). God had chosen the Jews to be the vehicle through which He would reveal His plan of redemption. Put another way, "Judaism is the trajectory of religious history through which God has been at work" (Burge 2000:145). The time was soon coming, however, when a Jew, a Samaritan, or any other person could freely worship the Lord—as long as that person did so "in spirit and in truth" (*alētheia*; v. 23, NIV; cf. Josh 24:14; Köstenberger 2005:44; Lindsay 1993:135-137). Indeed, the opportunity had been inaugurated with the Messiah's advent (which included His death, resurrection, and ascension). Schnackenburg (1987:1:438) comments that Jesus' "revelation of the true

worship of God is well illustrated by the Qumran texts, but it goes beyond them, since Jesus proclaims that the eschatological fulfillment has come".

To worship in spirit is to do so "honestly and openly" from the heart "with God" (Tenney 1981:56) and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Keener 2003:616), not merely to go through the motions of worship (cf. Bernard 1962:149; Haenchen 1984a:223; Morris 1995:239). The latter is frequently characterized by an obsession with being at the right place and performing approved rituals. Be that as it may, Jesus did not imply that "true worship is realized totally in the sphere of the supersensuous" or that it must be "elevated above the visible temporal word or any cultic form" (Ridderbos 1997:163). To worship in truth means to do so in a way that "accords with reality" (Thiselton 1986:891). Expressed differently, it is to reverence the Father as He has disclosed Himself in the Son (cf. 1:18), not as would-be worshipers have created God in their own minds (cf. Bultmann 1976:190-191). Indeed, He actively seeks people who worship Him with veracity, genuineness, and dedication (cf. Lindsay 1993:136-137). Here it is revealed that the essential nature of God is "pure spirit" (Bruce 1983:111), which means the divine is immaterial in His existence (4:24; cf. Isa 31:3; Ezek 36:26-27; Cook 1979:106; Hendriksen 1987, 1:168). Westcott (1981:73) notes that God is "absolutely free from all limitations of space and time". This verse "points to the reality of God as the absolute Power and Life Giver" (Saucy 2006:91), especially as seen in the believers' encounter with Him in Spirit-filled, truth-centered worship (cf. Carson 1991:225-226).

6. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 5:33

John 5 specifically deals with Jesus healing a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda and His divine authority to perform the miracle on the Sabbath. By recounting this episode, the Evangelist validated the theological truth that the Son is the culmination (i.e., the destination, goal, outcome, and fulfillment) of the law for believers. Moreover, as the Lord of the Sabbath, He provides eternal rest for His disciples (Lioy 2007a:109). The mention of "some time later" (v. 1) is an indefinite temporal reference. Most likely, the incident (recorded in vv. 5-9) occurred between A.D. 27 and 29. The incident of the Redeemer's healing on the Sabbath was not a one-time event. Because it was something He did on

numerous occasions, it challenged the authority of the religious leaders. They responded by persecuting Him. This included not only opposing Him verbally, but also exploring ways to have Him tried, convicted, and executed (vv. 16, 18).

In verses 19-30, Jesus asserted His divinely-given authority to heal on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders, of course, contested His claim. Like a skilled defense attorney, Jesus acknowledged that if He alone testified about Himself, what He declared would be invalid (5:31; cf. 8:13). This is because the Old Testament required at least two confirming witnesses to validate whatever testimony was given in a court of law. Adhering to this requirement would help to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the assertions being made (cf. Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15). Regrettably, the experts in the law did not accept the truth regarding the Son's relationship with the Father. The elitists also failed to recognize Jesus as the Prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18, whom God promised to send and whom Moses commanded God's people to heed (cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37). The religious leaders' stance of unbelief openly disregarded the corroborating witnesses provided by John the Baptizer (John 5:33), the Redeemer's own miracles (v. 36), the Father in heaven (v. 37), and Scripture (particularly through Moses; vv. 39, 46; cf. Asiedu-Peprah, 2001:27-28).

The one who is the realization of all the types and prophecies recorded in the law declared that the testimony offered by the Father about the Son was true (that is, accurate and valid; v. 32). Neither did it matter whether the religious leaders accepted the assertions made by the Father, for whatever He declared remained intrinsically valid (cf. Rom 3:3-4). In John 5:33, the Messiah noted that previously the religious leaders in Jerusalem sent a delegation of priests, Levites, and Pharisees to interrogate John the Baptizer and he testified to the "truth" (*alētheia*) about the Son (cf. 1:19, 24). In 5:33, the grammatical construction of the Greek words rendered "the truth" is best understood as a dative of interest. The idea is that the Baptizer, in bearing witness, provided objective, factual statements pertaining to the Messiah, especially in declaring Him to be the embodiment of truth (cf. 8:32; Barrett 1960:220; Köstenberger 2005:44). In short, Jesus is the "supreme Revealer, unveiling and manifesting to the fullest the divine secrets" (Spicq 1994:77). Admittedly, Jesus had no implicit need for any human witnesses. Instead, His motive was to use these to

convince His opponents to accept Him as the divine, incarnate Word and as a result be saved (5:34).

7. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 8:32, 40, 44, 45, and 46

The context of John 8 is Jesus ministering at the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles in October, A.D. 29. The narrative brings into sharp relief the lawsuit motif found throughout the Fourth Gospel (cf. Neyrey 1987:535). According to Lincoln (2000:45), the forensic element is a reworking of the lawsuits recorded in Isaiah 40–55. Moreover, in the Fourth Gospel, Israel becomes the "representative of the world" (2000:46), especially as the evidence is presented in the universal court of justice regarding Jesus and His messianic claims. The nations are "represented through the Samaritans," who affirm that Jesus is the Savior of humankind (John 4:42), and the Greeks, who want to meet Jesus (12:20–22). Furthermore, Jesus' "climactic trial before Pilate . . . sets the lawsuit squarely on the world stage and in the context of the nations" (256). Throughout the forensic process (as seen in the Fourth Gospel's cosmic-trial metaphor), Jesus functions as "God's authorized agent and chief witness" (2000:46).

The preceding information helps to explain why, in John 8, the religious leaders, in their interrogation of Jesus, conveyed their "response in legal language, perhaps preparing the sort of argument that could later prove useful in a forensic context" (Keener 2003:740; cf. Lindars 1986:330). Köstenberger (2004:250) adds that "in a reversal of the Synoptic portrayal of Jesus as on trial before the Romans and the Jews, John shows how it is not Jesus, but ultimately the world (including the Jews), that is on trial." Indeed, the irony is that the person who is eventually tried and condemned by the religious and civil authorities of the day turns out to be their Creator and Judge (as well as that of all humankind). John 8:30-47 serves as a prime example of the confrontational dynamic between Jesus and His interlocutors. He maintained that as the Messiah, He is the epitome and emissary of truth—especially in revealing the Father and elucidating His will (cf. Bruce 1983:196-197; Brown 1966:355; Lindsay 1993:138-139).

After Jesus had finished speaking, many people in the crowd put their faith in Him (v. 30). Next, Jesus declared that by continuing in His teaching, would-be

disciples showed the genuineness of their decision to follow Him. Conversely, those who failed to persevere demonstrated the superficiality of their faith (v. 31). Moreover, abiding in the "truth" (*alētheia*; v. 32) taught by the Son was an eternally serious matter (cf. Carson 1991:348-349). For instance, those who remained unwavering in their commitment to Him would come to a fuller understanding of and appreciation for the pronouncements He made. In point of fact, He is the embodiment of truth (cf. 14:6) and leads His followers (through what He taught) to genuine and lasting freedom from slavery to sin (cf. Ladd 1997:303). Beasley-Murray (1999:133) clarifies that the "revelation of Christ is inseparable from his redemptive action." Likewise, the "knowledge of the truth is not alone intellectual, but existential". It signifies life "under the saving sovereignty of God".

Keener (2003:750) explains that "Jewish texts speak of the Torah bringing freedom, whether from worldly cares, from national bondage, or from slavery in the coming world" (cf. Gen Rab. 92:1; Num Rab. 10:8; Pesiq Rab. 15:2). The freedom anticipated in the Torah finds its ultimate fulfillment in the redemptive work of the Messiah. In contrast, possessing mere intellectual knowledge can never lead to the same result, regardless of how scintillating that information might seem. Furthermore, there is no spiritual freedom in possessing truth in the abstract philosophical sense (cf. Morris 1995:261, 405; Ridderbos 1997:308). The focus in the Fourth Gospel is on the person and work of the Messiah (cf. Schreiner 2008:95). Only faith in Him can deliver people from the darkness of sin (cf. Dahms 1985:459).

Jesus' listeners bristled at the notion of being set free, for it implied that they were somehow in bondage. They failed to realize that the Messiah was speaking about slavery to sin. His listeners, however, took His remarks concretely and narrowly as a reference to their political and economic status as Jews. The Savior's audience retorted that they were descendants of Abraham and had never been slaves to anyone (v. 33). This overly generalized assertion failed to account for years of bondage to such despotic rulers as the Assyrians and Babylonians. In response, Jesus explained that He was talking about bondage to sin. This was certainly the case for those whose lifestyle was characterized by incessant wrongdoing (v. 34). The latter included a stubborn refusal to accept Jesus' messianic claims and authority, despite the mountain

of confirming evidence. Only God's intervention could bring a change of heart.

The Son was unapologetic about maintaining that even His Jewish listeners needed to be freed from sin, for He knew that all had transgressed and fallen short of God's glory (cf. Eccles 7:20; Isa 59:2; Rom 3:23). This continued to be the case regardless of one's physical ancestry. As long as Jesus' critics remained in spiritual bondage to sin, they could never enjoy a permanent status within the family of God. In contrast, by putting their faith in the Messiah, they could be given the never-ending right to become God's children (John 8:35; cf. 1:12). Thus, only by trusting in the Son could His listeners truly be released from their bondage to sin (8:36).

The one who is infinitely greater than Abraham had not overlooked the claims of His Jewish listeners to being descendants of the patriarch (v. 33). The Savior readily admitted this fact, though it did not negate the fact that Abraham's true spiritual descendants were those who put their faith in the Messiah for salvation (cf. Rom 4:9-17; 9:8). Paradoxically, despite the claims of Jesus' critics, they revealed by their actions that they were not Abraham's spiritual descendants. Köstenberger (2004:265) states that while Abraham was "receptive to the divine revelation and acted in obedience to it", the religious elite of Jesus' day—who claimed to be the patriarch's descendants—failed to follow the moral example he set. Indeed, among them were those who sought to bring about Jesus' arrest and execution. This was part of their agenda because the Savior's teaching had found no place in their hearts (John 8:37). Expressed differently, what the Son declared made no headway in their lives due to their unbelief.

In faithfulness to His Father, the Son declared to His audience what He had seen in His Father's presence. In contrast, Jesus' detractors operated according to the dictates of their spiritual "father" (v. 38), which verse 44 reveals was the devil. Because they drank heavily from the cesspool of his toxic doctrines, they refused to accept Jesus as the divine-incarnate Word and acknowledge that He represented the interests of the Father. Perhaps there was an element of consternation as Jesus' listeners declared Abraham to be their father (v. 39). Members of the Jewish community in the Second Temple period often referred to Abraham as their father and themselves as his descendants (cf.

Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1-2; 4 Macc 6:17, 22; 18:1; Gen Rab. 1:4; Matt 3:9; Gal 3:7).

Scripture reveals Abraham to be a person characterized by faith in and obedience to the Lord (cf. Rom 4:1-25; Heb 11:8-12, 17-19; Jas 2:21-23). In contrast, Jesus' audience, while being Abraham's biological descendants, showed by their actions that they were not his spiritual descendants. Otherwise, they would have accepted Jesus' messianic claims and authority. In reality, the religious leaders were searching for a way to arrest and execute the Son of God, because they were outraged by the "truth" (*alētheia*; v. 40) He taught, which came from His Father in heaven (cf. O'Day 1995:9:637). Because Abraham was never guilty of such a murderous intent, it was clear that Jesus' listeners imitated their real spiritual father, the devil. In protest, the audience rejected any accusation of having someone else other than God as their Father. They might have also insinuated that Jesus was born out of wedlock, being the illegitimate son of Joseph (v. 41).

Despite such insults, Jesus did not waver from His claim of originating with God, being sent by Him, and operating under His authority. Thus, if the Messiah's critics truly had God as their Father, they would love, rather than despise, His Son (v. 42). In reality, their hearts were spiritually hardened to the truth concerning the Redeemer, and this prevented them from understanding and accepting His teaching (v. 43). Satan, the god of this age, had blinded their unbelieving minds, making them unable to recognize the light of the glorious gospel about the Messiah, who is the exact likeness of God (cf. 2 Cor 4:4). The murderous intent of the antagonists toward the Son indicated they were the devil's spiritual offspring and sought to do the same sorts of evil things he desired (cf. 1 John 3:8–15).

Jesus noted that from the dawn of time, Satan was a murderer, rejected the "truth" (*alētheia*; v. 44), and was devoid of "truth" (*alētheia*). In keeping with his deceitful character, he not only lied, but also was the father of all lies. It stood to reason that those who followed the devil's wicked ways would spurn, rather than accept, the Messiah and the "truth" (*alētheia;* v. 45) He declared (cf. Köstenberger 2005:59). Despite the opinion of His critics to the contrary, Jesus had an absolutely clear conscience about His message and ministry. Because He knew He was sinlessly perfect (cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1

John 3:5), He risked asking His opponents whether any of them could prove Him to be guilty of committing sin. Of course, the answer was no. Accordingly, since the Son always did His Father's will, those who also claimed the Lord as their Father should have believed the Messiah and the "truth" (*alētheia*; v. 46) He taught.

8. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 14:6 and 17

The second half of the Fourth Gospel continues to present Jesus as both the epitome and emissary of truth. Whereas in chapters 1–12, the emphasis is on the signs performed by the Son of God, in chapters 13–21, the principal focus is on the salvation He provides. The time period is the spring of A.D. 30, during the last week of Jesus' life on earth before His crucifixion. The Last Supper forms the literary backdrop of chapter 14. Jesus spoke about leaving His followers and them knowing the way to where He was going (vv. 1-4). In response, Thomas exclaimed that he and his peers neither knew where Jesus was going nor the way to get there (v. 5). According to (Carson 1991:490), the question asked by Thomas "sounds as if he interpreted Jesus' words in the most crassly natural way".

Jesus' reply to Thomas is the most profound "I am" declaration in John's Gospel (cf. Ridderbos 1997:493). Jesus not only identified who He was, but made it clear that He is the only possible path to God (14:6). In all likelihood, the Greek coordinating conjunction *kai*, which is rendered "and", is used in an "epexegetical or explanatory" sense to clarify and emphasize what Jesus meant in declaring Himself to be "the way" (Brown 1966:621). In light of this observation, the verse might be rendered, "I am the way, that is to say, the truth and the life" (cf. Beasley-Murray 1999:252; Bultmann 1999:246; Hawkin 1987:3, 10; O'Day 1995:742; Spicq 1994:77; Whitacre 1999). Furthermore, the repetition of the definite article, which is rendered "the", points to the Son as being the enfleshment of absolute truth (cf. Haenchen 1984b:125; Thiselton 1986:891-892; Waetjen 2001:278), in contrast to all other forms of truth (which are partial and deficient). He is also the eternal life, in distinction from every other form of life (which is finite and transitory; cf. Cook 1979:92-93; Bruce 1983:299; Hendriksen 1987, 1:268; Hoskyns 1947:455; Lindars 1986:472; Roberts 2003:119; Tenney 1981:144).

According to Azumah (2007:303-304), "there are three dimensions to truth": (1) the "propositional and cognitive dimension"; (2) "truth as praxis"; and (3) "truth as a person or life". Jesus laid exclusive "claim to the fact that he combined all the three dimensions of truth in himself". Despite all the lies that were charged against Jesus during and after His public career, His words, deeds, and character have shown Him to be the embodiment of "truth" (*alētheia*; cf. Dahms 1985:457-458; Fernando 1999:185; Lindsay 1993:140; Schineller 2000:427). Nothing He ever taught has proved unreliable. In the Messiah believers witness the supreme revelation of the Father in action; and what better proof of knowing that Jesus is the source and sustainer of life than His spectacular resurrection. Indeed, only Jesus has the power over life and death. Previously Jesus' disciples had not fully known Him. They had seen glimpses of His true identity and had a partial understanding of who He was—but they had not fully experienced Him. If they had, they would have known that they were seeing what God the Father is like by seeing the Son. In the coming days, however, they would know Jesus and thus they would know God (v. 7).

The Messiah did not limit His statements to Himself. He also focused on the way in which He wanted to His followers to live. Morality for the ancient Hebrews was not an abstract concept disconnected from the present; rather, it signified ethical imperatives concerning how people of faith should live. Accordingly, the Messiah stated that those who genuinely loved Him also kept His commands (v. 15). As an encouragement to those who would love and obey Him, the Savior promised that His disciples would have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity would come and make His home in believers so that their love could be clearly defined and their obedience could be carefully directed.

The Son, by referring to the Spirit as "another advocate" (v. 16), indicated that the latter is the same kind of counselor, intercessor, and comforter as the Messiah Himself was to the disciples. Expressed differently, the Spirit comes to the believers' aid to help them meet every challenge to their faith. Moreover, He is the "Spirit of truth" (*alētheia;* cf. 1 John 4:6; 5:6), in which the Greek text possibly uses an attributive or descriptive genitive; in other words, as the "mediator of divine revelation" (Lindsay 1993:141), He is the Spirit characterized by truth (cf. Beare 1987:115; Bernard 1962:499; Bultmann

1999:247; O'Day 1995:773). A second possibility is that the genitive is appositive, in which case the phrase could be rendered "the Spirit is truth" (Brown 1966:639; cf. Hendriksen 1987, 1:277).

A third possibility is to understand the phrase as a genitive of source (cf. Westcott 1981:205). This means the Spirit discloses and communicates the truth about God (cf. Barrett 1960:386; Burge 2000:396), shows what is true, "inspires and illumines" the truth "by pointing back to Jesus" (Keener 2003:618), and leads believers into all truth (John 14:17). While the latter involves an "intellectual" comprehension of "theological truths", even more important is the "full personal apprehension of the saving presence" of the Father that has come in the incarnation of the Son (Ladd 1997:304). In these ways, the Spirit remains ever present to help believers understand, accept, and apply what the eternal Word commanded (cf. Crump 1992:861).

9. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 15:26

Once Jesus expressed His devotion to His followers and His Father, the Messiah summoned the disciples to prepare to leave the upper room (John 14:31). Recorded in 15:1-17 is the analogy of the vine (representing Jesus) and the branches (symbolizing His followers). Verses 18-25 record Jesus' statements about the world's hatred of Him and His disciples. In verse 26, Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Him. The Spirit would emphasize not only the significance of the Son's earthly ministry but also the import of His atoning sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead (cf. Morris 1995:607). The Son referred to the Spirit as the Advocate, the one who is characterized by "truth" (*alētheia*), and the one who comes from the Father to impart truth to believers (cf. Beare 1987:117; Roberts 2003:195; Westcott 1981:224).

10. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 16:7 and 13

John 16 is one the Bible's chief passages describing the Holy Spirit and His work. Jesus revealed that the Spirit of God, like a legal counselor, would act as a prosecutor to bring about the world's conviction. He does not merely accuse the world of wrongdoing, but also presents indisputable evidence to prove the

world's sinfulness.(cf. Roberts 2003:190, 192; Thiselton 1986:892) The Spirit would establish the case of the Father and Son against nonbelievers by presenting evidence in three different areas: sin, righteousness, and judgment (v. 8). In verse 7, Jesus used the Greek noun *alētheia*, which is rendered "very truly", to emphasize the veracity and trustworthiness of His statements concerning the divine necessity of His departure and the provision of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus' referred to as the Advocate (cf. Keener 2003:1029). It is also possible that *alētheia* serves as a reminder that what the Savior declared was "grounded in the truth" of His "revelation of God" (O'Day 1995:771; cf. Barrett 1960:405).

The purpose for the Spirit's advent was not only to convict the world of its guilt, but also to guide the disciples into comprehending the "depths and heights" of the Father's "revelation" in the Son (Beasley-Murray 1999:283) and transform every areas of their lives by means of it (cf. Piper 1962:716; Schineller 2000:428; Spicq 1994:80). The Savior wanted to share these eternal verities with His friends, but He knew that what the Holy Spirit would later convey to them would be too much for them to presently bear (v. 12). Jesus might have meant that this knowledge was too difficult for them to understand, or too difficult to emotionally absorb, or perhaps both.

In any case, the Spirit, who is characterized by and conveys "truth" (*alētheia;* v. 13), would help the disciples understand and apply "all the truth" (*alētheia*). The latter denotes the "revelatory sphere of God's character and ways" (Köstenberger 2004:473), especially as seen in all that the Messiah "concretely and concisely set forth" (Hoskyns 1947:485; cf. Morris 1995:621; Westcott 1981:230). The Evangelist's main emphasis is on God's "covenant integrity" (Keener 2003:1038), every aspect of which Jesus' followers would come to appreciate and heed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (cf. Beare 1987:118; Kuyper 1964:16). It would be incorrect to conclude that the "message" the Spirit disclosed was in some way "independent" from what Jesus had already revealed (Tenney 1981:158). Instead, the Spirit further unfolded the truth embodied in the divine-human Logos (Bruce 1983:320).

11.   The Use of *Alētheia* in John 17:17 and 19

After Jesus delivered His final discourse to His disciples before His arrest, He lifted His eyes toward heaven and prayed aloud to His Father. This is the Savior's longest recorded prayer. In it He prayed for Himself (John 17:1-5), the disciples who were with Him (vv. 6-19), and everyone who would come to believe in Him after His ascension (vv. 20-26). The petition is often referred to as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. In verse 11, the Son called His Father "holy" (i.e. infinitely upright, absolutely pure, and eternally free from all evil; cf. Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 1 Sam 2:2; Ps 145:17; Isa 6:3; John 17:11; 1 Pet 1:16; Rev 4:8). Then, in verse 17, the Son asked the Father to make the disciples holy.

In particular, the Son asked that the Father use His "truth" (*alētheia;* John 17:17) to separate the disciples from evil, bring them into the "sphere of the sacred" (Lindars 1986:528), and consecrate them for a life of service (cf. Haenchen 1984b:155; Lindsay 1993:142). Brown (1966:761) explains that in this context, "truth" is "both the agency of consecration and the realm into which [believers] are consecrated". The faithful response of the Father in bringing this about would, in turn, engender "steadfast devotion" on the part of Jesus' followers (Kuyper 1964:17). Here the Son declared that what the Father revealed—as recorded in His inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word—is the literal "truth" (*alētheia;* cf. Ps 119:42, 142, 151, 160; Hendriksen 1987, 2:361; Westcott 1981:245). Indeed, Scripture is the standard by which all other claimants to truth are evaluated for their genuineness and veracity.

Moreover, just as the Father had commissioned the Son to perform His earthly ministry, Jesus charged the disciples to herald His message of redemption to the far corners of the earth. This included the assertion that "Jesus is the one in whom God displays the divine glory" (Lincoln 2005:438); but the disciples could not serve the Messiah without first being sanctified in Him (John 17:18). When Jesus said, "I sanctify myself" (v. 19), this was most likely a reference to the cross (cf. Ladd 1997:305). Expressed differently, Jesus was giving Himself as a holy sacrifice for His disciples so that they could be made holy by God's truth (cf. Beasley-Murray 1999:301; Morris 1995:649-650; Woodbridge 2000:828).

In light of this information, it would be incorrect to conclude that Jesus had to make Himself holy; instead, He was affirming His dedication to finish the Father's plan of salvation so that believers could be "truly sanctified", in which "truly" renders the Greek noun *alētheia* and can also mean "genuinely" (cf. Bultmann 1976:511). Another viable option is to translate the verse as "sanctified in truth", where the emphasis is on the eternal verities of Scripture being the means by which God enables believers to grow in holiness. This implies that it is impossible to be "set apart for the Lord's use without learning to think God's thoughts after him". One must also learn to "live in conformity" with the truth God has "graciously given" (Carson 1991:566).

12. The Use of *Alētheia* in John 18:37 and 38

John 13–17 record the farewell meal Jesus ate with His disciples and the speech He made to them. The focus shifts in chapter 18 to His arrest and interrogation before the religious and civil authorities. As Jesus stood before Pilate, the itinerant rabbi from Nazareth claimed to be a heavenly king, not an earthly ruler (v. 36). He also asserted that His goal was to bring "truth" (*alētheia;* v. 37) to the world, not stage a revolt against Rome. The emphasis here is multivalent. On one level, the Son was referring to objective, factual declarations concerning His person, His earthly mission (Morris 1995:681), and the "redemptive faithfulness" of the Father (Kuyper 1964:18). On another level, Jesus' statement did not rule out more general revelation pertaining to the Father and humankind (cf. Carson 1991:595).

Jesus added that everyone who belonged to and loved the "truth" (*alētheia*), heard and heeded His teaching. In brief, the one who stood before Pilate is the meta-narrative of life, whether temporal or eternal in nature (cf. Lioy 2007a:253). Köstenberger (2005:42) explains that the Fourth Gospel deals with two central issues: (1) Jesus' claim to be the Messiah and (2) His assertion "to be one with God". Against this backdrop, "truth" is understood to be an affirmation of these two facts (cf. 20:30-31). The governor, instead of talking further with Jesus, cut off the conversation with a cynical retort, "What is truth?" (*alētheia;* v. 38). Evidently, Pilate had in mind abstract notions and theoretical concepts of a relativistic nature (cf. Bultmann 1976:656; Haenchen 1984b:180; Keener 2003:1113-1114). After his curt response to Jesus, the

governor set in motion the divinely preordained chain of events that led to the Redeemer's crucifixion and resurrection. Morris (1995:682) is close to the mark when he states that "on the cross and at the empty tomb we may learn what God's truth is" (cf. John 19:35; Clancy 2005:107-108; Hoskyns 1947:150-151). Here we discover that "truth as Jesus understood it was a costly affair" (Morris 1995:261).

13. Conclusion

This article has examined the biblical concept of truth in the Fourth Gospel. The essay began by providing a synopsis of the lexical data regarding the concept of truth. This is followed by an examination of the various places in the Gospel of John where the Greek noun *alētheia* (which is rendered "truth") occurs. Based on an analysis of the information, it is clear that the author of the Fourth Gospel affirmed the established notion of truth found in the Old Testament, post-canonical Jewish writings, and Synoptic Gospels. In brief, the prevailing concept is one of veracity and genuineness in stark contrast to all forms of falsehood. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the Evangelist refined this understanding by focusing the notion of truth on the Father's revelation of Himself in His Son. An examination of the data obtained from the Fourth Gospel indicates that the divine-incarnate Messiah is both the epitome and emissary of truth. Furthermore, it is surmised that the Savior's followers come to a full awareness and understanding of the truth by believing in Him for salvation and allowing Him to transform every aspect of their lives.

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A Brief History of Psalms Studies[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide and up-to-date review of the major periods in the history of psalms studies, with particular reference to the recent quest for the editorial shape and purpose of the Book of Psalms. The authors divide the history of interpretation into four major periods—pre-critical, historical-critical, form-critical and redaction-critical. Pre-critical interpretation (before 1820) generally considered the shape of the Psalter significant, but made no formal attempt to identify its purpose. During the historical-critical (1820-1920) and form-critical (1920-1980) periods, scholars treated the Psalter as an ad hoc collection of lyrics for use in temple worship; the focus was on the historical Sitz im Leben of the psalms. The modern interest into the editorial shaping of the Book of Psalms marks a renewed belief in the fact that the order of the psalms is significant and the first serious attempt to discern the editorial purpose or message of the Psalter as a 'book'.

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1. Introduction

In recent times, the level of scholarly interest in the Book of Psalms has risen to unprecedented heights. The Psalter held pride of place amongst the books of the Old Testament in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Throughout the centuries, the psalms have captured the hearts of Christians and ranked amongst the most popular of all biblical materials in the devotional life of the church. Yet in terms of biblical scholarship since the advent of critical era, they have taken a back seat to most of the other Old Testament materials. The current revival of scholarly interest in the psalms is largely due to research demonstrating that the Psalter is not a haphazard collection of psalms, but a purposefully arranged 'book', suitable for literary analysis.

In this article, we briefly review the history of psalms study from biblical times until the present. Our purpose is to place the current quest for the editorial shape and purpose of the Book of Psalms in its historical perspective. We shall begin our survey with ancient approaches to the psalms, work through the historical-critical and form-critical periods, and then devote considerable time to recent proposals regarding the overall shape and purpose of the Psalter.

2. Pre-critical interpretation

The Septuagint has appropriately been called "the first monument to Jewish exegesis" (Daniel 1971:855). In fact, the early translations of the Old Testament (e.g., Septuagint, Targums, Peshitta) suggest that the translators regarded the ordering of the Psalter as purposeful and significant. Although their numbering may differ, all the ancient translations of the Psalter follow the same order as the Masoretic Text. Furthermore, "the ancient translations endorse virtually all the internal structural markers, that is, the headings and doxologies, of the Hebrew Psalter" (Mitchell 1997:17). Since "later redactors might well have wished to reunite psalms that share common headings" (p. 18) or rearrange psalms to suit their own purposes, their retention of the order and the structural markers is evidence that they believed the ordering of the Psalter to be purposeful.

Evidence from the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates that the Qumran community produced its own purposefully arranged collections of psalms, including combinations of biblical and non-biblical psalms. While scholars believe their psalm collections generally followed the ordering of the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint (see Skehan 1978; Haran 1993), several collections of psalms have been found that do not follow the Masoretic Text, apparently having been arranged for special uses in the Qumran community (see Van der Ploeg 1971; Puech 1990). This demonstrates that the Qumran interpreters were accustomed to purposefully arranged collections of psalms and would likely have viewed the biblical Psalter as a purposefully arranged collection.

The New Testament contains implicit clues that the form of the Psalter was fixed by the first century, but it never attributes exegetical significance to the order of the psalms. The allusion to ὁ βίβλος ψαλμῶν ('the Book of Psalms') in Luke 20:42 implies that the Psalter existed in a fixed form, presumably the Septuagint, the edition from which most New Testament citations are drawn. In Paul's sermon as recorded in Acts 13, the apostle alludes to "the second psalm" (Acts 13:33), a small indication that Psalm 2 was indeed the second psalm in his text.

Ancient rabbinic writings give "evidence that the rabbis regarded the Psalter's sequence of lyrics as purposefully arranged" (Mitchell 1997:29). Mitchell proceeds to cite several examples of rabbinical interpretation referring to the preceding or following psalms as the literary context for the interpretation of a psalm. Examples include the juxtaposition of Psalms 2-3, 52-54 and 110-111.

The Reformers' interpretation of the psalms emphasised (a) the value of the headings, (b) the need to understand the psalms in their historical setting and (c) the prophetic-messianic nature of the psalms, regarding David as a type of the Messiah. Calvin (1949), ever perceptive, regarded Psalm 1 as an editorial preface to the Psalter. As for the arrangement of the collection, they did not address the question of its purposeful ordering.

3. Historical criticism

The nineteenth century witnessed a paradigm shift in biblical research. Led by a myriad of revolutionary German thinkers, a movement away from traditional, conservative approaches to the Bible gained momentum, splitting biblical and theological scholars into two distinct camps—liberals and conservatives. Liberal scholars were revolutionary. They rejected out-of-hand the faith-based presuppositions about the Bible that had previously provided the framework within which the Bible was studied. Instead of treating the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God, they regarded it as a book that is, like any other book, subject to scientific study. Hence was born the era of critical exegesis. Since the logical starting point for a critical analysis of the Bible lay in an analysis of the history of the text and the history in the text, the primary exegetical tool became known as historical criticism.

The Psalter certainly did not hold centre stage in the early application of historical-critical methods, but neither did it escape the pervasive tendency of critical scholars to reject all traditional views and adopt revolutionary new perspectives, especially as regards the authorship and dating of biblical texts. Under the guidance of such towering figures as De Wette (1811), Olshausen (1853), Ewald (1866; 1899) and Wellhausen (1898), early historical critics on the psalms completely rejected the historicity of the psalm headings as very late scribal additions. Therefore, they also rejected all indications of authorship contained in the headings as well as whatever historical information the headings may have contained. They proposed that most, if not all, of the psalms were written after the exile, perhaps as late as the Maccabean period.

The demise of the headings, coupled with a pervasively sceptical approach to the psalms, left little scope or basis for treating the final form of the Psalter as a purposefully arranged collection. Mitchell (1997:43) remarks:

> The idea that the Psalter was purposefully arranged was also disputed. Indeed, after the headings fell, it was defenceless, for the headings and doxologies, demarcating groups of psalms, had always been the best evidence for internal structure . . . . Thus many commentators of the period made no remark on the

existence of concatenation or upon the characteristics of heading-defined internal collections, such as the Asaph or Korah Psalms.

The dominant view of the Psalter that emerged among liberal, critical scholars regarded it as a piecemeal evolution of hymns and prayers that were collected *ad hoc* for use as the hymnbook of the second temple (see Briggs and Briggs 1906). The period witnessed a complete loss of interest in exploring the relationship between adjacent psalms or between groups of psalms.

The leading conservative voice of the middle nineteenth century was Hengstenberg (1845-1848), who defended the ascriptions of authorship in the headings, the purposeful arrangement of the Psalter and the presence of messianic prophecy in the psalms. He heavily influenced Delitzsch (1887), whose work on the Psalms represents the high-water mark of nineteenth century studies. Mitchell (1997:46) summarises Delitzsch's contributions perfectly.

> Delitzsch . . . achieves the best balance between criticism and tradition of all nineteenth century commentators. He generally supports the validity of the headings . . . . He notes that the order of the lyrics cannot be explained purely on the basis of chronological evolution, and indicates evidence of editorial activity in the Psalter, noting concatenation in particular. In the light of this, he detects 'the impress of one ordering spirit'. . . . Delitzsch also maintains that a central theme is discernable in the collection, that is, concern with the Davidic covenant and its ultimate fulfilment in a future Messiah. He perceives the eschatological hope not only in the redactor's mind, but also in the mind of the individual psalmists.

In spite of the influence of Hengstenberg and Delitzsch, by the end of the nineteenth century the current of psalms studies was flowing away from the traditional view of the Psalter as a largely Davidic collection that was purposefully arranged to a critical view that it was a piecemeal collection of anonymous, post-exilic lyrics compiled for use as the hymnbook of the second temple. The great commentaries of the early twentieth century reflect the

scepticism of the period (e.g., Cheyne 1904; Briggs and Briggs 1906-07; Kirkpatrick 1906).

4.   Form criticism

A major change of direction occurred around 1920 under the influence of Hermann Gunkel, a towering figure in Old Testament studies during the first half of the twentieth century. Gunkel, the father of Old Testament form criticism, pioneered and popularised form critical analysis of the Psalter, the approach that dominated psalms' studies for the rest of the twentieth century and still remains a prominent field of exegesis.

Gunkel's approach had two elements. First, he categorised psalms according to literary genres *(Gattungen)*. Second, he sought the original life setting *(Sitz im Leben)* that gave rise to each genre and, therefore, to each psalm within that genre. His approach was based on premise the form follows function.

- *Forms:* psalms can be grouped into categories on the basis of their tone and structure. Gunkel identified five primary forms, namely, individual laments, communal laments, praise hymns, thanksgiving psalms and royal psalms. "Within these principal categories Gunkel recongized the existence of other subsidiary classes", including songs of Zion, enthronement psalms, psalms of confidence, vows, pilgrimage songs, wisdom poems and Torah liturgies (Harrison 1969:991-992).
- *Functions:* each form can be linked to a particular kind of life setting that gave rise to it. The underlying assumption is that each life setting gave rise to stereotypical literature that was suitable for use in that setting. The life setting is the key to understanding the origin and preservation of its literary forms.

Gunkel was by no means the first to recognise the presence of different types of psalms in the Psalter. Throughout the ages, exegetes had classified psalms into different groups on the basis their content or form, such as praise, lamentation, petition or meditation (see Harrison 1969:990). What separated Gunkel from previous interpreters, therefore, was not the use of genre groupings, but the claim that each psalm genre originated and functioned within a particular life setting in ancient Israel. The life settings for which they

were written and in which they were used hold the key to identifying and understanding the forms in the Psalter. A correct reading of the psalms, therefore, requires sensitivity to the relationship between form and function, to the connection between genre and setting, between *Gattungen* and *Sitz im Leben*. Gunkel's emphasis, however, lay on the literary forms themselves.

Gunkel did not view the psalms as professional compositions created for cultic occasions. In general, although he "argued that the literary forms emerged from typical occasions within the cult, he believed that most of the psalms preserved in the Psalter were not cultic liturgies, but more personal poems based on cultic prototypes" (Broyles 1989:12).

The Scandinavian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel, a student of Gunkel's, retained his teacher's categories and premises, but laid much greater emphasis on the cultic *Sitze im Leben* of the psalms. He believed that all the psalms originated and belonged in cultic settings, especially cultic festivals. Mowinckel postulated an annual *Enthronement of Yahweh Festival* as the setting for many psalms, reconstructing this alleged festival largely by way of analogy with the Babylonian New Year Festival that included a ceremonial enthronement of Marduk, and claiming to find corroborative evidence within the psalms (see Mowinckel 1922, vol. 2; 1962). Mowinckel's hypothesis of an *Enthronement of Yahweh Festival* met with a mixed response, being enthusiastically embraced by some (e.g., Leslie 1949) and severely criticised by others (e.g., Eissfeldt 1928, quoted in Harrison 1969:994; Oesterley 1937; 1939).

The influence of Gunkel (in particular) and Mowinckel dominated psalms studies from 1920 until 1980. Major commentators of the second half of the twentieth century almost all follow either Gunkel's method of classifying psalms according to their forms (Leslie 1949; Kissane 1953; Westermann 1965; 1980; 1981; Dahood 1966; 1968; 1970; Durham 1971; Kraus 1978; 1988; 1989; Gerstenberger 1988; Allen 1998) or Mowinckel's attempt to

position the psalms within their cultic settings in Israel's worship (Johnson 1951; 1979; Weiser 1962; Eaton 1967; 1986; Day 1990).[4]

Gunkel's 'forms' (*Gattungen*) are widely accepted to this day. Although scholars might modify his classifications slightly, analysing psalms according to their literary forms remains a standard and influential branch of psalms studies. Today few scholars support Mowinckel's hypothetical *Enthronement of Yahweh Festival*—Johnson (1979) and Eaton (1986) are notable exceptions—but many accept the assumption that a significant number of psalms were written for use in cultic rituals. Nevertheless, "[a]ttempts to fix specific liturgical settings for each type [of psalm] have not been very convincing" (Stek 2002:779).

Form criticism still held centre stage in major reviews of psalms studies by Ronald Clements (1976), John Hayes (1979) and Erhard Gerstenberger (1985), but by the mid 1980s two new but related approaches to the Psalms were coming to the fore—redaction criticism and literary analysis.

5. Redaction criticism

David Howard succinctly summarises the dominant view of the structure and message of the Book of Psalms towards the end of the 1970s.

> [T]he Psalter was treated almost universally as a disjointed assortment of diverse compositions that happened to be collected loosely into what eventually became a canonical 'book.' The primary connections among the psalms were to have been liturgical, not literary or canonical. The original life setting *(Sitz im Leben)* of most psalms was judged to have been the rituals of worship and sacrifice at the temple. The psalms came together in a haphazard way, and the setting of each psalm in the Book of Psalms *(Sitz im Text)* was not considered. The Psalter was understood to have been the hymnbook of second-temple Judaism, and it was not read in the same way in

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[4] Roberts (2005) has offered a recent defence of "Mowinckel's autumn festival as offering the best explanation for the ritual background of the enthronement psalms" (Williams 2006).

which most other canonical books were read, that is, with a coherent structure and message (Howard 1999:332-333).

This state of affairs was turned upside-down by a paradigm shift in psalms studies that began in the late 1970s. There was a growing frustration among biblical scholars with the way historical criticism fragmented biblical texts rather than viewing them holistically. Influenced by the so-called *new criticism* that had been prominent among American literary critics since the 1940s (see Parsons 1991:261), Bible scholars began to experiment with literary approaches to the reading of texts. One natural consequence of the literary approaches was a tendency to read texts as literary wholes. This lead to an interest in studying the theology of the final form of a biblical text, a practice that was pioneered in Old Testament studies by Brevard Childs. It later became known as *canonical criticism.*

Childs' most influential work, *An Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979), set the stage for a major shift in focus in psalms studies. He encouraged reading the Book of Psalms as a literary unity. He also made several striking observations about the editorial structure and message of the final form of the Psalter, such as noting the programmatic significance of Psalms 1 and 2 for the reading of the final form and observing the strategic placement of royal psalms.

Under Childs' influence, and to a lesser extent that of Brennan (1976; 1980), a new avenue of psalms study opened up. Form critics had sought to understand the *Sitze im Leben* of the psalms. In this quest, they analysed psalms almost exclusively with reference to their historical context, paying little or no attention to possible textual relationships between psalms. Redaction critics began to study the Psalter as a literary work, seeking to identify possible relationships between psalms and to discover the redactional agenda behind the Psalter's final form. They shifted the focus from the *Sitz im Leben* to the *Sitz im Text* of the psalms.

The most outstanding and influential figure in the field of redaction critical analysis of the Psalter is Gerald Wilson, a student of Brevard Childs. His seminal work, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985a), remains the most comprehensive and authoritative work on the final redaction of the Psalter.

The greatest contribution of Wilson's research was his convincing demonstration that the Psalter is not an *ad hoc* collection of unrelated psalms, but that it bears evidence of purposeful editorial activity. He was not the first to hypothesise that the Psalter was purposefully organised, but he was the first to devise a sound method of testing the hypothesis. He began by analysing collections of hymns from Qumran, Sumeria and Mesopotamia. Having scrutinised the inscriptions and colophons employed in these collections, he concluded that clearly identifiable editorial techniques were employed in the arrangement of each collection. He thus deduced that collections of hymns in the Ancient Near East were not arranged in random order; it was standard practice to sort them into a purposeful arrangement.

Based on his observations of non-biblical hymn collections, Wilson turned to the Old Testament Psalter expecting to find evidence of purposeful arrangement. In the headings and doxologies he found what he called *explicit* evidence of redaction. In his view,

> A careful study of the use of psalm-headings to group the psalms of the Psalter indicates that the doxologies mark real, intentional divisions rather than accidental ones. Within the first three books (Pss 1-89), 'author' descriptions and genre terms are employed to bind groups of consecutive psalms together and to indicate the boundaries that separate them (Wilson 1992:131).

Although he did not consider author designations to be "the primary organisational concern of the Hebrew Psalter" (Wilson 1984:338), he successfully demonstrated that in the first three books of the Psalter the redactors deliberately used authorship designations to bind groups of psalms together and "to mark strong disjunctions" (p. 339). Within books two and three of the Psalter, he also demonstrated conscious use of genre designations to soften changes between authorship groupings when no strong disjunction is intended.

Wilson also found what he called *tacit* evidence of purposeful redaction. In the fourth and fifth Books of the Psalter, authorship designations are too scarce to serve as indicators of organisational intent. However, in the tradition of

Mesapotamian hymn collections that often use 'praise' or 'blessing' to "conclude documents or sections within documents" (Wilson 1984:349), he observed that the redactors of the fourth and fifth Books used *hallelujah* psalms, that is, psalms opening and/or closing with הַלְלוּיָהּ ('praise the Lord!'), to indicate the closing "boundaries of discrete segments of the larger collection" (p. 350). Furthermore, each group of *hallelujah* palms is followed by a psalm opening with "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his lovingkindness is everlasting" (the so-called הוֹדוּ psalms). Wilson interpreted this as a marker of the beginning of a new subgroup of psalms. He concluded:

> All these factors confirm that the conjunction of *hllwyh* and *hwdw* psalms in these texts is not coincidental, but is the result of conscious arrangement according to accepted traditions and serves to mark the 'seams' of the Psalter as a whole (Wilson 1984:352).

Finally, Wilson found additional *tacit* evidence of purposeful editing in the strategic positioning of royal psalms at the seams of the first three Books of the Psalter. Psalm 2, the beginning of Book I, Psalm 72, the conclusion of Book II and Psalm 89, the conclusion not only of Book III, but also of the first of the two major divisions of the Psalter, are all strategically positioned royal psalms. He viewed the placement of these psalms as one of the keys to understanding the overall redactional purpose of the finished form of the Psalter.

Wilson has written extensively about the editing of the Psalter. His most notable works include 'The Use of 'Untitled' Psalms in the Hebrew Psalter' (1985b), 'The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter' (1986), 'The Shape of the Book of Psalms' (1992), 'Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise' (1993a) and 'Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms' (1993b).

The influence that Gerald Wilson has exerted on the psalms studies since the mid 1980s is difficult to overstate. His work largely settled the question of

whether or not the Psalter was purposefully arranged.[5] The previously prevailing view, which held that the Psalter is a loose collection of individual psalms, is now scarcely tenable. David Howard (1999:329) describes the difference as follows:

> Psalms studies at the end of the twentieth century are very different from what they were in 1970. There has been a paradigm shift in biblical studies, whereby texts are now read *as texts,* that is, as literary entities and canonical wholes. This has manifested in Psalms studies in several ways, the most important of which is the attention to the Psalter as a *book,* as a coherent whole. It is also manifested in many literary and structural approaches.

David Mitchell asserted that "[t]he Psalter may be regarded as a book, rather than an *ad hoc* collection, if it bears evidence of careful arrangement" (1997:15). Wilson presented compelling reasons for accepting that the Psalter may indeed be regarded as a 'book'. What followed his landmark thesis was a deluge of studies attempting to identify the editorial agenda underlying the final arrangement of the Psalter. A few such studies attempted to discover the overarching structure, purpose and message of the entire Psalter. We now turn our attention to the most significant contributions to the quest for the shape of the Psalter.

6.   The shape of the Psalter

The first major contribution to the quest to discover the purpose and agenda of the final redactors of the Psalter came from Gerald Wilson himself. His seminal thesis, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Wilson 1985a), had two objectives. First, he sought to demonstrate that the Psalter was purposefully arranged. Second, he tried to uncover the significance of the arrangement, that is, the purpose of the redactors. The second objective was more subjective and illusive than the first, as Wilson (1992:136) himself admitted:

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[5] The only major work I am aware of that argues against reading the Book of Psalms as a book is *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (Whybray 1996).

> We are, it seems, left to our devices to discern and explain the final form of the Psalter. Any explanation of such significance, however, must make reference to, and be consistent with, those indicators of shape we discussed in the first half of this presentation.

Working on the assumption that the final redactors of the Psalter brought together previously existing collections, Wilson reasoned that the likeliest indicators of his/their editorial agenda would be found at the 'seams' between the five Books of the Psalter. Wisdom psalms are prominent at the seams—Psalms 1, 73, 90-91, 106 and 145 are all strategically placed wisdom psalms—indicating that wisdom interests dominate in the final shape of the Psalter. Wilson also noted that royal psalms—Psalms 2, 72 and 89—are found at three of the four seams of the first major segment of the Psalter (Books I-III, Psalms 1-89).[6] In these he sees "an interesting progression in thought regarding kingship and the Davidic covenant" (Wilson 1985a:209). Books I-III tell the story of the rise and fall of the Davidic dynasty: (a) Psalm 2 inaugurates the Davidic covenant; (b) in Psalm 72 the covenant is transferred to David's successors; and finally (c) Psalm 89 portrays "its collapse in the destruction and despair of the Exile" (Wilson 1992:134). Thus the first major segment of the Psalter closes with the collapse of the Davidic covenant and dynasty.

Book IV focuses on the kingship of Yahweh. Wilson regarded it as the theological centre of the Book of Psalms, the redactor's response to the failure of the Davidic covenant. Trust in human kings had failed. Book IV points readers to Yahweh, the true King of Israel. "Thus, for Wilson, the Psalter is a historical retrospective (Books I-III) followed by an exhortation directing Israel's future hope to theocracy unmediated by a Davidic king. The redactor's narrative standpoint is somewhere in the middle of book IV" (Mitchell 1997:62).

Several other major enquiries into the shape and shaping of the Psalter have proceeded along similar lines to those pioneered by Gerald Wilson. Perhaps the work of Nancy deClaissé-Walford (1995; 1997; 2000; 2006) is the most

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[6] Wilson first suspected that Psalm 41, at the end of Book I, may also be a royal psalm (see Wilson 1985:209-210).

notable in this category. In *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter,* DeClaissé-Walford (1997) claims that the shape of the Book of Psalms tells the story of Israel through the eyes of those who ordered the Psalter. Like Gerald Wilson, she focuses on the seam psalms—the psalms positioned at the beginning and the end of the five Books of the Psalter—for evidence of the editors' purposes in telling Israel's story. The 'story' is told with a focus on *torah* and *kingship* as key themes. These themes are prominent in the seam psalms. Psalms 1 (*torah*) and 2 (*kingship*) introduce these themes. Davidic psalms dominate Book I and, to a lesser extent, Book II. Psalm 73 laments the demise of the kingdom; it sets the tone for Book III. Similarly, Psalm 90 sets the tone for Book IV, which DeClaissé-Walford sees as looking back on the Mosaic era, the period before the monarchy when Yahweh was Israel's King. Perhaps questionably, she interprets Psalm 107 as a royal psalm and views Book V (especially Pss 146-150) as a celebration of Yahweh as King. The message of Books IV and V to the restored nation is that God and the law were sufficient for Israel before installation of the Davidic kings (Book IV) and they remain sufficient after the demise of the kingdom period.

In her own words, DeClaissé-Walford (2006:456-457) describes "the meta-narrative" of the Book of Psalms like this:

> Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the major themes of the Psalter . . . . The remainder of Book One (Pss 3-41) and Book Two (Pss 42-72) recount the history of ancient Israel during the time of the kingship of David, son of Jesse; Book Three (Pss 73-89) reflects the times of Solomon, the divided kingdoms, the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians, and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians; Book Four (Pss 90-106) addresses the Israelites in Exile in Babylon; and Book Five (Pss 107-150) recounts the return from Exile, the rebuilding of the Temple and life in postexilic Jerusalem—a life radically different from what it was before the Babylonian conquest.

Turning to the editorial purpose underlying this metanarrative, DeClaissé-Walford (2006:457) states:

> The story of the Psalter seems to be a summons to the people of postexilic Israel to review their history, come to see that in their postexilic life setting having an earthly king of the line of David is no longer possible, and to acknowledge God as king and sovereign over Israel as a means for survival in their present circumstances and hope for the future.

Steven Parrish (2003) also analyses the canonical Psalter as conveying a narrative, namely, telling the story of Israel's survival as a nation. Books I and II tell of the establishment of the kingdom, while Book III laments its collapse. Books IV and V tell the story of the nation's re-emergence. His overall view of the Psalter builds on the view of Wilson (1985a), but with greater stress on the narrative value of all the psalms and more attention to the three dimensional interaction between Yahweh, the law and the king.

A similar view of the Psalter is presented by Marti Steussy (2004) in *Psalms,* a book written as an introduction to the Psalter for pastors and seminary students. Although she treats some aspects topically, for the most part Steussy works through the Psalter in canonical order. In the mould of Wilson and DeClaissé-Walford, she treats the five Books as telling Israel's story from the reign of King David, through the Babylonian exile, to the return and rebuilding of the Temple.

John Walton (1991, 'Psalms: A Cantata about the Davidic Covenant') made an ambitious proposal that it may be possible to read the Psalter as a cantata about the Davidic covenant. Whereas Gerald Wilson's work focused almost entirely on psalm titles and seam psalms, Walton wondered if there might have been "an editorial rationale for the placement of each psalm" (Walton 1991:23). He based his analysis on the content of each psalm, not on the editorial information provided in the headings. In fact, one of the methodological presuppositions of his cantata theory is that the rationale for the placement of psalms may have nothing to do with the information provided in the psalm headings, since the headings are tied to the original historical context or life-setting, which may have no bearing on the final redactors rationale for placing the psalm within the final Psalter. Walton (p. 24) cautiously proposed and defended the following outline:

In other words, Walton views the entire Psalter as a postexilic review of the history of Israel from the inauguration of the Davidic kingdom until the restoration of the nation after the Babylonian exile.

Contrary to the historical rationales of Wilson (1985a; 1992), DeClaissé-Walford (1997; 2006) and Walton (1991), Walter Brueggemann (1991, 'Bounded by obedience and praise: the psalms as canon'; cf. Brueggemann 1984) proposed a purely sapiential explanation for the theological shape of the Psalter. He asked how one would move through the Book of Psalms from beginning to end. Psalm 1, an intentionally positioned preface, "announces the main theme of the completed Book of Psalms" (1991:64). As an introduction, it serves two functions: (a) it implies that the Book of Psalms "should be read through the prism of torah obedience" (p. 64) and (b) it presents an idealistic world, a perfectly coherent moral world in which the obedient prosper and the wicked perish. Similarly, Psalm 150 is an intentionally positioned conclusion to the Psalter. It is unique among the praise psalms, being the only one that summons to praise without offering any reasons for praise.[7] The goal of the Psalter, therefore, is to move the reader from obedience to praise, from willing duty to utter delight, from Psalm 1 to Psalm 150.

However, the journey from the one boundary to the other is not smooth. The psalms consistently belie the idealistic world of Psalm 1. Throughout the Psalter, the psalmists struggle to come to terms with Yahweh's חֶסֶד (ḥesed) since in the trials of life he appears to have been unfaithful to his covenant.

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[7] This might be a slight overstatement since Psalm 150:2, "Praise him *for his mighty deeds*; praise him *according to his excellent greatness*" (ESV, emphasis added), does contain grounds clauses. Brueggemann's point, however, was that the whole of Psalm 150, including verse 2, essentially functions as a call to praise. The psalmist does not pause to motivate praise with a catalogue of reasons.

Brueggemann's thesis is that "the way from torah obedience to self-abandoning doxology is by way of *candor about suffering* and *gratitude about hope*" (1991:72, emphasis in original). Psalm 73 stands at the centre of the Psalter, both literally and theologically, being a microcosm of the entire Psalter and denoting the turning point from obedience to praise (see Brueggemann and Miller 1996).

Mihaila (2001) seems to build on McCann's (1987) interpretation of Psalm 73 and embrace Brueggemann's (1991) view of the Psalter as a movement from lament to praise. Mihaila argues that "in the canonical structuring of the Psalter, Psalm 73 stands at its center in a crucial role" (p. 54). He offers several reasons for its pivotal role: (a) it stands near the physical centre of the Psalter; (b) it marks the beginning of the Psalter's movement from lament (Books I-II) to hope and praise (Books IV-V); (c) it is a programmatic introduction to Book III, which functions as the transitional Book of the Psalter; and (d) it is a microcosm of the theology of the Book of Psalms and, indeed, of the entire Old Testament.

At around the same time, a number of studies appeared exploring the role of wisdom psalms in shaping the final form and purpose of the Psalter. Picking up on a thread in Wilson (1985a), Mays (1987, 'The Place of Torah-Psalms in the Psalter') led the way in further exploring the strategic placement of wisdom psalms. In the early 1990s, Kuntz (1992, 'Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter'; 2000), McCann (1992, 'Psalms as Instruction'; 1993, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah*) and Crenshaw (2000, 'Wisdom Psalms?') explored the same question.

In an article entitled 'The Division and Order of the Psalms', Anderson (1994) worked his way through the Books I-V of the Psalter in canonical order discussing diverse points of interest, which ranged from authorship to ordering. He saw the compilation of the Psalter evolving Book by Book, beginning in the Davidic era (Book I and possibly also Book II) and ending around the time of Nehemiah (Books IV and V). He dates the compilation of Book III during the reign of Hezekiah. He is sceptical of high-level literary arrangement, and tends to see the development of the final form as a

somewhat piecemeal evolutionary process. He draws the following conclusions:

> In summation we have seen that the division of the psalter into five books is indeed not only warranted, but gives evidence of a historical development of compilation over the ages since the times of Hezekiah or earlier. This work of compilation into known and well used canonical collections was probably completed only after the exile, perhaps in the time of Nehemiah. Whilst there are indications of internal ordering here and there, there appears to be no systematic attempt to structure the psalter internally. Given the historical development of compilation, the old interpretation of *midrash tehillim* (on Ps 1:5) that the five books reflect the five books of Moses is probably no more than a late reflection. The *Sitz im Leben* of this long process of compilation appears to have been the need to furnish recognized collections for use in the temple liturgy.

In a major study of the overall purpose and message of the Psalter, David Mitchell (1997, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*) not only defended the view that the final form of the Psalter is a purposeful literary arrangement (a 'book') rather than a haphazard collection of psalms, but also sought to demonstrate that the final redactors intended the Psalter to be read eschatologically. He began with a comprehensive review of the history of psalms interpretation, demonstrating that until the rise of critical exegesis the psalms had always been interpreted eschatologically by both Jews and Christians. Next he offered four reasons why an eschatological agenda would have been likely:

a) "[I]t originated within an eschatological milieu (p. 82).
b) "[T]he figures to whom the Psalms are attributed were regarded as future-predicative prophets" (p. 83).
c) "[C]ertain psalms . . . describe a person or event in such glowing terms that the language far exceeds the reality of any historical king or battle" (p. 85).

d) "[T]he very inclusion of royal psalms in the Psalter suggests that the redactor understood them to refer to a future *mashiah*-king" (p. 86).

Mitchell proceeded to analyse several collections of psalms—the Psalms of Asaph (Psalms 50, 73-83), the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134), and the whole of Book IV—as well as the royal psalms scattered throughout the Psalter and a few key themes within the Book of Psalms, demonstrating how the final arrangement is consistent with a prophetic, messianic, eschatological editorial agenda.[8]

Although not many would go as far as Mitchell in contending that the entire Psalter is to be read as a prophetic, eschatological 'book', a growing number of scholars now concede that the Psalter does need to be read (in some sense) eschatologically. Childs, who sparked the modern quest for the editorial agenda behind the Psalter, believed that "the final form of the Psalter is highly eschatological in nature" (1979:518). Rendtor (1986:249), observing "the emphatic position of the royal psalms" and the overall movement towards the praise of God, felt that "[t]here can be no doubt that at this stage they were understood in messianic terms: the praise of God is not only directed to the past and the present, but also includes the messianic future." Cole lists Hossfeld & Zenger, Mays and Mitchell as key scholars who read the Psalter eschatologically. He states:

> Hossfeld and Zenger [1993:51] likewise detect an eschatological perspective in Psalm 2, and across the entire book. Mays [1987:10] states regarding the Psalter and its beginning, "[B]y the time the Psalter was being completed, the psalms dealing with the kingship of the Lord were understood eschatologically. . . . Psalm 2, reread as a vision of the goal of history, puts the torah piety of Psalm 1 in an eschatological context." Mitchell [1997:87] notes that Psalms 1 and 2 together "announce that the ensuing collection is a handbook for the eschatological wars of the Lord, describing the coming events

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[8] Georg Braulik (2004) argues that certain psalms, especially royal and/or Davidic psalms, were reinterpreted in a messianic or christological sense very early. Unlike Mitchell, he does not argue that the entire collection was edited with the intent that it be read eschatologically.

and the Yhwh-allegiance required of those who would triumph" (Cole 2005:40).

Cooper (1995:89) indicates that the recent trend is open to finding messianic allusions in the psalms, while not seeing all the psalms messianically.

> Some of the early church fathers were so enamored with the hope of Messiah in the Psalms that practically all Psalms were considered Messianic. With the advent of higher criticism and rationalistic principles for the study of Scripture, the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme, and no Psalms were considered to be Messianic. Today it is generally acknowledged that while not all Psalms are Messianic, there are clear portraits of Messiah in many of them.

A recent monograph by Jamie Grant (2004) lent further weight to an eschatological reading of the Psalter. Grant notes that the editors juxtaposed torah psalms with royal psalms—Psalm 1 with Psalm 2; Psalm 19 with Psalms 18 & 20-21; and Psalm 119 with Psalm 118. He argues that the kingship law in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 lies behind the editors' attempt to link torah and kingship. These paired psalms point to a future exemplary king, the messiah, who would be a pious 'torah-lover'. In the case of Psalms 1 and 2, the editors intend their readers to associate the torah-lover (Ps 1) with the anointed king (Ps 2). Thus the editors were pointing towards a future exemplary king.

Duane Christensen (1996, 'The Book of Psalms within the Canonical Process in Ancient Israel') attempted, unconvincingly in my opinion, to resurrect the Edward King's (1904) idea that the Psalter was designed to be read in a triennial cycle of Sabbaths. Supporting the old view that the five book divisions of the Psalter were patterned after the five books of the Pentateuch so as to form mirror collections of Moses and David, he posited that matching readings from the Pentateuch and the Psalter were read each Sabbath for three years.

Leslie McFall (2000, 'The Evidence for a Logical Arrangement of the Psalter') tried to show that "the Psalter has been arranged on a logical overall plan and that the superscriptions … played an important part in the early

development of the present arrangement" (p. 228). He identified four stages of sorting in the final structure of the Psalter: (a) by authors, (b) by divine names, (c) by genre and (d) by themes or key words. He did not believe that authorship was the main criterion of arrangement, but speculated that the compilers probably received author-defined collections of psalms. Then the compilers applied three stages of sorting. First, books were sorted according to the preponderance of the names Yahweh or Elohim. In the Elohistic Psalter, Psalms 42-83, not a single psalm uses the name Yahweh more than Elohim; conversely, in the two Yahwistic collections, Psalms 1-41 and 84-150, no psalm uses Yahweh more than Elohim. Therefore, McFall suggested that the first level of arrangement was to count divine names used in each psalm and group them based on the predominant name. Divine names took precedence over authorship, which explains the separation of Davidic, Korahite and Asaphite collections. Second, groups of psalms were sorted by genre. The compiler "took the Elohistic collection and grouped the Psalms into blocks according to the genre term used in the superscriptions" (McFall 2000:233). Thus, the Korahite and Davidic psalms in the Elohistic Psalter were grouped into *maskil* and *mizmor* blocks. This step was not applied to the Yahwistic collections because there were not enough psalms of each genre. Last of all, individual psalms were juxtaposed based on related topics, themes or link words.

In summary, Wilson (1985a), DeClaissé-Walford (1997) and Walton (1991) all offered historical explanations of the shape of the Psalter. Although all three view it as a commentary on the Davidic covenant, Walton's view is highly speculative and seems strained in places, whereas Wilson's (so too DeClaissé-Walford's) is more measured and methologically sound. Brueggemann (1991) offered a purely sapiential explanation, which accords well with the general nature of the Psalter. Neither Christensen's (1996) liturgical explanation nor McFall's (2000) three-stage sorting theory offer convincing explanations of the final editorial agenda underlying the Psalter. David Mitchell's (1997) attempt to account for the shape of the Psalter as a prophetic, eschatological, messianic collection is convincing in its treatment of certain groups of psalms, but struggles account for the shape of the entire collection. In my judgement, both Wilson's historical explanation and

Brueggemann's sapiential approach offer coherent explanations of the overall shape of the Book of Psalms.

7. Conclusion

The prevailing attitude towards the Book of Psalms has come full circle. Prior to the rise of historical criticism, it was widely believed to be more than a haphazard collection of hymns and prayers, although few attempted to prove that it is purposeful arrangement or to identify the purpose of the arrangement. During the periods dominated by historical criticism (ca. 1820-1920) and form criticism (ca. 1920-1980), interest was limited to individual psalms and their historical origin and function. Today, however, there is a renewed conviction that there are purposeful literary relationships between psalms and the Psalter itself is a purposefully edited collection. Unprecedented effort is being exerted to discover the editorial agenda underlying the Psalter and the literary relationships between psalms.

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Review of Paul Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*[1]

by Annang Asumang[2]

Anderson PN 2007. *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered.* **Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 226 pages.**

Paul Anderson is Professor of Biblical and Quaker Studies at the George Fox University, USA. As co-chair of the 'John, Jesus, and History' group of the Society of Biblical Literature meetings, he has been involved in the efforts to correct the increasing marginalization of the Gospel of John in scholarly discussions on the life and ministry of the 'historical' Jesus. As the subtitle indicates, this book aims to examine critically several of the foundational assumptions that have led to this modern "de-historicization of John and its direct implication: the de-Johannification of Jesus" (p. 2). To some extent, Anderson successfully lays good grounds for questioning some of these assumptions. This is the main strength of the book.

Anderson sets his stall out in the introductory chapter by arguing that there is a widening gap between 'traditional' and 'critical' scholars in approaches to the historical questions in John's gospel. The "relegation of John to the canons of Christology and theology" by critical scholars, he argues, has resulted in the state of affairs in which "Synoptic investigations of the Jesus of history can therefore be carried out unencumbered by the idiosyncrasies of John, 'the maverick gospel', and the history of John's material may be ascribed to . . . the theological imagination of the Fourth Evangelist" (p. 2).

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[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.

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This situation is unacceptable to Anderson, since all four evangelists were theologians equally motivated by the same agenda to present the good news of Jesus Christ. However, Anderson warns that his aim is not to generate a 'critical' versus 'traditional' scholarship conflict but rather to engender an "intentionally synthetic and integrative" (p. 4) approach between the two camps. His point is that there is no need to force a "dichotomous choice between John and the Synoptics" (p. 5).

With this background in mind, Anderson aims the rest of the book at putting the various assumptions underpinning the modernists' approach to John, which is by far the dominant perspective in Johannine scholarship, under scrutiny. In Part I, he examines the historical background to the marginalization of John's gospel. He notes that the historicity of John was not questioned until the eighteenth century when comparisons between John and the Synoptics became a serious scholarly endeavour. From then on, an assumption of 'three against one' resulted in John being categorized as a minority, and hence, a dissonant voice. He notes however, that "with the eventual emergence of Markan priority, the 3-against-1 denigration of John falls flat" (p. 17). John ought to have been re-installed as a conversation partner with Mark, rather than being isolated.

Anderson then examines the immense influence of Bultmann's 1971 commentary in this historical trajectory of John's marginalization. Bultmann, he argues, was "willing to ascribe the bulk of gospel narrative to contemporary mythological origins" (p. 19). This mythological interpretation essentially undermined the historicity of the fourth gospel. John's archaeological and topographical details, which to Anderson are remarkably more detailed and beneficial for historical Jesus research, have been largely ignored. Efforts by Käsemann, Dodd, Robinson, Morris, Carson and Blomberg to 'rehabilitate' John are noted; but these attempts have not led to any significant revision of the dominant marginalization of John's gospel.

Next, the various proposed hypotheses for explaining the John-Synoptic relationship—Markan Dependence, Midrashic Development, Historicized Drama and Two Editions theory, are all examined by Anderson and found wanting. Instead, he proposes that John was written from an independent tradition but not in isolation and seclusion from the synoptics. Both at the oral

and written phases of the gospels, John's gospel developed in a dialogical conversation with all the other gospels and with Mark in particular. "John's relationship with Mark was interfluential, augmentative and corrective; John's relationship with Q was formative, and perhaps interfluential; John's relation with Luke was formative, orderly and theological; and John's relationship with Matthew was reinforcing, dialectical and correcting" (p. 40). This last sentence perhaps summarizes, not only the major message of this book, but also serves as the gist of what is expanded in the rest of the book.

In Part II, Anderson further assesses some of the similarities and differences between John and the synoptics and examines the various approaches in dealing with them. He then employs the interinfluential approach to propose a number of explanations of the differences. Basically, John is a deeply reflective theologian who has also had more time to reshape and re-evaluate his understanding of Jesus. He notes that "some aspects of John's witness show signs of being crafted for readers and hearers of Mark" (p. 75). Anderson provides several balanced evaluations of the differences, such as how the ministry of John the Baptist is handled by Mark and the fourth gospel, and the "Messianic secret" in Mark against Jesus' self-declarations in John. This is very helpful; for it turns out in this book that John can be understood as in conversation and not in conflict with Mark.

In Part III, Anderson applies his proposal of interfluentiality to further explain the relationships between John and the Synoptics. In many ways, this part repeats several of the points which have already been made. However, a conceptual diagram (p. 126) helps to effectively summarize Anderson's view of the complex relationships between the gospels. In Part IV, Anderson argues that since to a large extent, Matthew and Luke depend on and develop Mark, and John is independent in conversation with Mark, the concept of the 'synoptic' gospels should be replaced by a new concept of the 'bi-optic' gospels, that is, we essentially have two traditions reflecting on the historical Jesus; with some additional material from Q.

Though this is not the first time Anderson has made such a proposal (see for example, Anderson 2001:175-88), it remains to be seen what other scholarly partners may view this approach. Clearly, Matthew and Luke were not insignificant theologians, a point that Anderson himself also admits. In any

case, one may not be too far from being right to suspect that John would rather wish to be admitted to the table of four instead of elbowing away Matthew and Luke from the table.

The final Part V brings Anderson's findings together and suggests some implications. He warns against the rejection of John based on, among other things, the "overstated claims regarding John's presentation of Jesus' pre-existent divinity" (p. 177). On the other hand, "denigration of John's historicity is fraught with insurmountable problems" (p. 180). What is needed is "a more adequate stance to consider the distinctive contribution of John in terms of its autonomous origin and development" (p. 181). This modest aim of Anderson is perhaps one of the main achievements of this book.

I can muster only two minor criticisms against such an excellent book. Firstly, the organization of the material results in several repetitions. The author has clearly set the material in such a way as to generate dialogue and conversation, certainly with 'critical' scholars. Yet, the discussions on various issues lead to a number of distracting duplications.

A second and more trivial criticism may yet be relevant, since another reviewer has also made a similar point (see Painter 2008). Though Anderson aims to generate dialogue, parts of the book are polemical. Statements such as "a scholar's livelihood and career may hinge upon distinguishing oneself as a hard-minded scientific scholar rather than a soft-hearted traditionalist one" and "no scholar wants to come across as embracing a naively traditionalistic view" (2007:45) may well be an accurate assessment of the state of affairs in Biblical Studies. However, in this reviewer's opinion, such labelling of dialogical partners could well entrench views rather than bring camps together. There is no doubt that the author feels strongly about the subject and aims to question certain accepted and strongly held norms in scholarly circles. Or perhaps the harsh tones in one or two of the book's pages may serve to bring to the fore the problem of uncritical acceptance of 'critical' assumptions. One hopes the later is the case.

These trivial objections notwithstanding, Anderson's book may prove to be one of the major publications which may contribute to the 'restoration' of

John's gospel to its rightful place as an equal partner with the synoptics in scholarly discussions of the 'historical' Jesus.

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Review of Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*[1]

by Annang Asumang[2]

Van der Watt J 2007. *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*. London: T&T Clark, 160 pages.

Prof J G van der Watt of the New Testament Department of the University of Pretoria begins his introduction by describing the Gospel of John as "straightforward to understand only to surprise the reader with its depth and finesse of expression and ideas" (p. 1). The same can also be said of his textbook aimed at professional students of the Bible and yet written with such clarity of language and ideas that it would also be of immense help to the non-professional.

Aware that the present state of Johannine research is like an overworked "Chinese rice field" (p. 146) and that scholarly interpretation of these documents is like a constantly swinging "pendulum" (p. 145), van der Watt begins by patiently engaging the texts themselves before moving on to discuss the various scholarly approaches and perspectives on the introductory matters. This is one of the major strengths of the book.

The first chapter describes the structure and purpose of the gospel of John and its relationship with the Letters. Van der Watt notes that the narrative flow of the gospel is such that the chronological account is not as important as the thematic account—"It is the message and not the events that dominate the narrative" (p. 12). Thus the emphasis in this introductory book is clearly on John's theology. After a brief examination of the conceptual overlaps between

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the Gospel and the Letters of John, van der Watt concludes that the "Letters are examples of how the Gospel was interpreted in latter situations, which makes the Letters, the 'first commentaries' on the Gospel" (p. 23).

The second chapter focuses on the theological themes of the Gospel and Letters. Though simply presented, the discussion is wide-ranging, thorough and effective. John's Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology are carefully examined with deftness and lucidity. In addition, he provides a number of helpful conceptual diagrams to illustrate the theological themes of the gospel. This is very much appreciated by this reviewer.

The rest of the book examines several of the introductory issues related to the interpretation of the Gospel and Letters of John. Here, van der Watt presents a fair account of the different and often conflicting scholarly views on some of these matters. The fourth chapter deals with the relationship between the Johannine literature and other biblical documents. With regard to John and the Synoptics, the author advises students to be "clear about their reasons for taking different positions" (p. 81) and so proceeds to supply these various options and the reasons behind each one of them. Van der Watt himself opts for an older view of the John-Synoptic relationship that is increasingly reasserting itself, that "John was written independently, but with some form of contact with synoptic material" (p. 90).

The fifth chapter deals with form, source and redaction critical issues related to the gospel. The author notes that these older approaches were aimed at resolving a feature of the Gospel whereby there appear to be "tensions" and "sudden breaks" in the narrative (p. 96). Again, van der Watt examines the different viewpoints in a fair manner and proceeds to note the problems inherent in the methods. He also observes the current scholarly trend to consider the gospel as a narrative whole while cautioning the student to also take seriously the "history" of the composition of the text as framework in interpreting the gospel (p. 105).

The sixth chapter deals with the questions of authorship, date and origin of the gospel and the debated issue of the Johannine community. Though no new grounds are broken here, the discussion surveys several stances. The author expresses concern on how the "two-level drama" hypothesis has resulted in an

unhelpful situation in which "Many players took to the field and played complicated speculative games in order to reconstruct the history of the Johannine community" (p. 115). This indeed is a salutary admonition regarding the speculative nature of the method of reading the Gospel of John from a purely hypothetical standpoint of a 'Johannine community'. The sixth chapter discusses the religious backgrounds of the Johannine Literature.

Van der Watt concludes the book by drawing the attention of scholars to the intrinsic dangers of going round in circles, such that "the same known material or knowledge is repeated in each article after the next" (p. 145). If his aim is to call for a renewed effort to re-engage the text itself, then indeed his book serves as one of the key opening salvos in that direction.

This reviewer cannot think of any criticism of the book. A tiny quibble about the lack of discussion on the implications of the genre of John as a gospel may however be made. If John's aim was to write a *gospel*, then perhaps the current understanding of the genre of the gospels as "theological and kerygmatic biographies" is one swing to the pendulum that needed some emphasis. For, it is likely that John's contribution to understanding the 'historical Jesus' may well become an important aspect of Johannine scholarship in the coming decades. However, this small quibble only applies to the reviewer's 'vested' interest and cannot detract from this regal introductory work by Professor van der Watt.

A Review of Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*[1]

by Mark Pretorius[2]

Byrne R 2006. *The Secret*. New York: Beyond Words, 190 pages.

Since *The Secret* debuted in 2006—and was given widespread exposure on the Oprah Winfrey show—its sales have exceeded the four-million mark. Celebrities from all genres are endorsing it. At the writing of this review, it is even reported to have outsold the latest Harry Potter book by JK Rowling's. Clearly, this book is attracting much attention, and people are prepared to spend money to read it. The question is: what is *The Secret* that so many people are clamouring to find out about?

The 'secret' is simply *the law of attraction*. It is a method developed—perhaps I should say 'discovered'—by Rhonda Byrne after facing a particularly difficult time in her life. In her forward, she explains that she was only able to come out of this difficult time after discovering 'the secret' and applying its principles to her life (pp. ix-x).

According to Byrne, the law of attraction is a powerful law within the universe. If properly used, the law of attraction can make all our dreams come true. It has to do with how we direct our thoughts, and how we lock into the power found within this law of attraction. Because it is an absolute law, it will always respond to our thoughts, no matter what they may be. In her view, and in the view of the many contributors to her book, we human beings are the most powerful force in the universe. This is simply because whatever we think about will come to pass. By what we meditate on, we shape the world around us, either positively or negatively.

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In her view, you shape your own life and destiny through the power of the law of attraction. Through positive thinking and visualisation, you can attract wealth and health, and anything else you may desire. These are two of many keys that, when properly applied, cause the law of attraction to work. Byrne states that "nothing [good or bad] can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts" (p. 28). She expands on this thought on page 33: "Your thoughts are the primary cause of everything". Your current reality or your current life is the result of the thoughts you have been thinking (p. 71).

Doubtless, there are aspects of this law that are attractive to the human heart. We all like to think that we have ultimate control over our lives and that we can have anything we want. We all want to control our destinies and to feel that the universe is at our beck and call—that it is a friendly force working with and not against us. This is, I am convinced, what draws people to the law of attraction.

The Secret reminds me of the days when the 'word of faith' and 'positive confession' movements were sweeping the globe. One only has to look at the so-called father of the faith movement, EW Kenyon, who was a student of Emerson College of Oratory, a breeding ground for New Thought philosophical ideas, to see the comparison between his writings and ideas and Rhonda Byrne's views and ideas.

Kenyon taught that the words of our mouths betray faith or fear in our minds, and the combined affect of positive or negative belief and words cause the positive or negative realities that come into existence. This is almost exactly what *The Secret* is teaching, but in a more modernised way.

Kenyon also formulated laws of prosperity which were embraced by many 'faith teachers' for daily rehearsal and recital to cultivate a mind of faith that would result in a life of complete health and material wealth. *The Secret* is no different, except it is written for a larger audience by not pushing a Christian stance. But it definitely has been written in a way that would attract a Christian readership as well. This is clear by the scriptures she quotes on page 47 (i.e., Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24). She claims that if we just ask and believe, we are able to create whatever we desire. Mark 11:24 is a scripture

made famous by a well-known word of faith minister named Kenneth Hagin. He quoted this scripture in almost all the books he wrote. Nothing is new in *The Secret*; it has all been taught before.

However, Rhonda Byrne takes this teaching one step further. The true essence of her book comes out near the end, where she makes this statement:

> You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of You on this planet (p. 164).

The book pushes a pantheistic view, meaning, no real lines are drawn between creation (or, as she calls it, "the Universe") and the Creator, God.

I believe the mind is one of the most powerful organs with which God has blessed humanity. There are more than 900 references in scripture to the mind, soul, intellect, thinking faculty, and so on. Doubtless, God is telling us the importance of the mind. However, only a mind submitted to God, and daily renewed by the Word and power of the Holy Spirit, can have any meaning in God's kingdom. To believe that simply meditating, visualising and confessing the things you desire will automatically bring them to pass is naïve and makes a mockery of God's omnipotent power and sovereignty over all creation.

The Secret is a simple read. It is clearly a New Age book written to popularise age-old beliefs for a new audience. Byrne tries hard not to offend anyone. Her book states what the latest fad in Hollywood is. If converted into a film like the Da Vinci Code, it could rake in a small fortune for the author and contributors, and further advance the 'new age' of so-called enlightenment.