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"And the Angels Waited on Him" (Mark 1:13): Hospitality and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel

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Abstract[2]

The emphasis on discipleship in Mark's gospel, particularly in its relationship to the cross, is well researched. Little has however been made of a parallel expression of discipleship through the extension of hospitality to Jesus. Yet, beginning with Mark 1:13 where angels table-served Jesus in the wilderness, several of His followers, including the disciples, also contribute to Jesus' mission by extending Him hospitality. After briefly reviewing the motif of table-serving God in the Old Testament and the literature of second temple Judaism, this article will examine the incidents in Mark's Gospel in which individuals express their discipleship to Jesus through hospitality. It concludes by outlining the contemporary implications of the findings to Christian witness in the African as well as non-African contexts.

1. Introduction

Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus, though brief (Mark 1:13), nevertheless provides a colourful setting for depicting Jesus' ministry in the rest of the gospel. In addition to noting that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days, where He was tempted by Satan, Mark also states that Jesus was with wild animals and *hoi angeloi diēkonoun autō* ("the angels waited on Him", Mark 1:13 NRSV). This final clause has attracted two main categories of questions: (a) what were the actual functions of the angels? and (b) what significance did Mark attach to these functions?

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

Broadly conceived, four sets of approaches have been adopted by interpreters to address these two questions. Beginning with a number of Patristic authors, a first group of interpreters consider the verse as largely theological and meant to set the context for Jesus' ministry. In this regard the *diakoneō* of the angels is considered to be symbolic of the new dispensation of God's kingdom inaugurated by Jesus. Mark 1:13, it is argued, depicts an Edenic and paradisiacal typology in which Jesus, the new Adam, peacefully interacts with angels and wild animals after defeating Satan and reversing Adam's fall (e.g., Donahue and Harrington 2002, 66; Bauckham 1994, 3-21; Marcus 2000, 168; Guelich 1989, 39; Jeremias 1971, 69-70; Schulze 1955, 280-283; Maloney 2002, 38-39). In support of this interpretation, the apocryphal Life of Adam and Eve 4 in which, following their eviction from Eden, the first couple are made to lament their loss of the "food of the angels" is often cited (cf. Isa 11:6-9; Hos 2:18).

Even though it assumes that the function of the angels was to feed Jesus, this theological interpretation nevertheless appears to strain the account of the temptation of Jesus beyond its immediate historical indicators. Significantly, Mark does not report the victory of Jesus in the verse, and in the rest of the gospel, Jesus is in constant conflict with the evil forces. This suggests that Mark 1:13 can only be interpreted as the beginning of the reversal of Satan's reign, rather than its end (cf. Lane 1974, 61).

A second set of interpreters take *diakoneō* to mean that the angels protected Jesus from the onslaught of Satan in the wilderness (e.g. France 2002, 87; Gundry 1993, 55; Stein 2008, 64-65). Psalm 91:11-13, which promises angelic protection against stumbling in a hostile environment populated by lions and snakes, is often cited in support of this interpretation. It is argued that Mark underlines the "holy war" context of Jesus' ministry in which the angels play the role of co-warriors of Jesus in the wilderness. France (2002, 87), along with Gibson (1994, 3-4), also emphasizes that this protective function of the angels is rhetorically aimed at balancing out the negative hostility of Satan to Jesus in the wilderness. However, even though the rhetorical effect of the clause on Mark's first readers may well have been the sense that Satan's negative activities in the wilderness were cancelled out by the positive

presence and protection of the angels, the use of the word *diakoneō* appears to suggest a much more practical function by the angels.

A third group of interpreters construe Mark 1:13 as part of a typological re-enactment of Israel's forty-year sojourn in the wilderness, and the *diakoneō* of the angels as representing the guidance of the people of God (e.g., Caneday 1999, 19-36; Lane 1974, 62; Mauser 1963, 124-128; van Henten 1999, 349-366). Just as the angels guided Israel through the wilderness (cf. Exod 14:19; 23:20), it is argued, so also did they guide Jesus during His time in the wilderness. Just as God fed Israel with the "food of the angels" during their travel through the wilderness (Ps 77:19 LXX; Wis 16:20), it is stressed, so also did He send the angels to feed His only Son in the wilderness. In a recent article, John Heil (2006, 63-78), has extended this interpretation further by linking it with the Old Testament idea of Israel as God's son or servant to argue that the function of the angels included the "training" and preparation of Jesus, God's beloved Son, for His upcoming ministry.

As a corollary, this interpretation is sometimes also linked with the angelic feeding of Elijah in the wilderness in 1 Kings 19:4-8 (cf. 1 Kgs 17:6). This parallel with Elijah in the wilderness has some merit, even though it has to be emphasized that the One fed by the angels in Mark 1:13 is much, much greater than Elijah. In any case, there is the remaining problem that there is no consistent "Israel Christology" in the rest of Mark's gospel. And hence, this interpretation does not demonstrate how the *diakoneō* of the angels relates to the rest of the theological emphases of the gospel.

The fourth class of interpretations takes a purely practical view and regards the *diakoneō* of the angels as providing table-service for Jesus in the wilderness (e.g., Stein 2008, 65). The angels, it is argued, extended hospitality[3] to Jesus in an inhospitable wilderness by keeping Him company and serving Him food and/or drink. In doing so, the angels sustained Jesus during a period of trial and ultimately aided His mission.

[3] The word, "hospitality" is defined differently by various writers. It is used in this article to refer to the practice of providing food or drink and/or company to another person to whom one is not naturally obliged to do so.

There are a number of reasons for preferring this fourth approach. Firstly, by highlighting the hunger of Jesus during His temptation, Matthew (4:2) and Luke (4:2) suggest that the *diakoneō* of the angels during Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness involved feeding and refreshing Him. Mark does not mention the hunger of Jesus as part of the temptation, and so must certainly be allowed to "retain his own voice". However, even though his account of Jesus' temptation is brief, there is no reason to suppose that his description was meant to be radically different from those of the other synoptic gospels. Mark 1:13 should therefore be regarded as a synopsis of the more elaborate temptation accounts of Matthew and Luke. Hence, the meaning of *diakoneō* as practical table-service is most likely the same in all three synoptic Gospels.

Secondly, within the prologue of Mark,[4] John the Baptist is also said to have eaten locusts and wild honey in the wilderness (Mark 1:4-6). Since the Baptist is compared and contrasted with Jesus in the prologue, the idea that Jesus was fed by the angels appears to pair reasonably well with the statement about the Baptist's wilderness menu. Typical of the contrast, John the forerunner who baptizes with water eats the austere food of the wilderness;[5] whereas Jesus the Mightier One who baptizes with the Spirit (Mark 1:7-8) is implied to have been fed by the angels. The meaning of *diakoneō* as practical table-service therefore makes good sense in the context of the Jesus and John the Baptist contrast in the prologue.

Thirdly, and more significantly, where *diakoneō* and its cognates are used in the rest of Mark's gospel, and in relation to Jesus, they indicate table-service (Mark 1:31; 15:41) or at least some form of menial service (Mark 10:45; cf. Weiser 1964, 302).[6] Therefore, unless there is an indication in Mark 1:13 to interpret it otherwise, this first use in the gospel must also be taken to mean the same. The resolution of the problem of what the significance of the functions of the angels in the wilderness was must therefore begin by

[4] Interpreters differ in how they define the limits of Mark's prologue. Some argue for 1:1-8 (e.g., Gundry 1993), others for 1:1-13 (e.g., Stein 2008, 35; France 2002, 13; Donahue and Harrington 2002, 67) and still others for 1:1-15 (e.g., Boring 1990, 43-81; Anderson 1976). A small minority of commentators argue for 1:1-20 (e.g., Myers 1988, 112).

[5] For a discussion on the state of current research on the wilderness menu of John the Baptist see Kelhoffer (2003, 104-127)

[6] Diakoneō is also used to indicate table service in Luke 12:37; 17:8; and Acts 6:2.

examining the possible relationship between Mark's uses of the *diakoneō* word group and its semantic and conceptual equivalents in the whole gospel. Once this is done, the significance which Mark appears to have attached to the *diakoneō* of the angels will become much more obvious.

This article aims to establish that the practical table-service of the angels in the wilderness is a prelude to several other instances in the gospel in which Jesus' followers, including the disciples, expressed their discipleship by extending Him hospitality. Since Mark's prologue provides the keys for interpreting the rest of the gospel (cf. Lane 1974, Hooker 1986, 6; Stein 2008, 38), and since the angels are functionally paralleled with the disciples in a number of unrelated passages in the same gospel, this link between discipleship to the Lord Jesus and hospitality appears to be an important aspect of the overall subject of discipleship in the gospel of Mark. Contemporary Christian witness needs to reflect on the implications of this link between hospitality and discipleship.

The article will proceed in the following fashion. After reviewing the motif of table-serving God in the Old Testament and some of the literature of Second Temple Judaism (STJ), the article will examine several instances in Mark's gospel in which hospitality is extended to Jesus as an expression of discipleship. Since the nature and importance of hospitality in any given society is significantly influenced by the society's socio-cultural protocols and practices, the article will conclude by enumerating a number of implications of the findings in the African as well as non-African contexts.

2. Table Serving God in the OT and Second Temple Judaism

The idea of extending hospitality to strangers as a religious and socio-cultural duty is a common feature of the OT.[7] In addition to humans extending

[7] The extensive OT laws on the just and benevolent treatment of neighbours, foreigners, fugitives, refugees, prisoners of war and resident aliens ensured that despite the cultural tendency to be hospitable, the society also had explicit rules, etiquettes and protocols that enshrined hospitable ethical behaviour in its people (cf. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000, 50)

hospitality to other human beings,[8] the OT also narrates a few instances in which hospitality is extended by human beings to God (or a divine Person who appears in a human form, and speaks and acts as God). A brief review of the significance of these OT instances and their subsequent interpretations by some of the literature of STJ will provide a useful background to appreciate how extending hospitality to Jesus in Mark's gospel ought to be regarded.

It has to be emphasized that the aim of this review is not to suggest equivalence or a particular form of continuity/discontinuity relationship between the nature of the divine-human encounters in the OT and that in the NT. Certainly, the incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus is here held to be a unique historical event. The aim of the review that follows is however to highlight how the practical habit of hospitality is closely intertwined with piety and exhibited in the manner in which those who were committed to a covenantal relationship with Yahweh table served Him.

In this regard, Abraham's hospitality towards the three "strangers" in Genesis 18 occupies the pride of place in the "table serving God" motif in the OT (cf. Arterbury 2003; 2005; Wenham 1994, 32-53).[9] The characterization of the visitors as "men" (Gen 18:2-3) shows that they certainly appeared to Abraham as human beings, but this should not detract from the core of the narrative that basically, as the beginning of the chapter announces, it was Yahweh who appeared to the patriarch "in the heat of the day" (Gen 18:1; cf. Thunberg 1966, 560-570). To be sure, by the end of the episode, Abraham had come to that conclusion and addressed one of the three visitors as "the Judge of the earth" (Gen 18:25). The patriarch's extension of hospitality to the "men" was therefore an indication of his deep piety as well as the closeness of his covenantal friendship with Yahweh. This closeness is evidenced by God's revelation of His intentions to Abraham and the fascinating "haggling"

[8] For example Reuel/Jethro towards Moses (Exod 2:20), Rahab towards the spies (Josh 2:1-21, cf. Heb 11:31, James 2:25), Samuel towards Saul (1 Sam 9:18-27), Job towards "strangers" (Job 31:32, cf. Testament Job 10.1-3, 25.5, 53.3), the old man who received the Levite and his concubine (Jdg 19:15-18), and the Shunamite woman towards Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8-36). For a review see Arterbury (2002, 53-72).

[9] The motif of eating with deity is also described, often in unrestrained elaborate manner, in ancient Canaanite myths (cf. Jacobsen 1975, 65-97).

between them over justice and mercy towards Sodom and Gomorrah that followed (Gen 8:16-21).

Also manifest in Abraham's exhibition of his piety through the extension of hospitality to Yahweh are the contents of some of the food that he arranged to be prepared for the visitors. As Gordon Wenham has suggested, the "seahs of choice flour" used for preparing the cakes (Gen 18:6) is also what Leviticus 24:5 later stipulated to be used for making the shewbread laid on the table in the tabernacle. In this manner, Abraham's provision of food to Yahweh and the other visitors in Genesis 18 pre-empted the later provision of shewbread for Yahweh in His tabernacle. The detailed description of Abraham's hospitable behaviour must consequently be seen as highlighting the positive importance of hospitality in a God fearing person such as Abraham.

Bolin (2004, 37-56), along with Matthews (1992, 3-11) and Hobbs (2001, 3-30), has pointed out that underlying Abraham's behaviour in Genesis 18 were the ancient near eastern cultural protocols towards strangers that were derived from the primary values of reciprocity, patronage, honour, and shame. These authors stress that in that culture, hospitality to strangers tended to be part of a socio-cultural behavioural strategy aimed at acquiring honour at the expense of guests, and so hopefully mollifying threats from potential enemies and competitors. Hospitality in that and several other cultures was therefore a means to an end, and not an end in itself. The authors for that reason caution that Abraham's hospitality in Genesis 18 should not be thought of only as demonstrating his deep spirituality. In addition to this, the cultural and behavioural tactics inherent in extension of hospitality to strangers must also be considered.

This caution is worth bearing in mind. For, as I shall later emphasize, the socio-cultural aspects of hospitality in certain societies, such as in the traditional African setting, must be taken into consideration when applying our findings to contemporary Christian witness. That said, however, the religious nature of Abraham's hospitality, certainly in the manner in which Genesis 18 depicts it, must not be diminished. The way the account emphasizes the extraordinary measures Abraham took in his extension of hospitality to the visitors indicates that he was not merely "going through the motions", as expected of any person in that society, or using hospitality to seek rewards and

favours in return. On the contrary, Abraham is depicted as a deeply religious person willing to extend love and welcome to strangers, who in this case turned out to be Yahweh.

Indeed, the subsequent interpretations of the Genesis account by some authors in STJ and the NT affirm the deeply religious nature of Abraham's hospitality. In the LXX, for example, the ambiguity in the Hebrew Masoteric text is lessened and the Greek makes it clear that it was God who indeed received exceptional hospitality from Abraham (cf. Sandmel 1971, 181). In Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews (1.191-198), he takes the strangers to be angels, but nevertheless underlines Abraham's hospitable behaviour as a feature of his religious piety, rather than as a reflection of the common cultural norms and protocols.

In his De Abrahamo 107-118, Philo similarly stressed the divine nature of the visitors, as well as Abraham's hospitality as a reflection of the greater virtue he possessed, which was *theosebeia* (piety)—"The hospitable temper of the man, which was as it were a sort of addition to set off his greater virtue; but his virtue was piety towards God, concerning which we have spoken before, the most evident instance of which is to be found in his conduct now recorded towards the strangers" (De Abrahamo 114).[10] Thus Philo takes Abraham's behaviour as the surest evidence of the patriarch's piety. In addition, even though it cannot be said for certain that the statement in Hebrews 13:2 ("some have entertained angels without knowing it") had Abraham in mind, it definitely underlines the belief that entertaining strangers was a pious behaviour worthy of emulation by Christians (cf. Arterbury 2003, 375). The possibility of cultural influences in Abraham's actions should therefore not detract from the basic point that it was a behaviour primarily stemming from his piety and devotion to Yahweh.

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[10] Quotation from CD Yonge's translation of Philo's Works, accessed on 16 July 2009 from http://www.deeperstudy.com/link/22-abraham.html. Typical of his extreme allegorical interpretations of the OT, Philo proceeds to conjecture that the three divine visitors were mystical visions of God representing God's self-existence, beneficence, and sovereign powers. Other literature of the period that comment on Abraham's hospitality include Jubilees 16:1; Testament of Abraham; Targum Jonathan and the Talmud (BM 86b); and Tobit 5:6; 6:11, and 9:5.

There are other minor instances of table-serving God in the OT.[11] The cultic practice of placing the "bread of the presence" or "shewbread" on the table in the tabernacle, described as "the food of your God" (Lev 21:8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25), has already been noted (cf. Gane 1992, 179-203). Plainly, the idea of the bread as "food of God" did not mean that Yahweh needed food to sustain Him. Rather, the provision of the bread was symbolic of the covenantal presence of God among His people as their Provider. It is significant therefore that the shewbread was the only Israelite cultic object qualified by the word "presence".[12] Laying the bread on the table in the tabernacle was a way of extending "welcome" and hospitality to Yahweh, who was in constant presence among His people, and yet, at the same time, also as a "Stranger" from far above human comprehension and earthly containment.

Also in Exodus 24:9-11, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, together with Israel's seventy elders, went up to Mount Sinai at which they beheld a theophany. Exodus 24:11b then states that the leaders "beheld God, and they ate and drank". The suggestion is certainly not that God ate with the leaders. Rather, Israel's leaders ate and drank in God's presence on the mountain. In this instance, they were "let" into the presence of God, and so God in effect acted as the "host" of the fellowship meal, even though the food was most likely provided by the leaders.

Be it as it may, this passage is typical of the peace offering sacrificial system in which God "shared" in the meals that were provided by the worshipper (cf. Lev 7:11-34). At the covenantal peace offering, for example, the sacrificed animal was "shared" between Yahweh and the worshipper—the fat and kidneys of the animal were burnt as the Lord's portion, whereas the rest of the sacrifice was eaten by the worshipper and the priests (Lev 3; cf. Kiuchi 1999, 23-31; Kurtz 1980). This sacrifice therefore depicted the devotion of God's

[11] The question of Lot's reception of the angelic visitors is much more complex. It is apparent that the narrative in Genesis 19 parallels Abraham's hospitable behaviour. Yet, there are significant differences—e.g., whereas it was God who visited Abraham with two other persons, in the case of Lot, two angels visited him, none claiming divine status (cf. Loader 1990; Alexander 1985, 289-300).

[12] The shewbread is called "bread of the Presence" in Exod 25:30, 35:13, 39:36; Num 4:7; 1 Sam 21:7; 1 Kgs 7:48; and 2 Chron 4:19. Other names include "holy bread" (1 Sam 21:5) and "regular bread" (Num 4:7).

people and, specifically, the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the worshipper. It is this idea which also appears to have been behind the practice among the Qumran Essenes of regarding their common community meals as sharing a banquet with God (IQS 28a 2:11-22).

Another cultic example of the motif of table-serving God as part of covenantal relationship is the fact that the burnt offerings were regarded as "consumed" by God as a sign of His acceptance. Thus in the case of the Mount Carmel contest, for example, God showed His acceptance of Elijah's sacrifice when the "fire of the LORD fell and *consumed* the burnt-offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench" (1 Kings 18:38; emphasis added; cf. Roberts 2000, 632-644).

The theme of God "consuming" food by fire from His Presence occurs on at least one occasion in the Book of Judges. In Judges 6, the text indicates that the Visitor, described as "the angel of the Lord", was indeed God Himself, for He spoke and acted as God.[13] In Judges 6:12-25, "the angel of the Lord" visited Gideon at the winepress in a human form and was offered food as part of hospitality. Though from the point of view of the narrator, this Visitor was Yahweh (Judges 6:23), Gideon did not perceive this until after the angel "touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire sprang up from the rock and *consumed* the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the angel of the LORD vanished" (Judges 6:21, emphasis added). It may well be that a degree of Gideon's hospitable behaviour emanated from the cultural norms rather than as sign of his piety. Even so, his actions and God's acceptance of the food illustrate aspects of the motif of table-serving God in the OT. Like Abraham before him, and despite his several flaws, Gideon is portrayed positively through his hospitable behaviour.

The above review indicates that though the human host in the OT may not always be aware of the identity of the divine Visitor, extending hospitality to God is associated with people of immense faith and piety. These people do

[13] Not all interpreters regard "the angel of the Lord" who appeared in the instances recorded in Judges 6 and 13 as Yahweh. Whereas I take the angel in Judges 6 to be God, that of Judges 13 appears equivocal (see Block 1997, 353-366; Auld 1989, 257-267; White 1999, 299-305; Finestone 1938, 372-377). Be it as it may, what needs to be noted is the miraculous appearance of fire to "consume" Manoah's sacrifice.

also in turn receive special blessings from God. With this background in mind, we now examine the relationship between hospitality and discipleship to Jesus in the gospel of Mark.

3. Table Serving Jesus and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel

Mark's prologue, in which the Evangelist provides the keys for interpreting the rest of the narrative, underlines the point that Jesus is both divine and human. In the prologue, Jesus is introduced in several different ways but all in a manner to emphasize that He is indeed God incarnate. Mark himself calls Him "the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The OT Scriptures which are merged together and quoted in Mark 1:2-3 (Isa 40:3; Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1) portray Jesus as the Yahweh of Isaiah 40:3, who sent His messenger before Him and has Himself come to fulfil His promise of comfort and execute judgement on the evil forces in the world (cf. Stein 2008, 42). Also in the prologue, John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the Mightier One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:8). And the Father speaks from heaven to confirm, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Thus the prologue points unquestionably to Jesus' divinity.

Equally, the prologue of Mark underlines that Jesus, though divine, is at the same time human. Jesus, it is said, came from Nazareth (Mark 1:9) thus highlighting his human origins. He, like many others who came to John the Baptist in the wilderness, was baptized in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9). And like all other human beings, Jesus was tempted by Satan (Mark 1:13). The reader of Mark's gospel is therefore left in no doubt that what will follow is the *bios* of Jesus as God incarnate. Even though in a significant section of Mark's gospel Jesus' true identity is unrecognized, and even hidden from the human characters, the reader knows, and should bear in mind, that the Person with whom the characters interact is God in human flesh.

When the fact of Jesus' divinity and the motif of table-serving God in the preceding review are taken into consideration, table-serving Jesus in Mark's gospel should be viewed with a gravity that has hitherto not been fully accorded to it by interpreters. Specifically, for our purposes, extension of hospitality to Jesus in Mark's gospel, as we now demonstrate, is equally

associated with piety and covenantal closeness to Jesus, just as it is depicted in the OT.[14] Hospitality and discipleship are closely linked.

3.1. Hospitality and Discipleship of Peter and Andrew in Mark's Gospel

Being among the first disciples to be called in Mark's gospel (Mark 1:16), and certainly the most prominent and apparent spokesperson of the disciples, Peter's (and Andrew's) hospitality exemplify their devotion to the Lord Jesus (Best 1978, 547-558; Brady 1979, 42-57). The evidence from Mark indicates that Peter and his brother Andrew owned a house in Capernaum which for some time served as the headquarters of Jesus' ministry in that part of Galilee (Mark 1:29; 2:1; 3:19; 9:33).[15] Given the emphasis on table-service in the first account of Jesus' ministry in that house (Mark 1:31-32) and other houses, it is very likely that Jesus was table served on several occasions in Peter's (and Andrew's) house.

Moreover, it is most likely that the boat which was used by Jesus and the disciples for their missions across the Sea of Galilee was owned by these gentlemen (Mark 3:9; 4:1; 4:36; 6:45). In addition to serving as a means of transport for Jesus in His itinerant ministry, the boat also served as a platform for preaching to the large crowd on one occasion (Mark 4:1). It also served as a place for Jesus to rest (Mark 4:38) and, occasionally, to separate Himself from the encroaching hysterical crowd (Mark 6:45).

The boat also served as a place of intimate interactions between Jesus and His disciples. As noted by Timothy Woodroof (1997, 232), "In the boat there is safety from the storm, camaraderie with Christ, shared work and experiences, [and] a common direction and purpose". Considering the nature of the psychological and emotional dynamics involved in sharing the limited space of a fishing boat, especially on the often dangerous and stormy Sea of Galilee,

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[14] It has to be observed that Jesus was not always on the receiving end of table service. Like Yahweh did in the OT, on at least three occasions, Jesus was the "host" of banquets with His followers (feedings of the four [Mark 8:1-9] and five thousand [Mark 6:35-44] and the Passover meal [Mark 14:12-26]).

[15] It is difficult to see Mark 9:28 referring to Peter's house since Mark 9:33 appears to suggest that Jesus and the disciples were previously in another house. Similarly, though the "house" in Mark 3:19 is most likely Peter's, the narrative is equivocal.

the boat was one of the places where the interactions between Jesus and His disciples was at its most intense and private. Indeed, on one occasion the boat served as the venue for a very significant theophanic revelation of Jesus to the disciples as He walked on the sea (Mark 6:45-61).

In making their boat available to Jesus, Peter and Andrew, if indeed the boat was theirs, served an important function of hospitality to Jesus and their colleagues. Such sacrificial generosity and hospitality should not be underestimated, for Peter and Andrew abandoned their former employment and source of socio-economic security to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). It is clear that their discipleship and stewardship did not stop at just abandoning their jobs, but much more, putting their properties at Jesus' disposal.

3.2. The Table Service of Other Members of "the twelve" in Mark

It is likely that the other members of "the twelve" who accompanied Jesus during His ministry also extended hospitality and table service to Him.[16] One instance of this was during the preparations for the Passover. Mark describes how Jesus sent two of His disciples to the venue for the celebration of the Passover with specific instructions to prepare the Passover meal (Mark 14:13-16). Their obedience flowing from their discipleship to Jesus is further stated—"the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and *they prepared the Passover meal*" (Mark 14:16, emphasis added). The importance of this aspect of discipleship exhibited through obedience and table service should be noted. As we shall shortly discuss, Jesus certainly attached great emotional value to the celebration of this particular Passover festival with His intimate disciples, for it was the occasion at which He revealed the essence of His death to them. The table service of these two unnamed disciples facilitated this important occasion in Jesus' ministry.

3.3. The Table Service and Discipleship of Peter's Mother-in-Law

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:30-31) served as the beginning of not only a very successful ministry of Jesus in Peter's house but also of her

[16] Since Levi is not explicitly named as one of the twelve in Mark, his hospitality is treated separately below.

own table service of Jesus. Robert Stein, along with a number of other commentators, has argued that Mark's statement about the woman's *diakoneō* immediately after the healing (Mark 1:31) must not be interpreted as an example of discipleship, but rather as proving that her healing was instantaneous (2008, 94; cf. Lane 1974, 78; France 2002, 108).

Yet, such a proposed dichotomy between "discipleship" and "table service" is rather drastic and unwarranted, given the manner in which service and servant-hood are portrayed as important traits of discipleship in the same gospel (e.g. Mark 9:33-37; 10:43-45). At the least, her service is depicted to be a result or response to her healing, in which case it is not as inconsequential as it is assumed by such a dichotomy. It is important to note that her *diakoneō* contributed to Jesus' successful ministry in the house, so much so that "the whole city was gathered around the door" (Mark 1:32). This happened, not only because Peter extended hospitality to Jesus, but also because his mother-in-law table-served Jesus.

It is therefore also significant that the same Greek word *diakoneō* is used for the table service of Peter's mother-in-law and that of the angels in Mark 1:13. In other words, the practical table service of the angels in the wilderness was repeated by Peter's mother-in-law. Indeed, elsewhere in Mark's gospel, other parallels are made between the angels and the disciples of Jesus. In Mark 12:25, for example, Jesus notes that in the eschatological age His followers will be "like the angels in heaven", since they would not marry. Similarly, in Mark 13:27 the angels are depicted as eschatological harvesters of the elect at the end of the age, paralleling the stated functions of the disciples also as eschatological harvesters or "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17; cf. Marcus 2000, 184; Lane 1974, 67).

Moreover, in Mark 8:38 Jesus cautions that disciples who are ashamed of him in this world will receive a similar negative treatment when He returns with His "holy" angels. In so doing, Jesus contrasts the "holy" angels with the failed disciple. Given these parallels between the angels and disciples in Mark's gospel, the use of *diakoneō* to describe Peter' mother-in-law's discipleship is significant indeed, and should not be diminished. The importance that Mark attached to the *diakoneō* of the angels in the wilderness is hereby indicated.

3.4. The Table Service and Discipleship of Levi (Mark 2:14-17)

The call of Levi[17] to become one of Jesus' disciples in Mark 2:14 is immediately followed by a banquet for Jesus in his[18] house. The original reasons for the banquet are not stated, and it is possible that Levi was celebrating his new-found faith in Jesus. Much more likely, however, is that the occasion served as an opportunity for evangelism and teaching. Present at the banquet were many "tax collectors and sinners", that is, the religious outcasts of the contemporary Jewish system (Hooker 1991, 96; Donahue and Harrington 2002, 102). Thus Levi's hospitality was extended to Jesus and others, many of whom, Mark tells us, were Jesus' followers (Mark 2:15).

The banquet was also a very important occasion for Jesus to clarify His mission to His disciples and detractors (the Pharisees and the scribes) alike. It was at this banquet that Jesus explained, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mark 2:15). In eating with the religious outcasts of His day, Jesus underlined the openness of the gospel to any person who would repent and believe. Levi's hospitality and table service as an expression of his discipleship therefore served as the platform from which Jesus' mission was facilitated.

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[17] Though he had been previously called in a manner similar to the first four disciples, Levi's name is absent from Mark's list of the twelve in Mark 3:16-19. Most commentators agree with church tradition and the other synoptics that Matthew (Mark 3:18) and Levi referred to the same person. Despite a few dissenting voices (e.g., Meier 1997, 638; Malbon 1986, 104-130), there is no evidence that this could not have been the case.

[18] The Greek of Mark 2:15b is ambiguous and could either mean that Levi hosted the banquet for his friends and Jesus' entourage (so Malbon 1985, 282-292) or Jesus hosted it for Levi and his friends (so May 1993, 147-149). The former is the more likely scenario given that most of those present were "tax collectors and sinners", i.e., people associated with Levi. In addition, that Jesus is said to have *katakeisthai* (reclined Mark 2:1) instead of the usual "sat" suggests a relatively well to do environment and so more likely to have been Levi's house rather than Jesus'. Note also that Luke takes it that the banquet was in Levi's "own house" (Luke 5:29).

3.5. The Table Service and Discipleship of Simon the Leper (Mark 14:3)

Even though not a lot is known about Simon the Leper of Bethany,[19] who hosted a banquet for Jesus (Mark 14:3), his characterization as "the leper" is important for our purposes. Lepers were isolated from the society and would certainly not have been able to host a banquet at which Jesus "reclines" (Mark 14:3). This strongly indicates that Simon had previously been healed by Jesus (cf. Stein 2008, 633). In table-serving Jesus, Simon was expressing not only his gratitude, but also his discipleship. And it was at this banquet that a most extraordinary act of devotion and prophetic anointing occurred. The anointing of Jesus by the woman prepared Jesus' body for His imminent salvific death (France 2002, 550; Stein 2008, 635; Hooker 1991, 329; Gundry 1993, 813). Her relationship to Simon the leper is unknown, but it certainly was his hospitality that provided the setting for such a profound act of love, devotion, and prophetic belief and action.

3.6. The Hospitality and Discipleship of the Owner of the Upper Room

The owner of the house in which Jesus hosted the Passover meal extended hospitality to Jesus at a deep level of submission, obedience, and stewardship (Mark 14:12-16). The passage suggests that Jesus had previously arranged the venue for His special meal with the disciples. Certainly, in describing Himself as "the Teacher" (14:14), Jesus indicates a prior Teacher-pupil relationship with this owner.

Furthermore, the confidence with which Jesus makes his request for the room demonstrates His prerogative as the divine Owner of all things, for Jesus sends the assertive message—"Where is *my* guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" (Mark 14:14; emphasis added). It also underlines how this owner's discipleship to Jesus was expressed in His extension of hospitality, since Jesus could lay claim to the guest room as His

[19] There is an apparent discrepancy between Mark's account and John's in John 12 regarding who the host was, the discussion of which need not detain us. That Lazarus is said to recline at the table in John 12:2, could suggest that he was a guest; perhaps so regular a guest in that house that it could be described more or less as his "home" (John 12:1). On the other hand, it is possible that Simon the Leper and Lazarus were related, in which case, the home could have belonged to both of them.

own, simply because this anonymous owner had submitted himself and his property to "the Teacher". And this spirit of submissive discipleship is also demonstrated by the owner's obedience. True to Jesus predictions that this owner would show the messenger disciples "a large room upstairs, furnished and ready" (14:15), Mark says, the messengers "found everything" just as Jesus had predicted. In the anonymous owner's actions, therefore, stewardship, obedience, hospitality, and discipleship intermingled to facilitate Jesus' mission.

3.7. The Table Service of the Named Women of Mark 15-16

The critical eyewitness roles of the named women in Mark 15:40 and Mark 16:1—Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome—who were at the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, certainly qualify them to be regarded as amongst the most important disciples of Jesus. The very fact that Mark names them suggests that they were prominent and well-known members of the primitive church. He was therefore identifying them as eyewitnesses whose testimonies could possibly be called upon to corroborate his account, for it was these women alone who together "see Jesus die, they see His body being laid in the tomb, [and] they find the tomb empty" (Bauckham 2006, 48). No other groups of Jesus' followers were entrusted with such a combination of all three profound eyewitness experiences. In addition, they were the first people in Mark's gospel to be entrusted with the post-resurrection apostolic commission—"go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee" (Mark 16:7). Their critical role in early Christianity cannot therefore be overestimated.

Yet, it must never be forgotten that this pivotal role of the women started because, as Mark puts it, these women "used to follow Jesus and *diēkonoun autō* (waited upon Him)" when he was in Galilee (Mark 15:41). Thus the women initially expressed their discipleship to Jesus by extending Him table service. This serving of Jesus became the platform for further growth and eventually of their unique roles as eyewitnesses of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Like the angels of Mark 1:13, and Peter's mother-in-law, the named women of Mark 15-16 also served great functions of facilitating Jesus' mission through practical table service.

3.8. Hospitality, Humility and Discipleship (Mark 9:37)

One of the strongest indications that hospitality is closely linked to discipleship in Mark's gospel is given by Jesus in Mark 9:37. In the context of correcting His disciples, who were jostling among themselves for positions of honour, Jesus sets a child in their midst and declares, "whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me". This saying is in itself uncontroversial, given that "the child" to whom hospitality is extended is welcomed as an agent of Jesus. In line with the Jewish Halakhic principle of the *shaliach*, which states that "a man's agent is like the man himself" (Berakoth 5:5), extending hospitality to Jesus' agent amounted to extending hospitality to Jesus Himself, and hence to Yahweh.

What is more striking about this statement, however, is Jesus' use of the notion of extending hospitality to a child as a sign of humility of the disciple who is receiving the child. In this context, the "child" represented the unrecognized and unwelcomed intruder whom Jesus now enjoins His disciples to welcome. It takes humility on the part of the disciple to do so. As Robert Stein (2008, 444) points out, "unlike the present day idealization of children, the first century was not a child-oriented time … [U]nable to keep the law, little children were seen in Judaism at best as 'weak' and not yet 'people of the covenant'". To welcome the child in the ancient world was therefore to welcome the unwelcome "intruder" and the undesirable visitor. The disciple of Jesus displays his humility in extending hospitality exactly to those whom he would otherwise not have welcomed. In doing so, he is extending hospitality to Jesus and His Father, Yahweh.

3.9. Summary: Hospitality and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel

The above findings suggest a consistent relationship between discipleship to Jesus and its expression through extending hospitality to Him. Each of the characters discussed are portrayed in a positive manner in their devotion and relationship to Jesus. In addition, in each case their table service is shown to have facilitated Jesus' mission. Since the disciples shared in the mission of Jesus to inaugurate and spread God's kingdom (Mark 1:16-20), the key role played by their hospitality in fulfilling this function needs some emphasis.

It might be countered that the act of extending hospitality to Jesus by several of His followers need not be seen in as significant religious light as is being proposed. For example, it could be argued that, being a human being, Jesus should be expected to eat, drink, and have company; therefore, the above instances should not be seen as necessarily expressing profound religious devotion or piety by His friends. In addition, it could be disputed that since hospitality was an expected socio-cultural behaviour in the society in which Jesus ministered, the above interpretation may be making too much of the apparent link between it and discipleship. Furthermore, it could also be argued that in stating that He came to this world to serve and "not to be served" (Mark 10:45), Jesus in effect diminished the relevance of service towards him.

These objections do not, however, stand up to further scrutiny. Firstly, Mark expected His readers to see Jesus as much more than a human being. Certainly, his prologue, as has been pointed out, directs the reader to see Jesus as indeed the Son of God and God incarnate, and many "characters" in the subsequent account confirm this (Mark 1:1; 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61; 15:59). Hence, the least that Mark's interpreters ought to do when evaluating these table-service incidents is to do so in the light of the motif of "table-serving God" in the OT. If this fact alone is taken into consideration, the table service of the disciples in Mark has parallels with that of Abraham. Furthermore, given the table service of the angels in Mark 1:13, the subsequent relationship between hospitality and discipleship in Mark should together be regarded as an important motif in the gospel.

Secondly, the blanket characterization of hospitality in ancient near eastern and Mediterranean societies as an intrinsic expression of a socio-cultural exchange phenomenon sometimes inadvertently overemphasizes the element of reciprocity. The fact that Jewish and Greco-Roman texts frequently exhorted their readers to be hospitable, and that hospitable characters in both OT and NT are portrayed positively, indicates that the culture appreciated hospitality as a virtue that needed to be pursued for its own sake by the religious faithful (cf. Arterbury 2005). Certainly, not all hospitable behaviour in those cultures was a tactical act designed and employed to achieve some other ends. In the case of the above followers of Jesus, their hospitality emanated from their devotion and piety towards Jesus, and not because they pre-calculated the gains that may be received from His patronage.

Thirdly, Mark 10:45 should be interpreted in its immediate context. The service to which Jesus referred was specific menial tasks, which servants rendered to their masters. In that case, Jesus' purpose for coming, the verse says, was not to "lord" His Lordship over His followers but to be the suffering servant who lays down His life as a ransom for many. The very fact that Jesus was actually served by others in the gospel therefore indicates that Mark 10:45 is making a specific point about the purpose of His coming, and hence the nature of His death, and not table service *per se*.[20] The thesis that there is an inexorable link between hospitality and discipleship in Mark's gospel is, therefore, upheld and hereby commended for contemporary Christian reflections.

4. Hospitality and Discipleship: Implications and Application

What are the implications of this finding to contemporary Christian theology and practice? In terms of the theology of discipleship in Mark's gospel, the above findings add to the accumulating evidence that Christology and discipleship in Mark's gospel is complex and multifaceted (cf. Henderson 2006). It is perhaps right that the link between discipleship and the cross of Jesus is well known and emphasized by interpreters. However, the present study has underscored another dimension of the many-sided nature of discipleship to Jesus, this time through hospitality. That the angels pre-empted this table-serving dimension of discipleship in Mark 1:13, albeit in the wilderness, heightens its significance in the rest of the gospel.

Contemporary Christian practice must therefore take this relationship between hospitality and discipleship seriously. For example, current vigorous debates on the appropriate treatment of the homeless, foreigners, and people of different races and religions in the United States, France, Italy, and United Kingdom have, until recently, proceeded without significant contributions from sections of Evangelical communities of those countries.[21] Indeed, there has been the unfortunate perception that when they have joined such debates,

[20] It will be worth investigating how the footwashing incident of John 13 in which Jesus links His salvific death to humble service sheds light on Mark 10:45.

[21] I (the author) am a black African immigrant in a developed country. Hence, this observation is possibly biased, and hopefully wrong.

many Evangelicals have been on the "wrong side" of the argument (cf. Emerson and Smith 2001; Rodríguez 2008, 76-92; Scaperlanda 2008, 14-16; Escobar and Others 2007, 96).

It is true that these debates are much more complex and certainly not exactly the same as hospitality to Jesus in Mark's gospel. However, there are significant crossovers, and contemporary reflections on Christian ethics ought to be nurtured by such strong indications in both the Old and New Testaments of a link between piety and hospitality. Indeed, it is evident from the gospels that the claim to be a disciple of Jesus on the one hand and indifference to the question of hospitable behaviour on the other hand are incompatible. In this regard, it is instructive that a model of evangelism based on banquets and table service (i.e., the Alpha Course) appears to have been one of the successful methods of evangelism in the United Kingdom in recent years. The above demonstration of the relationship between hospitality and discipleship in Mark seems to support this method. The remaining challenge is to extend this biblical understanding further to address Christian behaviour and attitudes towards "strangers".

With regard to contemporary Christian practice in traditional African societies,[22] it is perhaps not surprising that quite a few authors have drawn attention to several similarities between African notions of hospitality and ancient near and middle Eastern cultures (e.g. Mnyaka and Motlhabi 2005, 215-237; Gathogo 2008, 39-53; Echema 1995, 35; Olikenyi 2001; Tutu 1989, 69; Gathogo 2006, 32-36; Moila 2002, 3-5). Some of these authors have also pointed out that one of the negative effects of colonization has been the loss of the traditional ethos of hospitality within some African cultures (e.g. Gathago 2006, 36; Tutu 1989, 69).

To the extent that this may be a helpful reminder of the dynamics of the untoward effects of acculturation, enculturation, and colonization, and their interfaces with biblical belief and practice, this factor must be taken into

[22] I do not have expertise in international comparative anthropology and socio-cultural trends. Yet, it is likely that this application may well be relevant to other developing countries which frequently share similar traditional notions of honour, shame, and reciprocity as found in African traditional settings.

consideration in applying the above findings. Given the current confidence of conservative Christianity in Africa, there is mileage in examining how African traditional notions of hospitality may inform and enhance the way Christian discipleship is exhibited on the continent. For example, ethnic hatred and inhospitable attitude to people of other tribes, sometimes involving "Christians", are contrary to Christian discipleship and certainly do not honour Jesus as Lord. If it is true that the traditional African is innately hospitable, then perhaps it is time to press these notions of hospitable behaviour into Christian consciousness on the continent.

On the other hand, if these exhortations were heeded, the manner in which traditional African hospitality is practiced by Christians of the continent must be carefully nuanced. The notion of using hospitality and table-service as a socio-cultural strategy of exchange, and as a means of getting some benefits in return, is far from the nature of selfless sacrifice and discipleship that Jesus demands of His disciples.

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What did you go out to see? A demon crazed ascetic? Light on Matthew 11:7b from an Aramaic Reconstruction[1]

Charles R. Day[2]

In Matthew 11:7, Jesus asks the crowd a question concerning John the Baptist: what did you go out into the wilderness to see; a reed shaken by the wind? There is a depth to this question which has remained unexplored. Far from being a poetic image meant to convey something prosaic, this question probably alludes to an actual term of contempt used by the enemies of John. A proposed Aramaic reconstruction reveals not only the pun behind this, but may also allows exegetes a greater glimpse at the way Jesus uses this image to force the crowd to acknowledge him as Messiah.

The story starts in Matthew 11:1-6, when the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus with a question from their master, who was at that time in prison. They ask on his behalf: *are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?* Jesus sends them back to John suggesting that the signs and wonders performed provided the self-evident answer. It isn't that these displays of miraculous power in themselves proved anything. Jesus is claiming that his ministry is the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. The list Jesus gives is an allusion to a conflated version of Isaiah 61:1-2, which seems to have encapsulated the messianic expectations of the time.

[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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Matthew 11:5-6	Allusion in Isaiah
the blind receive sight,	29:18; 35:5; 42:7, 18; 61:1 (cf., Luke 4:18)
the lame walk,	35:6;
the lepers are cleansed,	
the deaf hear,	29:18; 42:18
the dead are raised,	26:19
and the poor are evangelized	61:1

A similar example amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls can be seen in 4Q521, entitled by its editor, *Une Apocalypse Messianique* [A Messianic Apocalypse] (Puech 1992:475). It is a vision of the messianic future. Consider the list of things the Messiah will do itemized in the following lines from fragment one, column two:

> 8. *מתיר אסורים פוקח עורים זוק כפופים* [*Setting free the prisoners, opening (the eyes of the) blind, raising up the downtrodden*]
>
> 12. *או ירפא חללים ומתים יחיה ענוים יבשר* [*Then he will heal the sick and the dead he will cause to live (and to the) poor he will announce the good news*]
>
> (Eisenman and Wise 1992:21, translation mine)

The similarities between Matthew 11:5-6 and the lines from 4Q521 above are striking:

Mt 11:5-6	4Q521
	setting free the prisoners
the blind receive sight,	*opening (the eyes of the) blind*
	raising up the downtrodden
the lame walk,	*he will heal the sick*
the lepers are cleansed,	
the deaf hear,	
the dead are raised,	*the dead he will cause to live*
the poor evangelized	*the poor he will evangelize*

In Matthew 11:5, Jesus specifies various things that are healed, where 4Q521 merely says *he will heal the sick* (though opening the eyes of the blind is mentioned in line eight). Both mention the dead being raised and then follow-up with a reference to the poor having the good news preached to them. The likelihood that this is merely coincidence is slim. Rather, both point to a common conflation of messianic prophecies known and accepted by the people of that day to Isaiah 61:1

Jesus' mention of the lepers being cleansed seems, at first glance, to have no allusional counterpart in Isaiah 61. First of all, the cleansing of lepers should not be seen as a case of healing *per se*. In the New Testament lepers are never healed, rather, they are cleansed. The cleansing of lepers is not mentioned as one of the things the Messiah will do in 4Q521 but it does mention the release of those who are bound in accordance with Isaiah 61:1.

There were several figurative expressions for lepers found in ancient Jewish literature (e.g., פָּרוּעַ [*destroyed*], חִוָּר [*white*], סְגִיר [*locked up*]). It is this last word which is of special interest. Strictly speaking the word סְגִיר was used to refer to those who were locked up, awaiting a priestly ruling as to whether or not they would be declared a leper (in accordance with Leviticus 13:44). The fact that in almost every case such persons were indeed declared leprous allowed this term to be used for lepers in general (e.g., Targ O Num 12:10; Targ Y Ex 4.6; for further references see Jastrow [1903] 1992:955). Thus, perhaps the inclusion of lepers being cleansed is not merely to accentuate the fact that miracles were taking place but that those who are bound have been released (in accordance with Isaiah 61:1).

Having sent John's disciples on their way, Jesus then takes the time to talk to the crowd about John. He asks (Mt 11:7b): *What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?* (NIV). Why would Jesus ask if the people had gone out to see a *reed shaken by the wind?* Our instinctive understanding of this rhetorical question is to expect a negative answer and we pass on without thinking about why Jesus would have used this image. We imagine Jesus is merely saying: *You didn't go out to see something ordinary and inconsequential, did you?* Yet, by reconstructing this verse into Aramaic one discovers that the true meaning of Jesus' question has not been clearly understood.

Greek: τί ἐξήλθατε εἰς τὴν ἔρημον θεάσασθαι; κάλαμον ὑπὸ ἀνέμου σαλευόμενον;

Reconstruction: מָא נַפָּקְתּוּן חֲמָהּוּן לְמַדְבְּרָא קוּלְמוֹס דְּבְרוּחָא מִזְדַּעְזַע

The idioms *go and see, go and hear* as well as *come and see* are used in both Hebrew and Aramaic (*Erub* 14[b], *Yoma* 86[b]; *yDem* VI, 25[b]) to mean *verify* or *prove something*. Thus, Jesus' admonition to John's disciples to *go tell John what you hear and see* mean *verify to John what is going on.* By the same token, the use of the terms *go out* and *see* in verse seven suggest that those who went out to the desert to see John were on a fact finding mission not a curiosity excursion. Thus, the question may be paraphrased as, *what did you prove out in the wilderness?* The intention of Jesus is to reinforce that they themselves have established the truth of just who John was—a prophet of God. This was not just to say something nice about John but to provide the foundation for a reminder that John had prophetically identified Jesus as the Messiah (Jn 1:29-34).

This indirect way of teaching was typical of Jesus. He preferred to bring people to their own conclusions. For this reason he used parables in his teaching, ending them with a question which would lead the one answering to give a judgment which could be applied to their own situation. He often answered a question with a question, the answer to which would then lead to the obvious answer for the original question. Compare, for example, the question Jesus asks in Matthew 11:7 with the one he posed to the chief priests and elders in the Temple, in Matthew 21:24. The point in each instance is to bring out a judgment from the ones questioned that John was a true prophet of God. For Jesus it was quite simple. If John is a true prophet and his prophecies come from God, then what he said and confirmed about Jesus must also be accepted. Rather than say that directly Jesus asks the questions:

11:7 *What did you go out into the wilderness to see, a reed shaken by the wind?*

21:24 *Where was John's baptism from, from heaven or from men?*

In Matthew 21:24 the question puts the religious leaders in a difficult position. They realize that if they answer, *from heaven,* they will be forced to acknowledge that what John said prophetically about Jesus was true.

With this in mind, it must be understood that the comparison of John to *a reed shaken by the wind* is no idle analogy. Jesus is purposefully guiding the crowd to ultimately establish for themselves that he is the Messiah. A reconstruction shows, not only that these words involve a clever pun, but that Jesus seems to be making a reference to a saying likely used by those who wished to dismiss John and his message.

John describes himself, in accordance with Isaiah 40:3, as *the voice of one crying in the wilderness.* This is one of the few things upon which all four Gospels agree (Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23). These words (an allusion to Is. 40:3) appears in the Hebrew text as: קוֹל קוֹרֵא בַּמִּדְבָּר.

Because John was identified so strongly with *the voice of one crying in the wilderness,* Jesus' question, *what did you go into the* ***wilderness*** *to see?* would cause those hearing to immediately think of this 'title'. The pun comes from the assonance between the self-designation of John as a קוֹל [*voice*] and a קוֹלמוֹס [*reed*] [The bi-lingual (even tri-lingual) nature of the language situation in first-century Palestine made using Greek loan words quite common. קוֹלמוֹס, though most often used as a word for *pen*, nevertheless retained its original meaning as *reed* in both the Hebrew and Aramaic of the period.]

The use of the image of a *reed* was employed for other reasons as well. Ephrem, in his commentary on the Diatessaron, indicates that *reed* in this passage is used as a metaphor because it is hollow. He emphasizes that the crowd knew John was not some sort of *hollow reed* (Leloir 1990:128). The hollowness of reeds is a feature unremarked upon in modern commentaries on this verse. Yet, Ephrem may be correct in drawing attention to it. Something hollow is something empty. A hollow person is a hungry person. [An analogy (if one were needed) can be seen in the way the Hebrew word נָבוּב (literally meaning *hollow*), found in Job 11:12 is homiletically interpreted as *hungry* in *Baba Bathra* 12[b].] John's ascetic lifestyle of self-deprivation and fasting probably left him thin and gaunt, thus making it easy to caricature him as a kind of *hollow reed.*

It is also not immaterial to this discussion that reeds grow beside rivers. John's preaching and proclaiming himself to be *a voice crying in the wilderness,* out

by the river Jordan, may have been parodied as the shrill sound made by hollow reeds by the side of a river when the wind blows on them.

The Hebrew word for *wind*, רוּחַ, can also mean *spirit* as well as *demon.* This same is true of Aramaic רוּחָא. The later comment by Jesus, that there were those who said that John had a demon, may be a play on the word רוּחָא/רוּחַ.

The use of מְזַדַּעְזַע (suggested by both the Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Harclean versions) gives another clue that the reference to *a reed shaken by the wind* may be a pun related to the accusation that John was demon possessed. The verb זוּעַ means not only *shake* but *be frightened* as well. The related word מְזַיְּעֵי (*Pa'el* participle), meaning *frightening demons*, is used in Targum *Yerushalmi* at Numbers 6:24:

> *יברכינך ה׳ בכל עיסקך ויטרנך מן לילי מזייעי ובני טיהרי ובני צפרירי ומזיקין ושלני* (Ginsburger 1903:237).
>
> *May the LORD bless you in all your affairs and guard you from night demons (i.e., Lilliths) frightening demons and sons of midday-demons, and the sons of morning demons and destroying demons and mischievous night demons.*

Another related word, תְּזָוִית, means *shaking* and is frequently used in rabbinic writings in connection with a demon as a figure of speech for *madness* (Jastrow [1903] 1992:1660). The fact that *shaking* is routinely used to describe behavior caused by demons may suggest that the depiction of John as a *reed shaken by the wind* is a reference to the way that John's detractors would mock him as some sort of mad-man ranting under the inspiration of demons.

Jesus says as much when he states that there were some who considered John's fasting to indicate that he was demon possessed. That John was a prophet was not contested by the religious leaders (21:26). So, who would possibly have derided John in this way? It is possible that John had the same enemies as Jesus, but it seems unlikely. At the very least, though the Pharisees and Sadducees had issues with John (Lk 7:30) they would have been afraid to voice them publicly. The second question Jesus asks the crowd may point the way to the answer.

11:8 *But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? Behold, those who wear fine clothes are in king's houses.*

John's direct preaching style certainly brought him into conflict with various groups, but it was Herod and Herodias who felt most threatened by his preaching. Though they also feared the people to some degree (Mt 14:5; cf., Mk 6:20), they were still able to openly confront John. Jesus' parenthetical statement that those who wear fine clothing live in king's houses may be a veiled reference to Herod, who ironically gave such a garment to Jesus (Lk 23:11). Jesus contrasts John, not with a generic picture of kings living in luxury, but with John's arch enemy and his courtiers. Perhaps the contrast is meant to include the difference between King Herod's house in which he lived, and his prison, in which he held John a prisoner.

By making a reference to John's clothing Jesus also drew attention to what John actually wore. Matthew 3:4 mentions that John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. This was exactly what the prophet Elijah also wore (2Ki 1:8). The coincidence was probably intentional. Elijah was expected to come in the end times (Mal 4:5). Even before John was born it was prophesied of him that he would minister *in the spirit and power of Elijah* (Lk 1:17). John understood his role as the forerunner of the Messiah and the prophetic voice preparing for the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 3:2-3). Jesus' proclamation that John should be identified with Elijah (Mt 11:14) would not have seemed surprising, but would be taken as confirmation of what people had already decided based upon what they had seen and heard. [John's denial of being Elijah (Jn 1:21) should not be construed as a contradiction to Jesus' statement that *he is Elijah who was expected to come* (Mt 11:14). The thing which John denies is being Elijah risen from the dead. Moses' prophecy (Dt 18:15) that another prophet would be *raised up* after him was interpreted by some, in the first century, to mean that the Messiah would be a prophet resurrected from the dead. Thus, when Jesus asks (Mt 16:13; Mk 8:27; Lk 9:18), *who do men say that I am?* The disciples answer with the names of dead people: Elijah, Jeremiah, and even John the Baptist. The double meaning of *raise up* became a special preaching point for the early Church (Acts 3:22-26).] The statement, *he who has ears to hear, let him hear,* is, once

again, a deliberate hint that the people themselves are witnesses of Jesus' identity. For, if they accept that John is Elijah—then the one John said he was the forerunner of must also be acknowledged as the Messiah.

It is a good bet that Herod Antipas is the source of the mocking reference to John as *a reed shaken by the wind*. If anyone were to use John's characteristic emphasis on fasting as a basis for the accusation, δαιμόνιον ἔχει [*he has a demon*], it would be Herod. Though the Pharisees did not receive John's ministry (Lk 7:30), fasting would not have been a problem to them. In Matthew 9:14-15, Jesus is asked why his disciples do not fast as do the Pharisees and the disciples of John. Jesus' answer to this question (by giving a question in return) is instructive: *How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is still with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast* (NIV). Though the Sermon on the Mount presupposes that fasting would be part of the lifestyle of believers (Mt 6:16-18), fasting was not a part of the lifestyle of Jesus and his disciples during his earthly ministry. Jesus' emphasis on the arrival of the kingdom was demonstrated by a lack of fasting and in celebration dinners which were symbolic of the messianic banquet to come (Jeremias 1971:116). That this went against religious sensibilities of the time is illustrated by the accusation against Jesus for his eating and drinking (Mt 11:19): *behold a glutton and a drunkard (who is also) a friend of tax collectors and sinners*.

Jesus closes the subject with the words *wisdom is justified by her children*. These words, from Matthew 11:19, really mean that wise people (the sons of wisdom) declare what is really wise or not. The wise will declare that the criticism given against John is just as foolish as that spoken against Jesus. At the same time, those who would consider John to be a true prophet must also declare Jesus to be the Messiah.

The point of this article is to show how our superficial reading of this passage keeps us from seeing how well Jesus makes his point. *What did you prove John to be: a demon crazed reed* [*kolmos*] *or was he an anointed voice* [*kol*]*?* Admitting that John was a true prophetic voice forces the crowd to a dramatic conclusion. As the implication of John's prophetic calling dawns on them, smiles break out among the people as they see that they can no longer sit on the fence. By appreciating the underlying puns and allusions of this passage

we are able to smile along with those in that crowd and acknowledge that Jesus has forced them, whether they like it or not, to be witnesses to his Messiahship.

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Divine Wisdom versus Human Wisdom: An Exegetical-Theological Analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:16

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Abstract[2]

This journal article undertakes an exegetical-theological analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:16 in order to distinguish between divine wisdom and human wisdom. It is maintained that human wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic in orientation. In contrast, divine wisdom is Bible-based, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led. It seeks to glorify the Lord, not oneself, by focusing on the eternal sagacity of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Furthermore, human wisdom uses empty rhetoric and deceptive arguments to snare its victims. Conversely, divine wisdom heralds the truth of redemption in plain language so that the cross is not emptied of its power to save. Religionists and sophists consider the teaching about Jesus' death and resurrection to be utter nonsense; yet God uses the message of the cross to annihilate the erudition of the worldly wise and thwart the understanding of those who imagine themselves to be clever. Regardless of whether they are young or old, rich or poor, powerful or weak, famous or unknown, everyone must trust in Christ for salvation. Moreover, they must rely on the Holy Spirit for insight and understanding into the will of the Father.

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

1. Introduction

Christians who are aware of today's panoply of religions know that teachers with ostensibly new spiritual insights combine ideas that sound reasonable with a smattering of Bible verses. Then, when skilled speakers proclaim these falsehoods through the modern electronic and print media, their ideas can come across sounding fresh and exciting. In point of fact, though, these alleged "truths" are not original, but actually echo ancient lies. Even more tragic is the tendency for a gifted speaker with questionable motives and dubious biblical views to win a following and gradually substitute his or her own authority for that of Scripture. That is how most religious cults gain a toehold in society.

Believers need to evaluate the teaching they hear, making certain that it is grounded in Scripture and honors the Savior; yet it is not enough to simply disregard fraudulent teachers. After all, Christians do not grow spiritually by merely turning a deaf ear to heretical teaching. They also need sound instruction to learn how to be faithful to God, how to be more Christlike, and how to better serve the Lord. Biblically-grounded and astute teachers will help Jesus' followers comprehend the true wisdom of God and reject pagan substitutes. The following exegetical-theological analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:16 emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between divine wisdom and human wisdom.

2. The Historical Backdrop of the Corinthian Congregation

The first-century A.D. church at Corinth was still young when problems like divisions, immorality, immaturity, and instability began to emerge (cf. Brown 1996:427-428). To address these issues, Paul, who had founded the church less than five years earlier while on his second missionary journey (A.D. 50–52; cf. Acts 15:40–18:23),[3] wrote a letter to believers instructing them to live godly lives. The most likely date, then, for 1 Corinthians is A.D. 55, when the apostle was near the end of his three-year ministry at Ephesus and at the midpoint of his third missionary journey (A.D. 53–57; cf. Acts 18:23–21:17;

[3] The dates used in this essay for Paul's life are based on the timeline appearing in the *Zondervan TNIV Study Bible* (2006:1854-1855).

Betz 1992:5:188-189, 191-192; Betz and Mitchell 1992:1:1141; Bruce 1986:3:699, 703; Bruce 1993:684-686; Prat 2008; Purdy 1962:3:685-686).

New Testament Corinth was located on a narrow isthmus of land in southern Greece about 45 miles (or 73 kilometers) from Athens, in the Roman province of Achaia. The lower portion of Greece is connected to the rest of the country by this four-mile-wide isthmus, so all traffic between the two areas of the country passed by Corinth. The isthmus was bounded on the east by the Saronic Gulf and on the west by the Gulf of Corinth. Sea captains could literally have their ships rolled across the isthmus on a stone tramway and avoid a 250 mile trip around southern Greece. As a result, the city prospered as a major trade center, not only for most of Greece but also for much of the Mediterranean area, including North Africa, Italy, and Asia Minor. Nearby Isthmia hosted the Isthmian games, one of two major athletic events of the day (the other being the Olympic games). This created more people-traffic through the city and thus increased the potential for business and prosperity (cf. Finegan 1962:1:682-684; Furnish 2003:1-2; Madvig 1979:1:772-774; Morris 1979:1:775; Murphy-O’Connor 1992:1:1134-1139; Robertson 2001:62-63).

As a commercial city with a constant influx of visitors from nations around the known world, Corinth also became infamous as a center for immorality. Greek philosophy was discussed and wisdom was emphasized, but such considerations in no way bridled the debauchery practiced in the Corinth. In some respects city’s religious composition helped create this atmosphere of depravity. Though the Jews had established a synagogue near the city’s forum, at least 12 temples to various pagan deities existed in Corinth and overshadowed the city’s Jewish influence. One of the most famous of these shrines was the Temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love), where at one time more than a thousand priestess-prostitutes served the shrine’s patrons (cf. Brown 1997:511-513; Carson, Moo, and Morris 1992:263-264; DeSilva 2004:555-560; Gilmour 1962:1:685; Guthrie 1990:432-433).

It was into this setting that Paul brought the gospel while on his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:1-18). Before leaving the city to continue his trip, Paul established a church made up of a growing number of Christian converts, including both Jews and Gentiles, higher classes and lower classes, free persons and slaves. Upon the apostle’s departure, the philosophical,

sexual, and religious temptations of Corinth took their toll on many of the new believers, and after a while, began to diminish the unity of the congregation. When Paul got word of the divisiveness and immoral practices arising among the believers, he penned a letter to them in the hope of correcting the problems they were experiencing (Bock 2007:575-583; Fisher 1975:10-11; Hodge 1969:vii-ix; Johnson 2004:20; Lenski 1961:13-14; Reese 2000:638-651; Tannehill 1994:221-229; Walaskay 1998:168-172).

3. The Presence of Divisions at Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-17)

Though the believers at Corinth were abundantly gifted (1 Cor 1:7), major shortcomings existed within their congregation. Perhaps the chief issue plaguing the church was the people's schisms and sharp disagreements (v. 10; cf. Marshall 2004:253; Thielman 2005:279). In non-biblical writings, the Greek word translated "divisions"[4] was used to refer to a tear in a garment, the breaking of bones, the separation of joints, and the eruption of factions among political groups struggling for power (cf. Danker 2000:981; Harris 1971:3:543-544; Louw and Nida 1989:1:226, 494; Maurer 1971:7:963-964; Welborn 1987:86). While Paul had the apostolic authority to give commands to the Corinthians, he instead appealed to them as fellow believers in Christ. The apostle urged them, as those living under Jesus' lordship, to stop arguing among themselves about minor, peripheral issues and cultivate harmony, rather than hostility, in their church. Paul also implored them to be of one mind, whether it involved their thoughts, plans, or actions (cf. Fee 1987:52-53; Fee 2007:135; Polhill 1983:327; Wanamaker 2005:420-421).

The apostle learned from members of Chloe's household that heated arguments had arisen from among the members of the church (v. 11). The Greek word rendered "quarrels" can also be translated "rivalries" or "disputes" (cf. Danker 2000:392; Giesen 2000:2:52-53; Louw and Nida 1989:1:439; 495; Spicq 1994:2:69-72). The term points to the existence of "factions engaged in a struggle for power" (Welborn 1987:87). The various cliques were centered around favored personalities and antagonistic to other like-minded groups. (Chloe was a Christian woman who lived either in Corinth or in Ephesus, the

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

latter being the place where Paul resided when he wrote his epistle.) Regrettably, groups of converts began to prefer different ministers (v. 12; cf. Calvin 1996:26; Fiore 1985:86-87, 101; Furnish 2003:5; Garland 2003:43-44; Ker 2000:75-76; Kistemaker 1993:10-11; Lenski 1961:41-42; Thielman 2005:281).

Some believers claimed to follow Paul, their spiritual parent, while others (possibly Jewish Christians) said they favored Peter, perhaps the most prominent member of the twelve disciples whom Jesus had called. ("Cephas" was Simon Peter's Aramaic name.) Still others asserted they listened only to Apollos, a Christian Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, who conducted a dynamic ministry, first at Ephesus and then at Corinth (cf. Acts 18:24—19:1; Bruce 1971:32-33; Horsley 1998:47-46; Ker 2000:77; Lampe 1990:117; Morris 1979:1:776; Wenham 1995:130). At first glance, Paul may seem to have contradicted himself when he scolded one faction for alleging they followed Christ (1 Cor 1:12), especially after the apostle urged all the groups to be united in the Savior (v. 10); however, it is possible that this clique thought they were superior to the others by claiming to be devotees of Jesus. Perhaps they convinced themselves that their pride-filled allegiance to Him made them better than those who claimed to follow the teachings of merely human leaders (cf. Betz and Mitchell 1992:1:1141-1142; Furnish 2003:30; Gilmour 1962:1:687; Hodge 1969:14; Marshall 2004:253; Morris 2001:41; Polhill 1983:328).

The believers at Corinth had lost sight of the source of their unity (cf. 12:12-13). They had become divided over which one of their spiritual teachers they liked most. Because the entire New Testament had not yet been written, believers living in the first century of the common era had to depend heavily on the preaching and teaching of ministers such as Paul, Peter, and Apollos for the gospel message and spiritual insight into the Old Testament. Inevitably, different believers were attracted to certain personalities, leading to arguments and schisms in the early church. The Corinthians' self-centered preference for one teacher caused them to argue with other believers over which minister of the gospel supposedly was better. Also, they childishly emphasized the human messenger more than God's message (cf. Fisher 1975:24-25; Garland 2003:5-51; Mare 1976, 10:192; Orr and Walther 1976:150; Verbrugge 2008:266).

In 1:13, Paul asked his readers a series of rhetorical questions to get them to think seriously about the implications of their actions. For instance, the congregants were guilty of trying to divide the spiritual body of Christ (cf. Fee 1987:60; Fee 2007:101; Welborn 1987:87). The apostle, however, wanted them to realize that while God used different people to proclaim the gospel, they were all united in their message and focused on pointing people to the Savior. The apostle's main point was that the body of Christ was never intended to be divided into fractured groups. To underscore what he was saying, Paul used himself as an example. It was not the apostle who was crucified on behalf of sinners; rather, Jesus was sacrificed to pay for sins. Likewise, the Corinthians had been baptized into the name of Christ, not Paul. Expressed differently, they had become identified with Jesus and spiritually united with His people. Thus they were to be followers of Christ, not of some infinitely less significant person (cf. Garland 2003:52; Grosheide 1984:38-39; Johnson 2004:50-51; Kistemaker 1993:49-50; Orr and Walther 1976:150-151).

As Paul reflected on his ministry at Corinth, he recalled baptizing only two believers there: Crispus and Gaius (v. 14). Crispus had once been a ruler of the Jewish synagogue at Corinth. When he heard Paul proclaim the gospel, Crispus trusted in Jesus as the Messiah, and so did the entire household of Crispus (Acts 18:8). Some think Gaius was the person who hosted Paul when he wrote the letter to the Romans (cf. Rom 16:23). Tragically, the recipients of Paul's letter to the Corinthians had transferred their allegiances from the Savior to their spiritual mentors. That is why the apostle deemphasized the baptisms he performed while among the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:15). Paul was not minimizing the importance of baptism, but rather was emphasizing the supremacy of the Lord Jesus in all situations. Upon further reflection, the apostle also recalled baptizing the household of Stephanas (that is, family members, slaves, and so on; v. 16). The latter was a member of the church at Corinth. According to 16:15, those in his household were the first converts in the Roman province of Achaia (namely, southern Greece) and among the few whom Paul had baptized; but beyond these believers the apostle did not remember baptizing anyone else (cf. Barrett 1968:47-48; Calvin 1996:30-31; Conzelmann 1975:36; Lenski 1961:46-48; Mare 1976, 10:192; Robertson 2001:76-77; Verbrugge 2008:266-267).

The solution to the Corinthians' problem was to shift their attention away from prominent leaders and back to the Messiah. This did not depreciate the value of the ministers who led them. It just meant that no one could replace the Savior and be given more prominence than Him. Accordingly, Paul realized his place in the church; and that is why he declared his thankfulness for restricting the number of baptisms he had performed in Corinth. Moreover, the apostle did not want this ministry to be a cause of divisions. Neither did he want anyone to claim having been baptized in his name, and as a result, promote discord among the Corinthian believers. Paul sensed that his chief calling was not to baptize people (v. 17). As before, his intent in making such a statement was not to devalue baptism; rather, he was stating that his main goal was to proclaim the gospel (cf. Fisher 1975:28; Garland 2003:55; Johnson 2004:53; Morris 2001:42-43; Prior 1985:37-38; Soards 1999:35).

Regarding Paul's preaching, he wrote that his words were not based on clever speech and ingenious salesmanship, but on the redemptive power of Jesus' death at Calvary. Put another way, it was Christ—not eloquent Bible teachers—who alone died to atone for the sins of the lost (cf. Welborn 1987:101-102). Paul knew that many of the Corinthians were enamored by worldly wisdom. Thus the apostle's words contained an implicit warning. His readers were not to be misled by empty rhetoric and deceptive arguments and thereby miss the simple message of the cross of Christ. These statements do not mean Paul was against those who carefully prepared what they said (i.e. he was not promoting anti-intellectualism); rather, he was against those who tried to impress others with their knowledge or speaking ability. Thus, the apostle heralded the truth of redemption in plain language so that the cross would not be emptied of its power to save (cf. Calvin 1996:52; Grosheide 1984:40-41; Hodge 1969:18; Keener 2005:32-33; Smit 2002:245-246; Sampley 2002, 10:808).

Biblical wisdom may be defined as the ability to handle matters skillfully, to exercise sound judgment, and to apply the truths of Scripture to one's conduct. Wisdom from the Lord guides the believer to live in an upright, virtuous, and well-pleasing manner. The wise person is committed to God, devoted to His will, and obedient to His Word (cf. Blank 1962:8:852-853; Brown 1971, 3:1027-1028; Estes 2008:854, 856-857; Gilles 2005, 12:8522-8523; Lichtenstein and Camp 2005, 6:4077-4078; Lioy 2008:24-25; Murphy 1992,

6:920, 924-926; Schnabel 1993:967-968; Sheppard 1988, 4:1074, 1076-1077; Wilson 1997, 4:1277-1280). There are numerous facets of wisdom that merit consideration. There is an intellectual dimension, in which sublime truths are taught (Prov 4:11) and an ethical dimension in which such virtues as righteousness, justice, and equity are commended (2:7; 8:20). Wisdom stresses the importance of revering God (1:7; 2:5) and caring for the needy (Jas 1:27). God-given sagacity also indicates how one can lead a satisfying life (Prov 2:10-21). Scripture urges believers to embrace the wisdom of God (3:1-2) and forsake the folly of the world (9:13-18).

The prudent individual tends to enjoy a productive life, peace with the Lord, and spiritual joy (3:16-18). In contrast, the foolish person often reaps sorrow, emptiness, and death (4:14-17). The fruit of wisdom is far superior to gold and silver (8:19) and far more creative than anything humankind can produce (vv. 22-31). Those who appropriate the truths of God's Word are pleasing to the Lord, while He condemns those who reject His wisdom (12:2). Although these contrasts between the results of wisdom versus those of foolishness are generally true, there are always exceptions. There are times when godly, hardworking people do not thrive materially. Likewise, there are instances when lazy, deceitful people live with an abundance of material possessions.

Truly wise people are humble because they are aware of the depth of their ignorance. The more they learn, the more they realize how little they really know. In Greek thought, humility was a negative trait that suggested weakness and a lack of worth or dignity. Jesus, however, made humility the cornerstone of Christian character (Matt 18:4; 23:12; Luke 18:14). Scriptural humility involves an absence of arrogance, and it is rooted in the understanding that all we are and have we owe to God. A humble person is secure enough to praise and lift up others without any need for self-exaltation (Phil 2:3-4). The biblical concept of humility knows nothing of harsh self-abasement, belittling of oneself, or putting oneself down. This is a form of false humility (Col 2:18, 23).

James 3:13-18 comments at length on the nature of godly versus worldly wisdom. Undoubtedly, there were some Bible teachers in the first century of the common era who claimed they were wise and understood God's ways. Verse 13 admonished these would-be sages to prove their moral insight and

intellectual perception by living in an honorable manner. They were also to show their expert knowledge by doing good works with the humility that comes from godly wisdom. Against the backdrop of humility and graciousness that characterizes a truly wise person, it is easier to spot the cheap imitations. The worldly wise (the so-called "street smart") are characterized by bitterness, envy, and selfish ambition. The trail of deceit and strife they leave behind is nothing to boast about; in fact, their bragging and lying are used to cover up the truth (v. 14). Verse 15 spotlights the real source of worldly wisdom. The jealousy and selfishness it spawns originate from below, not "from heaven." In this light, believers can more fully appreciate this emphasis on seeking divine wisdom (cf. Adamson 1976:149-153; Davids 1982:149-153; Hiebert 1979:226-233; Motyer 1985:130-133; Stulac 1993:132-133).

James 3:16 explains that where envy and selfish ambition are present, the natural result is confusion and a variety of immoral behaviors. These vices, of course, are in direct opposition to the unity, peace, and righteousness God intends to be at work in the relationships His people have with one another. A person focused on nothing but his or her own advancement is less likely to be concerned with the "troublesome" issue of ethics. Moral boundaries are usually perceived by such people as obstacles in the way of their success. Since the Lord is neither a God of disorder nor receptive toward evil, the worldly wisdom that produces such bitter fruit cannot come from Him (cf. 1 Cor 14:33; 1 John 1:5; Adamson 1976:153-154; Davids 1982:153; Hiebert 1979:233-234; Motyer 1985:134-135; Stulac 1993:133-135).

After being exposed to the unwholesome images associated with earthly wisdom, it is refreshing to learn more about heavenly wisdom. First of all, divine prudence is known for its purity and compassion. This, in turn, promotes tranquility and harmony, along with gentleness and humility (Jas 3:17). The wisdom from above is also characterized by sensibility and kindness, mercy and love, impartiality and sincerity. None of these virtues comes about immediately; rather, the Spirit cultivates them as believers yield to God's will. The emphasis in verse 18 is on being peacemakers, rather than peace-breakers. James compared peace to seeds that the godly plant. In short, the harvest is an abundance of righteousness, goodness, and justice (cf. Adamson 1976:154-158; Davids 1982:154-155; Hiebert 1979:234-238; Motyer 1985:135-138; Stulac 1993:135-138).

4. The Power and Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18-25)

The account of Jesus' crucifixion proved a powerful challenge to the believers at Corinth. Since the congregants were prone to factions, many took sides on the issue of God's wisdom versus worldly learning (cf. Grosheide 1984:44; Schnabel 1993:969; Soards 1999:39). At the center of many of the arguments was Jesus' death and resurrection. These philosophical debates were drawing believers away from the central points of the Christian faith. Consequently, Paul sought to turn them back to the sufficiency of the gospel. The apostle's message to the Corinthians centered on the cross (cf. Barrett 1968:51; Plevnik 1989:478; Prat 2008). He said that even though the truth about Jesus' atoning sacrifice has the power to save lives eternally, to unbelievers its content is sheer folly. Moreover, as long as unbelievers reject the message of the cross as absurd, they are doomed to eternally perish (v. 18). In contrast, to those who are saved through their faith in Christ, the good news is a demonstration of God's power (cf. Rom 1:16; Lenski 1961:54-55; Mare 1976, 10:194; Polhill 1983:329; Verbrugge 2008:268-269).

In 1 Corinthians 1:19, Paul quoted the Septuagint version of Isaiah 29:14 (cf. Prior 1985:41; Wenham 1995:131). The context of the latter were prophecies describing Assyria's siege of Jerusalem and the Lord's deliverance of the city. Isaiah described the people of Judah as stunned, blind, drunk, and asleep (vv. 9-10), all of which refers to their spiritual insensitivity. Tragically, they did not even pay attention to what God was trying to tell them through His prophets and seers. Isaiah described his own oracles as being comparable to words recorded in a sealed scroll that the people refused to open and read (vv. 11-12). Though the inhabitants of Judah rejected God's Word (as presented through His prophets' declarations), they did maintain their religion; but Isaiah declared their ritual honoring of God was mere lip service and their worship was no more than legalism (v. 13). Like the people's refusal to listen to prophecy, this feigned obedience was a sign that their hearts were not turned toward God. In former times, His people had witnessed His awesome wonders, particularly when He delivered them from Egypt. Now He would astound the current generation of hypocrites with one unexpected judgment after another. In this way, the Lord would disprove the ideas of the so-called wise, who supposed they knew better than Him what they needed (cf. Grogan

1986:6:188-189; Leupold 1983:1:458; Oswalt 1986:1:532-533; Tucker 2001:6:243-244; Young 1972:2:320-322). Paul picked on this latter thought to state that God used the message of the cross to annihilate the erudition of the worldly wise and to thwart the understanding of those who imagined themselves to be clever (1 Cor. 1:19; cf. Ciampa and Rosner 2007:697-698; Fisher 1975:29; Grosheide 1984:45; Johnson 2004:56-57; Kistemaker 1993:55).

As in verse 13, Paul used a series of rhetorical questions in verse 20 to reinforce his argument against those who fancied themselves to be the epitome of sagacity and prudence (cf. Isa 19:12; 33:18; Barrett 1968:53; Ciampa and Rosner 2007:698; Conzelmann 1975:42-43). It did not matter whether these individuals were brilliant philosophers, scholarly experts in the Mosaic law, or the world's most impressive debaters. The Lord had shown that regardless of the type of philosophical or ideological system favored by unbelievers to address humanity's concerns, all of it was foolish (cf. Lowery 1994:252; Orr and Walther 1976:159-160; Polhill 1983:329). For the Jewish religious elite of Paul's day, the foremost issue was the advent of an end-time Messiah to deliver them from Rome's oppressive control. In contrast, the primary aim for Greek sophists was using logic and debate to answer their questions about human existence. The apostle essentially asked, "Of what use is worldly wisdom in light of the saving message of the cross?" (cf. Brown 1971, 3:1030-1031; Bruce 1971:35; Sheppard 1988, 4:1080-1081). In their search for God, many people had errantly looked only to pagan knowledge and understanding in the hope of finding Him; but God did not intend for worldly wisdom to be the means of knowing Him, especially since the unregenerate "way of assessing life" was "egocentric" (Garland 2003:66-67). Rather, it pleased the Father, in His infinite wisdom, to use the allegedly "foolish" message of the gospel, which Paul and others proclaimed, to redeem those who put their faith in the Son (1 Cor 1:21; cf. Furnish 2003:38; Ridderbos 1975:242; Schnabel 1993:970; Thielman 2005:282).

The good news of salvation represented both an exaggerated paradox and incomprehensible absurdity to the lost. As a precondition to accepting the gospel, educated Jews demanded miraculous signs (cf. Matt 12:38; 16:1, 4; Mark 8:11-12; John 2:18; 6:30), while learned Greeks insisted on worldly erudition (1 Cor 1:22); but what was an intolerable offense to the Jews and

utter nonsense to the Gentiles—the Messiah's atoning sacrifice at Calvary (cf. Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13)—was the only way for people to come to a saving knowledge of God (1 Cor 1:23; cf. Brown 1971:3:1031; Brown 1996:432; Joop 2003:190; Morris 2001:45-46; Robertson 2001:138). The phrase "Christ crucified" was a startling contradiction in terms. To the religious elite, a reference to the Messiah was closely associated with power and triumph, while remarks about the cross were synonymous with weakness and defeat. In contrast, those summoned by the Father to redemption—both Jews and Greeks—the Son was the epitome, embodiment, and emissary of God's power and wisdom (v. 24; cf. Rom 1:4, 16; Col 2:3; Fee 1987:75; Fee 2007:101; Hodge 1969:22-23; Lenski 1961:66-67; Lowery 1994:252; Thielman 2005:280; Wenham 1995:117-118, 353). Paul had good reason to emphasize these truths. Apparently the believers in Corinth were drawn toward worldly wisdom and away from what they perceived to be the folly of the cross. The apostle explained that the supposed "foolishness of God" (v. 25; as seen in Jesus' crucifixion) was infinitely more profound and efficacious than any human plan or course of action. Similarly, what appeared to be God's weakness was immeasurably more powerful than whatever people imagined to be their greatest display of human strength (cf. Ellis 1974:95; Guthrie 1981:95; Grosheide 1984:50; Lampe 1990:120-122).

Paul's statement was not intended to minimize God's wisdom or power. The apostle certainly was not implying that God ever does anything weak or foolish. Instead, Paul used gentle sarcasm to show the vast discrepancy between the infinite wisdom of God and feeble wisdom of humanity (cf. Barrett 1968:56; Conzelmann 1975:50-51; Garland 2003:70-71; Polhill 1983:330). Specifically, God chose a means of salvation that overturned the world's greatest philosophers, namely, individuals who saw the cross as being ludicrous and pointless. Allegedly, if the Father was all-powerful, He would never allow His Son to perish at Calvary. Instead, the Father would intervene to save His Son from such an ignoble fate. Supposedly, to do otherwise would reveal weakness (cf. Matt 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37); yet the Father, by not intervening, displayed wisdom and strength far beyond any human understanding by raising the Son from the dead (cf. Acts 2:24; Rom 1:4). Also, in this way, the Father opened wide the door of salvation to all who

would believe in the Son (cf. Heb 2:9, 14-18; 1 Pet 1:3-5; Johnson 2004:58-59; Mare 1976, 10:195; Sampley 2002, 10:812; Verbrugge 2008:270).

5. Glory Only in the Lord (1 Cor 1:26–2:5)

The believers in Corinth, who came from the various echelons of society, were a living example that established the validity of Paul's assertion concerning the power and wisdom of the Father in the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son. The apostle asked his readers to consider their circumstances when God called them to salvation through the proclamation of the gospel. By any human standard, few of them were intellectually impressive or sophisticated. Not many of them were considered persons of wealth, influence, and power. Moreover, hardly any were noted for their high social standing (1 Cor 1:26). Indeed, most of them were less educated people from the lower classes. Perhaps that is why some of the parishioners in Corinth were tempted to incorporate aspects of Greek philosophy into their belief systems, for doing so would secure for them a privileged status within their community. Thankfully, Paul warned his readers against pursuing such worldly ambitions (cf. Gilmour 1962, 1:685-686; Lampe 1990:126; Meeks 1998; Thielman 2005:277).

The apostle revealed that God deliberately chose what seemed idiotic to the sophisticates of the world. God's purpose in doing so was to shame the latter. He also chose to manifest His saving grace on the outcasts of society through the ignominy of the cross. In this way He used what the world considered weakness to discredit what it lauded as being strong (v. 27). In this contrarian approach, God intentionally selected what pagan human society belittled as lowly and despised (cf. Grosheide 1984:51; Orr and Walther 1976:161; Soards 1999:47; Welborn 1987:97). Indeed, He chose things the lost considered to be worthless and irrelevant to reduce to nothing what the world considered to be important (v. 28). In short, God disgraced the worldly wise by overturning their warped perspective. Indeed, the presence in the church of those who had little or no rank or standing in society completely negated what the rich and powerful thought was important (cf. Fisher 1975:33; Joop 2003:191; Polhill 1983:330; Wenham 1995:131-132).

Paul added that by means of this counterintuitive approach, God eliminated the possibility of the world's elitists boasting in His presence (v. 29).

Expressed differently, through the message of the cross, God demonstrated conclusively that human beings can do nothing to earn salvation. Assuredly, all the effort in the world—and even all the wisdom in the world—cannot merit anyone's redemption. The Father alone is responsible for bringing believing sinners into spiritual union with the Son. Because they are joined to Him by faith, the Messiah has become for them the living essence of wisdom (cf. Barrett 1968:59-60; Garland 2003:78-79; Lenski 1961:81-82; Orr and Walther 1976:161; Ridderbos 1975:242). Prudence and sagacity no longer remain theoretical abstractions dominated by society's privileged upper class. As well, not even the religious elite can maintain a stranglehold on the claim to be more upright and sanctified than others. After all, the Father has made the Son to be the enfleshment of righteousness (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), holiness (cf. Rom 8:9-10; Eph 2:8-10; 2 Pet 3:18), and redemption (cf. Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 15:55-57); and the Father graciously bestows these blessings on all who trust in the Son for eternal life (1 Cor 1:30). As they abide in Him, they become more virtuous in their conduct, separated from sin, and set apart for the Lord (cf. Calvin 1996:46-47; Furnish 2003:43; Horsley 1998:52-53; Mare 1976, 10:197; Verbrugge 2008:272-273).

In verse 31, Paul quoted from Jeremiah 9:24 to substantiate his point. The collection of messages in Jeremiah 7–10 is commonly called "The Temple Address", for the prophet delivered these oracles at the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Chapter 26 describes the probable historical events surrounding these prophecies. King Josiah's reforms died when he did, and the idolatry of the Canaanites rapidly reemerged in Judah during the early reign of Josiah's son Jehoiakim. In chapter 9, Jeremiah urged those who considered themselves to be wise, strong, and wealthy to stop putting their trust in their human attainments and resources (v. 23). Instead, if they wished to boast, it should be that they knew the true and living God and that He alone is the Lord. They were also to affirm that it was only God who acted out of covenant faithfulness and that He alone was able to bring justice and righteousness to the earth (v. 24; Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard 1991:153-154; Feinberg 1986, 6:444-445; Huey 1993:121-122; Miller 2001:6:656; Thompson 1980:318-321). The consequence for Paul is that no one has any right to boast about how he or she has earned God's favor (1 Cor 1:31; cf. Ciampa and Rosner

2007:699-700; Fee 1987:87-88; Fee 2007:129-130; Grosheide 1984:54; Johnson 2004:61-62; Kistemaker 1993:65-66; Morris 2001:50).

Paul referred to himself as an example of someone who had found significance through faith in the Messiah. The apostle mentioned the occasion, during his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:1-18), when he proclaimed in Corinth the "testimony about God" (1 Cor 2:1). (Some manuscripts read "mystery" rather than "testimony"; cf. Barrett 1968:62-63; Bruce 1971:37; Garland 2003:83; Mare 1976, 10:199; Verbrugge 2008:275.) It is also possible that Paul was referring to the testimony borne by God or the apostle's witness initiated by God. In any case, this testimony is the truth concerning the crucifixion of the Son. Paul wanted the latter to be the sole focus of the message he presented to the lost. Even though the apostle could have overwhelmed his listeners with finely-honed intellectual arguments, he refused to do so. He also rejected the tactics exploited by well-trained Greek orators of the day—which included lofty eloquence and impressive erudition—to persuade the lost, for to do otherwise would have called attention to himself. Instead, the apostle declared the message of salvation in a simple and straightforward way. Despite Paul's stellar professional credentials, he made up his mind that while he was with the Corinthians, he would forgo his encyclopedic knowledge of the Mosaic law and keep his focus squarely on the Lord Jesus, especially His atoning sacrifice at Calvary (v. 2; cf. 2 Cor 11:5-6; Lampe 1990:127; Morris 1990:66; Polhill 1983:330-331; Sampley 2002, 10:817; Soards 1999:52-53).

The Book of Acts provides some background information about the founding of the church at Corinth. Paul had come to Macedonia (northern Greece) after a vision he experienced in Troas (16:8-10). Before heading to Athens, the apostle established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. During his time in Athens, Paul reinforced his conviction that when it came to knowing God in a saving way, worldly wisdom had nothing to offer (cf. 17:16-34). Then, after the apostle arrived in Corinth (18:1), he befriended an influential couple named Priscilla and Aquila (vv. 2-3). Paul preached in the synagogue at Corinth until Jewish opposition forced him to focus his ministry on the Gentiles (vv. 4-7). As a result of the apostle leading a number of people to faith in Christ, a church was established (consisting of both Jews and Gentiles) and soon began to grow (vv. 8-10). Paul's ministry in Corinth lasted a fairly

long time (more than 18 months; vv. 11, 18), and he accomplished much while in the city (cf. Grosheide 1984:13-14, 57; Horsley 1998:29-30; Kistemaker 1993:9-10, 71-72; Lenski 1961:90-91; Mare 1976, 10:179; 180; Morris 1979, 1:775-776; Verbrugge 2008:241-242).

In summary, before Paul arrived in Corinth (about A.D. 51), he had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, run out of Thessalonica and Berea, and scoffed at in Athens (cf. 16:22-24; 17:10, 13-14, 32). Understandably, the apostle felt weak as a result of struggling with timidity and trembling (1 Cor 2:3). This circumstance prevented him from proclaiming the gospel with clever words and persuasive rhetoric; instead, he was plainspoken in his preaching and teaching (cf. Fisher 1975:33; 34; Joop 2003:191-192). Out of necessity, the apostle could not resort to worldly means, but had to rely entirely on the Spirit's power (v. 4). As a result, the apostle preached with honesty and integrity (cf. 2 Cor 2:17); and in the process, only God could be credited for the effect the gospel was having on people's lives (including their manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit; cf. 1 Cor 1:7). Moreover, the faith of the converts living in Corinth (that is, both their decision to believe and the content of what they affirmed) was due to God's power, not human wisdom (2:5; cf. Hodge 1969:31; Keener 2005:8, 34; Johnson 2004:63-64; Smit 2002:246; Sampley 2002, 10:775-776, 817; Thielman 2005:283).

In stepping back from what Paul said, it appears that he was launching a counterattack against a faction in Corinth that was trying to exalt worldly wisdom and its own personal strengths. These opponents of the apostle were arguing that their understanding of truth was more valid than his due to their sophisticated logic and carefully crafted oratory. Paul emphasized that deep life changes had occurred in the believers at Corinth when they embraced a message that ran counter to pagan human philosophies. This is the same good news that had been delivered by an evangelist who, at the time, seemed poorly prepared to deliver a compelling witness; and yet the results were amazing. Paul stressed that the fascination of his readers with secular forms of erudition would lead them to self-sufficiency and self-congratulation—the very opposite of what would bring them to spiritual maturity. Without question, God's power was the only sure and eternal foundation on which to stand (cf. 2 Cor 12:9-10).

6. Wisdom from the Spirit (1 Cor 2:6-16)

Paul had previously argued that the success of the gospel cannot be attributed to the skill of its messengers, nor is it reliant upon what the world calls "wisdom" (1 Cor 2:6). It would be incorrect to conclude, however, that the good news is devoid of wisdom, for it is part of the inspired truth recorded in God's Word. Moreover, the wisdom found in the gospel belongs neither to this world nor to its rulers, who have only temporary power and are soon forgotten after they die. In point of fact, all earthly splendor is rendered meaningless by the death and resurrection of Christ. Also, in the day of God's judgment, all forms of human strength, wealth, and wisdom will be brought to nothing (cf. Ladd 1997:477; Lampe 1990:127; Mare 1976, 10:200; Verbrugge 2008:276-277).

Paul clarified that the "mature" were those who believed the truth of the gospel. Moreover, they were enlightened by the Spirit (cf. Barrett 1968:69; Conzelmann 1975:60; Ridderbos 1975:243; Scroggs 1967:39-40; Soards 1999:58). In extrabiblical literature dating from the first century of the common era, the Greek word rendered "mature" was used to refer to those being initiated into the so-called mystery religions (cf. Danker 2000:995-996; Delling 1967:8:68-69, 75-76; Louw and Nida 1989:1:124, 753-754; Schippers 1971:2:59-60 62). Undoubtedly, some recent converts in Corinth were enamored by these pagan belief systems and the religious frauds who disseminated them. In an effort to counter this tendency, the apostle took a familiar term and applied it to believers to indicate that they were the ones who are full of spiritual awareness and understanding (cf. Brown 1971:3:1031; Plevnik 1989:468; Welborn 1987:105). The Greek term rendered "mystery" (v. 7) was originally used to refer to secret knowledge and surreptitious rites associated with pagan cults in vogue at the time. Devotees vowed to never divulge this information to noninitiates (cf. Bornkamm 1967:4:803-808; Danker 2000:661-662; Finkenrath, G 1971:3:501-503; Louw and Nida 1989:1:345). Paul adopted this terminology to refer to "God's wisdom", especially as seen in the cross of Christ (cf. Grosheide 1984:63-64; Ridderbos 1975:46-57; Schnabel 1993:970).

Admittedly, to the unsaved the meaning of the gospel was a "mystery". Though its significance was an enigma to the world, the true import of the

good news was known and appreciated by all who put their faith in the Messiah (cf. Ellis 1974:87; Furnish 2003:40; Polhill 1983:331). Paul, in saying that the message of the cross was once "hidden", meant that prior to Jesus' advent, the gospel had been unknown and obscure, for people could not fully understand it. Even so, before the world began, the Father decreed His redemptive plan and program for the eternal benefit and glory of the redeemed (cf. Rom 8:17). Now that the Son had been raised from the dead, the Holy Spirit empowered ministers such as Paul to explain the theological significance of Jesus' atoning sacrifice to the lost so that they might be saved (cf. Rom 11:25-36; 16:25-26; Eph 1:3-10; 3:3-11; Col 1:25-28; Fee 1987:105-106; Fee 2007:107; Guthrie 1981:95; Joop 2003:193; Morris 1990:47).

The central truth of the apostle's preaching was that the Father had sovereignly determined to redeem sinners and bring many into His glory through the crucifixion of the Son. For a time, though, God had kept this truth veiled from human awareness and understanding. Indeed, if the rulers of this age—such as the chief priests, Pilate, and Herod Antipas—had comprehended the divine plan of salvation, they would not have crucified the Messiah (cf. Luke 24:20; Acts 3:17; 4:25-28; 13:37). In all probability, these earthly heads of state were unwittingly acting in alignment with supernatural forces opposed to God's kingdom (contra Carr 1976:21, 24-27; Miller 1972:526-528; cf. Dan 10:13, 20; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Rom 8:38; Eph 1:20-21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15; Bruce 1971:38-39; Conzelmann 1975:61; Orr and Walther 1976:164; Prior 1985:50-51). Scroggs (1967:43) opined that "here stands under judgment the entire rulership of the old order, both heavenly and earthly". Paul's reference to the Son as "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8) is perhaps the "loftiest title" the apostle "ever applied to Christ" (Morris 2001:55). The epithet not only points to the Savior as being characterized by glory, but also to His supreme rulership over it. Beyond question, the phrase emphasizes Jesus' status as the divine Savior (cf. Pss 24:7-10; 29:3; Acts 7:2; 20:28; Fisher 1975:33; 39-40; Fee 1987:106-107; Fee 2007:136; Garland 2003:96-97; Hodge 1969:36; Lenski 1961:100-101).

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul most likely quoted from Isaiah 64:4 to substantiate his point. (Less likely possibilities for his statement include the following: Isa 52:15; a citation taken from a Jewish liturgy; an amalgamation of Old Testament concepts; or a line originating from the anonymous apocryphal

work titled the *Apocalypse of Elijah*; cf. Ciampa and Rosner 2007:701; Conzelmann 1975:63-64; Mare 1976, 10:200-201; Orr and Walther 1976:157; Verbrugge 2008:278.) In the preceding verses, the prophet (speaking on behalf of the faithful remnant) petitioned God to once again manifest His protection and favor on His people. Isaiah also prayed that God would punish the enemies of Israel by splitting the heavens and dealing forthrightly with the nation's wicked oppressors. The prophet then affirmed the Lord's awesome power and splendor by noting that since the dawn of human history no one had ever seen or heard a God like Yahweh. He alone intervened to rescue those who put their hope in Him (cf. Grogan 1986:6:338-339; Leupold 1983:2:352-353; Oswalt 1986:2:532-533622-623; Seitz 2001:6:529; Young 1972:3:494-495).

Paul picked up on the latter thought by stressing that prior to the advent of the Messiah, no one had imagined God's marvelous plan of salvation. Indeed, no one had conceived of the heavenly blessings God had prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). The apostle explained that what once had been an undisclosed truth, the Spirit of God now revealed to believers through the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Eph 1:17-19; 3:16-19; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Indeed, only the Holy Spirit understands the wisdom of God and can convey those eternal verities to us (cf. Calvin 1996:38; Brown 1996:434; Lowery 1994:252). Thankfully, it is not secret knowledge reserved only for a select and privileged few. Instead, the Father uses the Spirit to unveil the mystery of the cross to believers (cf. Guthrie 1981:555-556; Morris 1979:1:777). This arrangement is appropriate, for the Spirit searches out everything, even the hidden depths of God's redemptive plan (1 Cor 2:10). Paul did not mean that the Spirit literally conducts an exhaustive search to uncover divine truth. After all, the Spirit is Himself fully divine and He already knows all things. Instead, the apostle was saying that the Spirit clarifies the Father's essence, His attributes, and His glorious purpose for those who trust in the Son for salvation (cf. Ellis 1974:95; Ridderbos 1975:244-245; Sampley 2002:10:821).

In verse 11, Paul used an analogy to illustrate the Spirit's deep and profound knowledge of the Father (cf. Morris 1990:77; Polhill 1983:332; Wenham 1995:134-135). No one can give an accurate reading of what goes on inside a person—all the emotions, thoughts, and desires—except that person's own spirit (i.e. the immaterial aspect of one's existence). Likewise, no one can

understand what is taking place within the mind of the Father except the Holy Spirit. He knows the Father intimately, as no human can; and it is only the Spirit who leads believers into a truly personal knowledge of the triune God. Paul related that the Father has given His Spirit, not the world's spirit, to believers. In turn, the third person of the Trinity, as a genuine personality and sentient being, teaches us the wonderful things the Father has freely bestowed on us in union with the Son (v. 12). The salvation offered by the Messiah is one of the Lord's supreme gifts, and it is made available to all who receive it by faith. This was an important truth that Paul declared to his readers (cf. Furnish 2003:45; Garland 2003:98-99; Grosheide 1984:70-71).

In point of fact, the wisdom the apostle shared with believers came from the divine Spirit. By way of implication, Paul's teaching was not based on the pagan musings of human wisdom. Verse 13, which is literally rendered, "comparing spiritual with spiritual", has been understood in various ways, three of which are worth mentioning. The apostle was referring to: (1) comparing one spiritual reality with another spiritual reality; (2) interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual; or (3) explaining spiritual concepts in spiritual language (cf. Barrett 1968:76; Calvin 1996:60-61; Conzelmann 1975:67; Fisher 1975:33; 43; Hodge 1969:41-42; Johnson 2004:68; Kistemaker 1993:90-91; Lenski 1961:113-114; Orr and Walther 1976:165-166). Regardless of which option is preferred for understanding the precise meaning of the clause, Paul's main point is clear. The Spirit is the source of divine truth. Additionally, the spiritual truths mature believers receive from Him are not to be hoarded, but rather freely passed on to others. Doing so enables spiritual growth to occur within individual believers and within the entire faith community (cf. Ellis 1974:87-88; Guthrie 1981:556; Morris 2001:58; Soards 1999:61).

In verse 14, Paul mentioned the "person without the Spirit". This is more literally rendered the "natural person" and refers to unbelievers. The main difference between them and Christians is who or what directs their lives. In short, unbelievers are steered by their own fallen inclinations. Moreover, because non-Christians depend solely on wisdom derived from the world, they refuse to receive or accept the gifts of God's Spirit. In fact, what the Spirit graciously offers seems nonsensical to unbelievers. Neither do they fully appreciate salvation through faith in the crucified and risen Messiah, for this

can only be spiritually examined, discerned, and appropriated by the Spirit. As long as unbelievers reject the assistance of the Spirit, they remain spiritually blind (cf. Ladd 1997:533; Marshall 2004:273; Mare 1976, 10:202-203; Verbrugge 2008:280).

In contrast to people who rely on worldly wisdom, Jesus' followers are dominated by the Spirit's presence within them. The Spirit instructs, enlightens, regulates, and guides believers. Therefore, people who are controlled by the Spirit are able to evaluate the worth of all things through the discernment He gives. Moreover, when it comes to the truths of the gospel, Christians are not subject to the scrutiny and condemnation of unbelievers. After all, the latter have no insight into the things of the Spirit, especially what it means to trust in the Messiah for salvation and live by faith in Him (v. 15). Some claim that, as Christians, they are beyond the counsel or discipline of other believers; but the fact that Paul was writing to the believers in Corinth to reprove them undercuts this idea (cf. Barrett 1968:76-77; Calvin 1996:63; Hodge 1969:44-45; Keener 2005:39; Garland 2003:100-101; Grosheide 1984:74; Sampley 2002:10:822).

In verse 16, Paul quoted the Septuagint version of Isaiah 40:13 to substantiate his claim that unbelievers are not qualified to pass judgment on believers regarding spiritual matters (cf. Wis of Sol 9:13). The prophet asked a series of rhetorical questions in verses 12 to 14 that point to the unfathomable depths of God's knowledge and greatness. In the work of creation, God is pictured taking great care in measuring out the correct ingredients. This was something only God could do; and He needed no coaches or consultants to show Hm how to do it. Indeed, no human being could ever fathom the depths of the Lord's infinite wisdom or instruct in Him in the proper plan of action to take (cf. Rom 11:34; Ciampa and Rosner 2007:702-703; Fee 1987:119; Fee 2007:130-131; Grogan 1986:6:244-245; Leupold 1983:2:30; Oswalt 1986:2:59-60; Seitz 2001:6:342; Young 1972:3:44-45).

Paul drew upon the preceding truth to illustrate his earlier point that the mystery of God's salvation had been revealed through the cross of Christ. All those who believe that Jesus' crucifixion (and resurrection) has brought them salvation can comprehend spiritual truths in a manner similar to the way the Messiah Himself understands them; and because the Spirit has made these

truths known to believers, they genuinely have the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). The latter phrase signifies "insight into the very mind of God" (Ladd 1997:519; cf. Brown 1996:435; Keener 2005:39-40; Morris 2001:60; Soards 1999:62). In addition, with the Spirit's help, believers remain in tune with the Lord's thoughts, counsels, plans, and will. The answer to Paul's rhetorical question in this verse is that no one instructs the Lord. Furthermore, believers get their instructions from the Father because they have a priceless possession—the mind of the Son. Expressed differently, all of His wisdom, love, and humility are available to every believer through the agency of the Spirit. Consequently, it is possible to grow in Christlikeness. Believers are the recipients of God's wisdom, not for the purpose of intellectual speculation, but so they can live fully pleasing to Him in all things (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

7. Conclusion

This journal article has undertaken an exegetical-theological analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10–2:16 in order to distinguish between divine wisdom and human wisdom. The latter is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic in orientation. In contrast, divine wisdom is Bible-based, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led. It seeks to glorify the Lord, not oneself, by focusing on the eternal sagacity of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Human wisdom uses empty rhetoric and deceptive arguments to snare its victims. Conversely, divine wisdom heralds the truth of redemption in plain language so that the cross is not emptied of its power to save. Religionists and sophists consider the teaching about Jesus' death and resurrection to be utter nonsense; yet God uses the message of the cross to annihilate the erudition of the worldly wise and thwart the understanding of those who imagine themselves to be clever.

In short, regardless of the type of philosophical or ideological system unbelievers may choose to address humanity's concerns, all of it is foolish. To the chagrin of those who envision themselves to be the epitome of sagacity and prudence, God uses the message of the cross to bring about the redemption of the lost. By means of this counterintuitive approach, God demonstrates conclusively that human beings can do nothing to earn salvation. Regardless of whether they are young or old, rich or poor, powerful or weak, famous or unknown, everyone must trust in Christ for salvation. Moreover,

they must rely on the Holy Spirit for insight and understanding into the will of the Father. Whereas earthly wisdom is derived solely from a person's own misinformed ruminations and subject to human limitations and error, divine wisdom comes from the mind of the omniscient Creator and is infallible. For this reason, prudence and discernment originating from God's Word are what believers need to live in a manner that pleases and honors the Lord.

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Human Freedom and God's Providence: Is There Conflict?

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Abstract[2]

How can we reconcile human freedom with God's providence? The key, in my view, is bottom-up and top-down causality. These particular terms state that all events in the world are the result of some previous event, or events. Accordingly, all of reality is already in a sense predetermined or pre-existent and, therefore, nothing new can come into existence. But how does this impact on our actions? Are we predetermined to walk a specific path and, if so, how is this accomplished by God without violating our human freedom?

1. Introduction

Scripture does not precisely define the nature of human freedom, but philosophers and theologians do discuss it. In general, scholars usually present two main notions of freedom: *libertarianism* and *compatibilism*. These are mutually exclusive conceptions of human freedom, but both are internally consistent. Supporting the notion that both views of freedom are coherent and defensible, Flint (1988:177-179) proposes that "ultimately the view of freedom that one ought to embrace should be the view that best fits the biblical data, not our pre-conceived notions of what human freedom is or ought to be".

Before unpacking this seeming enigma regarding human freedom in current philosophical and theological literature, the two basic views need to be dealt with as they impact on one coming to a reasonable conclusion on this subject.

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

The one is an *indeterministic* notion, sometimes called *libertarian free will* or *incompatibilism*. The other is a *deterministic* notion, referred to as *compatibilism* or *soft determinism*. The view of freedom to which one subscribes has dramatic implications for how one construes the relationship between divine sovereignty, omniscience, and human freedom.

What follows is a breakdown of the differences and similarities between libertarianism and compatibilism, and a possible solution to combining human freedom with God's providence.

2. Libertarianism and compatibilism

Compatibilists view human actions as causally determined, yet free (Wellum (2002:260). In other words, in contrast to a libertarianistic view, a compatibilist view of freedom perceives the human will as decisively and sufficiently inclined toward one option (Peterson et al. 1991:59). The will is deemed to be free as long as it meets the following requirements:

1. the immediate cause of the action is a desire, wish, or intention internal to the agent;
2. no external event or circumstances compels the action to be performed; and,
3. the agent could have acted differently if he or she had chosen to (see Peterson et al 1991:26-28).

If these three conditions are met, then even though the human action is determined, it may still be considered free. Feinberg (1987:400) summarises this view well when he states:

> If the agent acts in accord with causes and reasons that serve as a sufficient condition for his doing the act, and if the causes do not force him to act contrary to his wishes, then a soft determinist would say that he acts freely.

The question is: What then do philosophers and theologians mean by a libertarianistic view of freedom? Simply stated, the most basic sense of this view is that a person's act is free if it is not causally determined. For libertarians, this does not mean that one's actions are random or arbitrary. In

the view of Wellum (2002:259), reasons and causes play upon the will as one chooses, but none of them is sufficient to incline the will decisively in one direction or another. Thus, a person could have chosen other than he did. Basinger (1993:416) puts it this way: for a person to be free with respect to performing an action, he must have it within his power "to choose to perform action A or choose not to perform action A. Both A and not A could actually occur. However, which will actually occur has not yet been determined" (see Hasker 1983:32-44).

How then would a person committed to libertarianism conceive of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom? What is the relationship between a libertarian view of human freedom and the way one conceives of God's sovereign rule over the affairs of humanity. Without using the word in a disparaging or negative sense, one must in some sense "limit" God's sovereignty (Wellum 2002:260). Instead, "limit" is used in the sense that God freely chooses to limit Himself by virtue that He has chosen to create a certain kind of world which contains human beings with libertarian freedom. In this sense then, "limit" does not refer to a weakness or flaw in God, but rather to a self-imposed limit that is part of His plan, not a violation of it (see also Cottrell 1989:108-110).

Obviously, this view is in stark contrast to the compatibilist or soft determinist view. According to the determinist, if a person acts in accord with causes and reasons that serve as a sufficient condition for the person doing the act, and the causes do not force the person to act contrary to his wishes, then a soft determinist would say the person has acted freely. This leads one to the next point of discussion, namely, *divine omniscience*.

3. Divine omniscience

Traditionally, Christian theologians and philosophers have sought to maintain that God has complete and infallible knowledge of everything past, present, and future (Wellum 2002:262). Accordingly, Morris (1991:87) writes:

> Not only is God omniscient, He is necessarily omniscient, i.e. it is impossible that His omniscience collapse, fail, or even waver. He is, as philosophers nowadays often say, omniscient

> in every possible world. That is to say, He is actually omniscient, and there is no possible, complete and coherent story about any way things could have gone (no possible world) in which God lacks this degree of cognitive excellence.

However, as scholars have long been discussing, this view of God's omniscience does appear to generate a thorny problem. Simply put: How can one possibly conceive to be free in ones actions if God knows exactly how one will act on every occasion in the future. Morris (1991:89) poses the problem in this way:

> If God already knows exactly how we shall act, what else can we possibly do? We must act in that way. We cannot diverge from the path that He sees we shall take. We cannot prove God wrong. He is necessarily omniscient. Divine foreknowledge thus seems to preclude genuine alternatives and thus genuine freedom in the world.

Clearly, this is a valid question, especially if one brings into the equation the study of nature from a scientific perspective. For example, Karl Barth and others of the neo-orthodox persuasion used the idea of primary and secondary causes to defend divine sovereignty over nature. At the same time though, they kept the idea of free will as a God-given attribute of human nature. Furthermore, Barth (1958:148) asserted that God "rules unconditionally and irresistibly in all occurrences". Nature is God's "servant", the "instrument of His purposes". God controls, orders, and determines, for "nothing can be done except the will of God." God foreknows and also predetermines and foreordains. "The operation of God is as sovereign as Calvinist teaching describes it. In the strictest sense it is predestination". Clearly, Barth affirms, in the view of Barbour (2000:160), both divine sovereignty and creaturely autonomy. As such, God controls, and all creaturely determinations are "wholly and utterly at the disposal of His power". As a consequence, the creature "goes its own way, but in fact it always finds itself on God's way." Thus the idea is that all causality in the world is subordinate to God. For Barth, when a human hand writes with a pen, the whole action is performed by both the hand and the pen—not part by hand and part by pen. Barth further declared that creaturely causes, like the pen, are real, but "have their part only

by submission" to the divine hand that guides them (Barth 1958:42, 94, 106, 133).

To add to this, Farrer (1966:76, 90) writes that "God's agency must actually be such as to work omnipotently on, in, and through creaturely agencies, without either forcing them or competing with them". As a result, God acts through the matrix of secondary causes and is manifest only in their overall pattern. "He does not impose an order against the grain of things, but makes them follow their own bent and work out the world by being themselves". Barbour (2000:161) puts it this way, "we cannot say anything about *how* God acts; there are no 'casual joints' between infinite and finite actions and no gaps in the scientific account. So, too, the free act of a person can at the same time be ascribed to the person and to the grace of God acting in human life".

It is at this point that some scholars propose *presentism* as a plausible solution to the foreknowledge-freedom problem. Presentism is a logically consistent theory, but represents a departure from traditional Christian belief. It strong insists that God knows everything there is to know, that is, God is truly omniscient. However, presentism then adds this very critical point: it is precisely future free actions of people that are impossible to know. Swinburne (1993:175) sums it up thus: "omniscience is knowledge of everything true which is logically possible to know". Given libertarianistic freedom, they insist, it is impossible for anyone, including God Himself, to truly know what people will do since there are no antecedent sufficient conditions which decisively incline a person's will in one direction over another. The problem is: When upholding a libertarianistic view of human freedom, one denies that God can know the future free actions of human beings. Some refer to this as *open-theism*.

4. God and determinism

On the opposite side of this thinking lies the *deterministic view*, the claim that everything is determined. But is the determinist right?

Before addressing the arguments for determinism, it is necessary to correct some misconceptions about the deterministic position. According to Hasker (1983:37), it must be most strongly emphasised that determinists do not deny

that people make choices. If they did deny this, their position would be absurd, but they do not. Besides, the experience of choosing—seeing alternatives, weighing up desirability, and finally making up one's mind—is not any different whether one is a libertarian or a determinist. Thus, while determinists believe that there are sufficient conditions which will govern their choices, they do not know at any given time what those determinants are, or how they will decide as a result of them. So, like everyone else, they simply have to make up their own minds. As a result, the difference between the liberterianistic and determinist lies in interpreting the experience of choice, not in the experience itself.

What are the arguments for determinism? For some (perhaps many) determinists, determinism seems to have the status of an ultimate principle. For example, Leibniz (1996:66) found the *principle of sufficient reason* to be a necessary truth of reason. This particular principle states that for anything which occurs, there must be some sufficient reason that *it* occurs rather than something else. As such, Hasker (1983:38) asks: "And how can this be doubted? If there is no *sufficient* reason for something to happen, then this means that the reason that actually exists is *insufficien*t, and if that were so, the event would not take place."

However, Barrett (2004:146-147) believes differently. He states that the idea of divine providential action through hidden introduced active information—God subtly embeds within a person information to bring forth His will—is consonant with that of a gracious Creator who allows the creation to be itself and to have room to develop through the exercise of human free will, including the pathways of free procedures. This may also be accomplished via divinely installed guiding principles of chance and necessity. In Christian theology it is the Creator-Spirit who is thus creatively at work throughout space-time (see John 5:15; Rev 21:5). This Spirit of life is referred to by Taylor (1972:27-28) as the *go-between God.* He states:

> God is ever at work in nature, in history and in human living, and wherever there is a flagging or corruption or self-destruction in God's handiwork, He is present to renew and energize and create again … If we think of a Creator at all, we are to find Him always on the inside of creation. And if God is

> really on the inside, we must find Him in the process, not in the gaps. We know now that there are no gaps … If the hand of God is to be recognised in His continuous creation, it must be found not in isolated intrusions, not in any gaps, but in the very process itself.

Peacocke (1993:174-175) likens the role of the Creator to that of the composer

> who, beginning with an arrangement of notes in an apparently simple subject, elaborates and expands it into a fugue by a variety of devices of fragmentation, augmentation and re-association … Thus might the Creator be imagined to enable (the unfolding of) the potentialities of the universe which He himself has given it, nurturing by His redemptive and providential actions those that are to come to fruition in the community of free beings—an improviser of unsurpassed ingenuity—a composer extemporizing a fugue on a given theme.

Although arguments such as these have considerable weight, many determinists believe the strongest reasons for their position come from the theory and practice of modern science. The most general scientific argument for determinism is found in the claim that determinism is a "methodological assumption", a "necessary presupposition" of science (Hasker 1983:39). The scientist is seeking to understand, explain, and control nature; therefore, the way to reach this goal is by discovering and stating the universal laws to which natural processes conform. The scientist, to begin with, does not know what the laws are, that is, what he is trying to determine through investigation. However, it is absolutely essential to assume that such laws exist (i.e., the ones that determinism holds), for if he does not assume this, the whole endeavour makes no sense at all. And this applies as much to the science of human behaviour as to any other part of science. Thus Skinner (1962:257) states: "You can't have a science about a subject matter which hops capriciously about. Perhaps we can never prove that man isn't free; it's an assumption. But the increasing success of a science of behaviour makes it more and more plausible."

One should note that scientists can only presuppose determinism as a working hypothesis. As such, the claim that everything is determined is not a scientific conclusion, but rather a philosophical assumption. As Evans (1996:52) puts it:

> No one has actually discovered the scientific laws that the determinists believe underlie all human behaviour. Though several generations of psychologists, sociologists, and social scientists of other stripes have laboured mightily, no one knows the laws of human behaviour that are in any way comparable to the laws discovered by the physical scientists.

5. God's actions

There is no doubt that the last twenty years has seen a remarkable renewal of interest in the relation of theology and science (see Sanders 2002). One particularly difficult tangle of issues has to do with the idea that God acts in the world, a belief which is deeply rooted in the theistic traditions. From a scientific view, Murphy (1996:4) defines these actions as a *bottom-up and top-down causation.*

> The fundamental forces of physics underlie chemistry and biology, allowing emergent levels of order in the hierarchical structure of systems. Basic physical laws determine what happens at the microscopic level, and hence underlie functioning at the macroscopic levels, through bottom-up causation. The higher levels in turn, however, affect the processes at work at the lower levels through top-down causation (see also Peacocke 1993).

What is the relation between theological depictions of the world as the scene of divine action, and scientific descriptions of the world as an intelligible structure of natural law? Can God be understood to act entirely in and through the regular structures of nature or does a robust account of divine action also require the affirmation that God acts to redirect the course of events in the world, bringing about effects that would not have occurred had God not so acted? If one says the latter, then is one committed to the claim that God at

least sometimes performs miracles, in the familiar (if truncated) modern sense of an event caused by God that "violates" the laws of nature?

No doubt a theistic biblical worldview involves a strong conception of divine sovereignty over the world and human affairs, even as it presumes human freedom and responsibility. While too numerous to list here, biblical passages affirming God's sovereignty and divine action have been grouped by Carson (1981:24-35) under four main headings: (a) God is the creator, ruler, and possessor of all things, (b) God is the ultimate personal cause of all that happens, (c) God elects His people, and (d) God is the unacknowledged source of good fortune or success. As such, no one taking the many scriptural passages attesting to God's actions in the world seriously can embrace currently fashionable libertarian revisionism, which denies God's sovereignty over the contingent events of history.

However, there is no doubt according to Barrett (2004:142), that divine action is a long-standing topic of debate. If the world is no longer construed in terms of the mechanistic Newtonian picture but rather as a world of flexibility and openness to change, what is the manner and scope of divine action and wherein lies the causal joint? Where does God actually act? Furthermore, has God in eternity past *determined* the course of all future events? The key, in my view, is bottom-up and top-down causality.

6. Bottom-up and top-down causality

These particular terms state that all events in the world are the result of some previous event, or events. Accordingly, all of reality is already in a sense predetermined or pre-existent, and therefore nothing new can come into existence. This closed view of the universe sees all events in the world simply as effects of other prior effects—a sort of *supervenience* or *emergence* taking place—and has particular implications for morality, science, and theology. Ultimately, if determinism is correct, then all events in the future are as unalterable as are all events in the past. Consequently, human freedom is simply an illusion and the need of prayer, for example, is irrelevant in changing surrounding reality, as its course of action—in a sense—has already been determined. The question then is: how does this affect or impact on human freedom?

Regarding the question of determinism, Murphy (1995) has proposed that God determines all *quantum indeterminacies* but arranges that law-like regularities usually come about in order to make stable structures and scientific investigation possible, and to ensure that human actions have dependable outcomes, so that moral choices are thus possible. As such, orderly relationships do not constrain God, since He includes them in His purposes. Murphy holds that in human life God acts both at the quantum and at higher levels of mental activity, but does it in such a way that it does not violate human freedom.

An alternative would be to say that while most quantum events occur by chance, God influences certain quantum events without violating the statistical laws of quantum physics (see Russell 1998). However, a possible objection to this model is that it assumes bottom-up causality within nature once God's action has occurred, and thus seems to concede the reductionism's claim that the behaviour of all entities is determined by their smallest parts (or lowest levels). The action would be bottom-up even if one assumed that God directed His intents to the larger wholes (or higher levels) affected by these quantum events. However, most scholars in this field also allow for God's action at higher levels, which then results in a top-down influence on lower levels, as well as quantum effects from the bottom-up.

In line with this, Peacocke (1993:215) says that without argument, God exerts a top-down causality on the world. In his view, God's action is a boundary condition or constraint on relationships at lower levels that does not violate lower-level laws. Generally, boundary conditions may be introduced not just at the spatial or temporal boundaries of a system, but also internally through any additional specification allowed by lower-level laws. In human beings, God could influence the highest evolutionary level, that of mental activity, thereby modifying the neural networks and neurons in the brain.

Peacocke (1993:217) further maintains that divine action is effected in humans down the hierarchy of natural levels. As a result, one has at least some understanding of the relationships between adjacent levels. He suggests that God communicates His purposes through the pattern of events in the world. Thus, one can look on evolutionary history as acts of an agent who expresses intentions but does not follow an exact predetermined plan. Moreover, he says,

God influences one's memories, images, and ideas, just as ones thoughts influence the activity of neurons.

As such, ideas of top-down causation are invoked by both Peacocke (1993:157-165) and Polkinghorne (1998:60; 1994:31-32), but in different ways. Peacocke speaks of the relationship between Creator and creation in panentheistic terms, placing great emphasis on the immanence of God who is all the time creating in and through the processes of the world. These processes are themselves God's action and are thus constrained to be what they are in all their subtlety and fecundity by virtue of the way God interacts with the world-as-a-whole. Sanders (2002:213) finds Peacocke's position to be "the most promising current theory", though he acknowledges that it operates at a high level of abstraction. Accordingly, knowing the interconnectedness of the world to the finest detail, one thus envisages God as being able to interact with the world "at a *supervenient* level of totality"—*holistically*—thereby bringing about particular events and patterns of events (i.e., His predetermined plan). To further expand on the concept of supervenience, Murphy (1996:23) states that it is a term coined by philosophers "to refer to the relation between properties of the same system that pertain to different levels of analysis". However, Murphy does acknowledge that there are a variety of definitions of supervenience, meaning that the term can be used to describe how higher-level properties supervene on lower-level properties but are not reducible to them. Thus, for example, mental properties can be said to supervene on properties of the neurological system; moral properties supervene on psychological or sociological properties.

Taking the above into consideration, Barbour (2000:170) states that if quantum events have necessary but not sufficient physical causes, and if they are not completely determined by the relationships described by the laws of physics, their final determination might be made directly by God. What appears to be chance—which atheists take as an argument against theism—may be the very point at which God acts. Such interaction, then, amounts to the input of information of a pattern-forming nature; the energy content of which can be vanishingly small so that there is no breach in the causal network of natural law. Indeed, it is a form of top-down causation that Peacocke prefers to call *whole-part influence*. Thus, in the view of Murphy (1996:20), Peacocke has made an important contribution to the dialogue between

theology and science by suggesting that theology be understood as the science at the top of the hierarchy, since it studies the most complex of all systems, the interaction between God and the entire universe. Like Sanders (2002), Murphy believes that Peacocke has made an important contribution with his model. For Peacocke, his concern is always to interpret the world's happenings as naturalistically as possible, seeing this as a crucial task of theology in the scientific age. However, in the view of Barbour (2000:170), scientific research finds only law and chance, but perhaps in God's knowledge all events are foreseen and predetermined through a combination of law and particular divine action. Since God's action would be scientifically undetectable, it could be neither proved nor refuted by science. This would exclude any proof of God's action of the kind sought in natural theology, but it would not exclude the possibility of God's action affirmed on other grounds in a wider theology of nature.

Consequently, Polkinghorne (1998) also speaks of top-down causality through providing similarly energy-less *active information*, although he suggests a more direct input into the world's processes—*chaos concept*. In my view, "chaos" is difficult to define. According to Gleick (1988:306), of the chaos scientists he interviewed "No one could quite agree on a definition of the word itself". However, in the view of Polkinghorne, with the chaos concepts of *butterfly effect* and *strange attractor* in mind, it is conceivable that pattern-forming information can lead a system from one arrangement to another. Meaning, since any trajectory from one point within its strange attractor to another does not involve any change of total energy. Thus, Polkinghorne suggests, the divine will could be exerted within any macroscopic part of the world's structure. Besides, he also believes that there is a greater dynamical openness for divine agency via *chaotic* systems than simply through *holistic* operation on the world-as-a-whole. However, Bak (1997:31) has challenged this theory. According to him, the chaotic theory is not robust, since the critical state only occurs in the ephemeral interface between disordered and ordered states. Furthermore, chaotic systems tend to oscillate back and forth due to the strange attractor and cannot build up unique systems slowly over time. In Bak's (1997:31) words, "Chaos theory cannot explain complexity". However, according to Polkinghorne (1998:36), when challenged, macroscopic physical systems—even in their chaotic mode—follow

deterministic equations and therefore cannot be expected to offer any room for manoeuvre. Furthermore, he states, the equations can be understood as estimations to true physical reality, applicable in only those rare and specific situations in which a system can be treated as totally isolated from its environment.

Could divine causality perhaps function only through those who submit by faith to God. Meaning, if people render their wills to God, believing that He knows best, they can then say that no violation of human freedom is forthcoming, since it was freely given over to God to do as He pleases. Thus, when they freely render their wills over to God, He can freely exercise top-down-causality through them, to fulfil His will on the earth. Perhaps those who do not freely submit their wills are not in God's will, so to speak; thus their prayers, for example, are not necessarily answered, specifically if they are not part of God's providential plan for their and others' lives? Therefore, the bottom-up causality will still affect their course of action, so God's divine will is still coming about throughout creation, even though uncommitted minds or mental processors are in the equation.

To sum up, one could present it as follows: God could, in a sense, place laws of determinacy into cells at the quantum level. From this a *determined emergence* could occur throughout the different levels till it reaches the mental states (see Murphy 1996:23). From this mental state, ideas could emerge—one could call them *God ideas* (see Barbour 2000:170). It is at this level that one could either determine or reject, by an act of free-will, to go forward with the emerging ideas to bring about changes in the natural realm of reality. For Murphy (1996:25), this is where top-down *action* occurs; when human volition is involved. Consequently, this brings about the necessary causal changes with the capacity to influence that which sustains its very existence—the natural realm. Thus one has the combination of upward determinism and downward causation. This then brings about human experience, which then changes and adjusts human nature as God would have.

When using prayer as an example of how the process may work, one could say that prayer is the causal joint to start the process of bringing about His will on this earth as the person praying, to a large degree, is rendering their will to a higher power. In other words, as one submits to God, so the ideas and desires

regarding what to pray subtly come on a person's thoughts through emergent properties determined by God at the quantum level. When one prays out those ideas and thoughts that emerge, one is, in a sense, praying God's determined will on the earth, and as a result, things begin to change in the physical.

7. Conclusion

Despite the expression of hope suggested by a libertarianistic view of human freedom, we must realise just how significant is this sense of risk that God supposedly accepts (Ware 2000:51). This is especially so when He chose to create the kind of world He has created. The fact is that the view in question brings into existence a kind of world in which He largely really only exercises a power of love and persuasion towards His volitional creatures. All their free decisions, unknown in advance by Him, have the potential of either advancing or violating His purposes. The success of these purposes rests, rather significantly, in others' hands. One then has to say that not even God *knows* whether His purposes will be fulfilled. We must conclude, therefore, that a libertarianistic view of human freedom is not an option for a theistic view of God. Rather a soft-deterministic view, which merges the ideas of bottom-up and top-down causality, is the better option. In this way, human freedom is not violated, but works within the bounds of Gods providence and sovereignty to bring about His will on earth.

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A Review of William Young, *The Shack*

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Young WP 2007. *The Shack*. Newbury Park: Windblown Media.[2]

1. Introduction to the book and the author

The Shack, one of the most popular and controversial Christian books of recent years, is the fictional work by first-time author William Young, which embodies lengthy conversations between the main character, a man named Mack, and three persons who represent a version of the Trinity. It is a national bestseller widely embraced by some churches and many professing Christians.

The Shack is a fresh, unique, and thought-provoking book that manages to touch the heart in very real ways. Young uses contemporary metaphor to reveal God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Evangelical recording artist Michael W. Smith states, "*The Shack* will leave you craving for the presence of God."

The Shack has been touted as a modern day successor to *Pilgrim's Progress*. Eugene Peterson believes "this book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!" In both C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, one can see how the authors use the power of metaphor and association to illustrate the character and attributes of God.

On the other hand, seminary president Al Mohler says that the book "includes undiluted heresy", and many concur. Given its popularity (number one on the

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New York Times bestseller list for paperback fiction), influence, and mixed reviews, one needs to study the book carefully. Good Christian fiction has the ability to get across a message in an indirect, non-threatening, yet powerful, way. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is the most successful in the genre and has been mightily used of God to teach spiritual truth. What determines the value of fiction is how closely it adheres to Scripture. One would therefore need to utilise Biblical criteria to measure the value of *The Shack*.

2. A summary of the book

The Shack is a story about an Oregon man, Mack. He is married and has a family of his own, but tragedy strikes when his daughter, Missy, is kidnapped and brutally murdered in an isolated shack. Since her death, Mack has lived in a fog state, The Great Sadness, as he accuses that Great Interferer God for letting an innocent die.

A few years after her murder, during a nasty ice storm, while his wife and the two younger children visit relatives in Washington State, Mack receives an invitation from God in his mailbox to meet Him at the shack where his murdered daughter's blood drenched dress was found. Obviously sceptical, Mack takes a chance that God might really show up and heads alone towards the aptly named Hells Canyon National Recreation Area to confront God and hopefully gain closure. There God, in the form of all three members of the Trinity, meets with him for the weekend. God the Father is depicted as a large African woman named Papa, God the Son is depicted as a middle-eastern looking lumberjack, and God the Holy Spirit is depicted as a small Asian woman named Sarayu.

Mack works through the meaning of suffering as he spends the weekend with the Trinity. God gives Mack new insight about Himself, about life, and about pain and tragedy, and Mack goes home a new man. Mack learns more than he bargained for from Papa, who vows to always wipe away the tears as more will occur over the years.

3. Strengths of the book

3.1. It delves into the question of the purpose of suffering

The Shack is a book to guide one through the answers relating to the purpose of suffering. William Young creates an anguished scene of a family losing its innocence to the brutality of a world we cannot even begin to understand. Left to the prison of his thoughts, a father grapples with the task of understanding how a Creator could truly love in the midst of evil, and emerges from a broken world with a broader, yet admittedly broken, understanding of the WHO of God.

In this book, God meets man in horrific tragedy, specifically at the place of the tragedy—the shack. The core of the book seems to be captured when God speaks to the protagonist Mackenzie (Mack):

> Mack, just because I work incredible good out of unspeakable tragedies doesn't mean I orchestrate the tragedies. Don't assume that my using something means I caused it or that I need it to accomplish my purposes. That will only lead you to false notions about me. Grace doesn't depend on suffering to exist, but where there is suffering you will find grace in many facets and colors (p. 185).

3.2. It challenges our perceptions of God

Young reminds all of us of the frailty of our human minds, of the grandeur of God, and of the great mystery behind God's truth. Because we live in a society where truth is often determined by scientific understanding and reason, religion has been reduced to a set of rules and expectations. As a result, we have become a judgmental generation of believers falling devastatingly short of understanding God.

Young challenges his readers' perceptions of God. He challenges our tendency to "put God in a box". Sarayu profoundly captures this when she says:

> Just because you believe something firmly doesn't make it true. Be willing to reexamine what you believe. The more you live in the truth, the more your emotions will help you see clearly. But even then, you don't want to trust them more than me (p. 197).

Through *The Shack*, we are reminded of God's omnipotence and omnipresence, and we are chided for our feeble imaginings of God. *The Shack* explains the Great Paradigm: God can never be twisted to fit all perceptions. And although all Truth is God, that Truth can only be found in the mysterious Trinity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Separate from that, we are deceived.

The Shack serves as a great catalyst for theological discussion and thought. It is a tremendous reminder that God is a God of justice and mercy who calls us to be pursuers of the same. And as our minds and hearts reflect upon that thought, Young delivers his greatest lesson: Apart from Christ, we are powerless over everything—even the fiercest darkness.

3.3. It emphasizes a trusting relationship

Relationship is a central overarching theme in The Shack. The book both depicts and speaks to relationship well. It emphasizes relationship, such as when Jesus says, "Mack, you don't need to have it all figured out. Just be with me" (p. 178). Likewise, simplicity is emphasized in relationship with phrases like "no agenda" and just being with Jesus. The following quotes are valuable as they capture the theme of relationship scattered throughout the book:

> You don't play a game or color a picture with a child to show your superiority. Rather you choose to limit yourself so as to facilitate and honor that relationship. You will even lose a competition to accomplish love. It is not about winning and losing, but about love and respect (p. 106).

> You are free to love without an agenda (p. 181).

> True love never forces (p. 190).

Young ties love with knowing (and love expands, and so it actually *does* grow). He indicates the importance of living out truly loving relationships instead of trying to fulfil the expectations of man (or placing expectations on others):

> [I]f you and I are friends, there is an expectancy that exists within our friendship. When we see each other or are apart, there is expectancy of being together, of laughing and talking. That expectancy has no concrete definition; it is alive and dynamic and everything that emerges from our being together is a unique gift shared by no one else. But what happens if I change that 'expectancy' to an 'expectation' -- spoken or unspoken? Suddenly, law has entered into our relationship. You are now expected to perform in a way that meets my expectations. Our living friendship rapidly deteriorates into a dead thing with rules and requirements. It is no longer about you and me, but about what friends are supposed to do, or responsibilities of a good friend (p. 205).

Young pushes for a deep, genuine, trusting relationship:

> [F]orgiveness does not create a relationship. Unless people speak the truth about what they have done and change their mind and behavior, a relationship of trust is not possible. When you forgive someone you certainly release them from judgment, but without true change, no real relationship can be established (p. 225).

3.4. It respects Scripture

Although there are theological tensions in the book, even concerns, Young respects Scripture and eventually gets to what really matters—glorifying God, truth, relationship (especially with Jesus), and the Bible—as demonstrated by the following quotes:

> The Bible doesn't teach you to follow rules. It is a picture of Jesus. While words may tell you what God is like and even

> what he may want from you, you cannot do any of it on your own. Life and living is in him and in no other (pp. 197-198).
>
> You might see me in a piece of art, or music, or silence, or through people, or in Creation, or in your joy and sorrow. My ability to communicate is limitless, living and transforming … And you will hear and see me in the Bible in fresh ways. Just don't look for rules and principles; look for relationship—a way of coming to be with us (p. 198).
>
> Mack, I don't want to be first among a list of values; I want to be at the center of everything (p. 207).

4. Weaknesses of the book

4.1. Scripture comes in second to inner voices

Young passionately rejects the primacy of Scripture which his character Mack was taught in seminary:

> In seminary he had been taught that … God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects … Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book (pp. 65-66).

Young would prefer a God who communicates with us in our thoughts rather than on paper (i.e., the Bible) (p. 195). Realising the subjectivity of such revelation, he assures us that we will "begin to better recognize [the Holy Spirit's] voice as we continue to grow our relationship" (p. 196). Scripture comes in second to inner voices in Young's theology. Scripture puts God in a box; inner voices make God alive and fresh. This is what Young wants to convey.

4.2. It downplays the church and other related institutions

Young also has little good to say about the church or other related institutions. While Mack had attended seminary, "none of his training was helping in the

least" (p. 91) when it came to understanding God. He consistently depicts the activity of the church in a negative light: Mack is pretty sure he hasn't met the church Jesus loves (p. 177), which is all about relationships, "not a bunch of exhausting work and long list of demands, and not sitting in endless meetings staring at the backs of people's heads, people he really didn't even know" (p. 178). Sunday school (p. 98) and family devotions (p. 107) both take hits as well. Systematic theology itself takes a post-modern broadside as the Holy Spirit says, "I have a great fondness for uncertainty" (p. 203). However, Scripture does not place such words in the mouth of the Holy Spirit.

4.3. It does not provide a clear understanding of salvation by grace through faith

When Mack asks how he can be part of the church, Jesus replies, "It's simple Mack, it's all about relationships and simply sharing life" (p. 178). On an earlier occasion, Jesus tells Mack that he can get out of his mess "by *re-turning*. By turning back to me. By giving up your ways of power and manipulation and just come back to me" (p. 147).

It is clear that Young believes in classic Pelagianism—the belief that original sin did not taint human nature and that mortal will is still capable of choosing good or evil without Divine aid. In short, man has full control, and thus full responsibility for his own salvation, in addition to full responsibility for every sin. According to Pelagian doctrine, man does not require God's grace for salvation (beyond the creation of his will).

Young's theology leaves no room for the doctrine of justification by faith, as reflected in the following question: How is a person declared righteous before God? Young lacks a clear understanding of Abraham's imputed righteousness in the book of Romans. The Bible clearly teaches that a person is saved by grace through faith.

4.4. It does not provide a clear understanding of the gospel message: the death of Christ as the basis of salvation (penal substitution)

Nowhere in *The Shack* is the reader given a clear understanding of the gospel. When Mack asks what Jesus accomplished by dying, he is told, "Through his

death and resurrection, I am now fully reconciled to the world." When pressed to explain, God says that He is reconciled to "the whole world", not just the believer (p. 192). Does this mean that all will be saved? Young never goes that far, but he certainly gives that impression when Mack's father (who was an awful man and showed no signs of being saved) is found in heaven (pp. 214-215), when God says repeatedly He is particularly fond of all people, when God claims that He has forgiven all sins against Him (e.g. pp. 118-119), that He does not "do humiliation, or guilt, or condemnation" (p. 223) and, contrary to large portions of Scripture, God is not a God of judgment. "I don't need to punish people for sin, sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my job to cure it" (p. 120).

The Shack shows that Young lacks an understanding of sin and salvation, and the gospel message. On page 225, Papa says, "I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me, but only some choose relationship." And later, "When you forgive someone you certainly release them from judgment." While Young's comment has some validity, it does not faithfully reflect the teaching of Scripture which portrays God as actively involved in the punishment of sin.

It is clear that Young believes the Pelagian doctrine that Jesus' execution (death on the cross) is devoid of the redemptive quality ascribed to it by orthodox Christian theology. Furthermore, Pelagianism views the role of Jesus as "setting a good example" for the rest of humanity (thus counteracting Adam's bad example). However, the Bible clearly teaches penal substitution, which indicates that on the cross Jesus suffered the death penalty in the sinner's place and so appeased the wrath of God.

4.5. It does not provide a clear understanding of what it means to be a Christian

Young further muddies the waters as he has Jesus reply to Mack's question, "Is that what it means to be a Christian?" Jesus says,

> Who said anything about being a Christian? I'm not a Christian … Those who love me come from every system that exists. They were Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrat, Republicans and many who don't vote or are not

> part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions … I have no desire to make them Christians, but I do want to join them in their transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa, into my brothers and sisters, into my beloved" (p. 182).

With Mack we are confused. "Does that mean," asks Mack, "that all roads will lead to you?" Jesus denies this but then says, "What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you" (p. 182). Jesus apparently means that He will travel any road to "join them in their transformation". The implication is that people are on many roads that lead to their self-transformation. Jesus will join people where they are on that road and apparently aid in that transformation. This is certainly not the teaching of Scripture, which tells us that we must come to the one road, the narrow way that leads to God through Jesus Christ.

4.6. It does not present a clear understanding of God and how we should relate to Him

The main thrust of the novel concerns itself with an understanding of God and how we are to be in relationship to Him. However, the method by which mankind comes into the right relationship with God is cloudy at best in *The Shack*. Young's Trinity is equally confusing. The author does not develop his understanding of God exclusively from Scripture and, in fact, often contradicts biblical teaching. The first issue is that of imagining and presenting human forms for the members of the Trinity. While some slack might be given for Young's portrait of Jesus, who came in human form (although we don't know what He looked like), the first two of the Ten Commandments would forbid us depicting the Father or the Holy Spirit in physical form. When we create an image of God in our imagination we then attempt to relate to that image—which is inevitably a false one. This is the essence of idolatry and is forbidden in the Word.

4.7. It humanises God rather than exalting Him

The portrayal of God throughout the novel is one which humanises Him rather than exalts Him. Young quotes Jacques Ellul,

> No matter what God's power may be, the first aspect of God is never that of absolute Master, the Almighty. It is that of the God who puts Himself on our human level and limits Himself (p. 88).

This quote is in contradiction to the entirety of biblical revelation, which often declares God to be absolute Master, yet in no way mitigates the incarnation, as Young and Ellul are trying to claim.

Further we are told that Jesus "as a human being, had no power in himself to heal anyone" (p. 100). So how did he do so? By trusting in the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Spirit says, "is just the first to do it to the utmost – the first to absolutely trust my life within him" (p. 100). Although these statements contain a certain amount of truth, they are nevertheless confusing and inaccurate, since they clearly downplay the divinity and power of Jesus. Jesus, never ceasing to be fully God, had all Divine Power dwelling in Him. That He chose to limit His use of that power and rely on the Holy Spirit while on earth in no way diminishes His divinity.

Young further humanises God and contradicts Scripture by teaching that all the members of the Trinity took human form at the incarnation: "When we three spoke ourself into human existence as the Son of God, we became fully human" (p. 99). Is Young advocating modalism (an ancient heresy which teaches that the Trinity is not composed of three distinct members but three distinct modes in which God appears throughout human history)? If not, it is abundantly clear that Young believes that the Father died on the cross with the Son and bears the marks of the cross to this day (pp. 95-95, 164). He does not believe that the Father abandoned Jesus on the cross as Scripture implies (p. 96). And any concept of authority and submission in the Godhead is denied (pp. 122, 145), although 1 Corinthians 11:1-3 seems clear that such authority-submission exists. More than that, God submits to *us* as well (p. 145). By the end of the book God is reduced to being our servant as we are His (it's all about relationships, not authority) (pp. 236-237).

4.8. It moves from a biblical understanding of a personal God to an understanding of God in everything (panentheism)

The very essence of God is challenged when Young, quoting from Unitarian-Universalist, Buckminster Fuller, declares God to be a verb not a noun (pp. 194, 204). In a related statement, Young has Jesus say of the Holy Spirit, "She is Creativity; she is Action; she is Breathing of Life" (p. 110). Yet the Bible presents God as a person (noun) not an action (verb). When this truth is denied, we are moving from the biblical understanding of a personal God to an understanding of God in everything (panentheism). The term panentheism (from the Greek) literally means "all (is) in God" (Nikkel 2003). Thus, we are not surprised that when Mack asks the Holy Spirit if he will see her again he is told, "Of course, you might see me in a piece of art, or music, or silence, or through people, or in creation, or in your joy and sorrow" (p. 198). This is not biblical teaching.

This idea seems repeated in a line from a song Missy creates, "Come kiss me wind and take my breath till you and I are one" (p. 233). At what point do we become one with creation? This is an Eastern concept, not a biblical one. Young reinforces his Eastern leanings with a statement right out of New Age (New Spirituality) teachings: Papa tells Mack, "Just say it out loud. There is power in what my children declare" (p. 227).

4.9. It downplays the Sovereignty of God

Young unfortunately, in his attempt to personalise the Godhead, does so at the expense of the sovereignty of God. Young's casual approach to illustrate the sovereign God described in the Bible leads one to think that he was influenced by Harold S. Kushner's book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. This little book was published in the early 1980's and was a big seller. In it, Kushner rejected God's omnipotence and omniscience.

Young's god is similar to the one theorised by Pelagius. According to this view, God created the world and sits back and observes life as it acts itself out—only occasionally intervening, but doing so as to not interfere with man's so-called "free will". Naturally, God often resists the temptation to intervene because of His love for His creatures. This is not unlike a clockmaker who

winds up a clock, places it on the mantle, and watches time go by. The clockmaker's only chore is wind it up from time to time.

5. Conclusion

The Shack, as the cover of the book promises, is "where tragedy confronts eternity". On the one hand, *The Shack* is an interesting contemporary inspirational tale in which a still grieving father learns the truth about his late daughter and why bad things happen to the innocent. It is a strong character driven tragedy, which provides a deep angst-laden storyline in which Mack and the audience understand that God is there for us at our gravest moments, when we feel most abandoned, to help us through the dark into the light.

On the other hand, *The Shack*, while occasionally getting things right, is, in the end, a dangerous piece of fiction. It undermines Scripture and the church, presents at best a mutilated gospel, misrepresents the biblical teachings concerning the Godhead, and offers a New Age understanding of God and the universe. It cannot therefore be regarded as a great novel to explain tragedy and pain. It is a misleading work that will confuse many and lead others astray.

If one is looking for a solid biblically-based book on how to deal with personal suffering, the author strongly recommends Jerry Bridges' book, *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*. Bridges shows how we must learn about God's sovereignty, wisdom, and love if we want to know Him better.

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A Review of Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: "Rediscovering a Life of Faith"*

Mark Pretorius[1]

Borg MJ 2004. *The Heart of Christianity: "Rediscovering a Life of Faith".* San Francisco: Harper Collins (234 Pages).[2]

Marcus Borg, Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture, an endowed chair at Oregon State University, is considered by many to be one of the most influential voices in what is referred to as Progressive Christianity, a movement founded in 1996 by a retired Episcopalian priest, James Adams, in Cambridge, MA. It currently represents the most liberal established Christian group within Christianity.

Borg's philosophy is simply that one does not have to take the Bible literally to take it seriously. He teaches that a historical-metaphorical approach to the Bible has more meaning for today's world than is the historical-grammatical approach or that of biblical literalism. Borg summarizes his description of the historical-metaphorical approach by stating that the Bible is the Word of God metaphorically.

Although I approached this book with an open mind, and having read a couple of his other books, I have always struggled with his approach. There were some chapters that I found to contain views that I could not adopt. One was his view of religious pluralism (like many liberal Christians, he has real trouble with the idea that Jesus is the only way to salvation), and another was his view of the Bible and the inerrancy of Scripture.

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

Besides this, Borg clearly seems to reject that the miracles in the Bible really happened, such as Jesus turning the water into wine. He instead reads a metaphorical meaning into it (as do other liberals who cannot accept Biblical miracles as literal). Borg claims that when we read the Bible as a literal document, we miss the metaphorical meaning (the meaning for life).

His argument is simply that we diminish our faith stories by making them merely literal. He pushes for the "more-than-literal" meanings in the Christian scripture. In my view, it is a growing modern Western mind-set that he portrays. Sadly, there are many theologians holding prominent positions in academia, who hold fast to this approach to Scripture.

As one reviewer of his work bluntly stated:

> Evangelicals beware—this is the same Marcus Borg of the Jesus Seminar, the one who has categorically stated that he does not believe that Christianity is the only path of salvation, that the Bible is the Word of God, that Jesus experienced a bodily resurrection, or that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God.

That said, Borg never degrades those who do hold to a strong doctrinal stance and a literal interpretation of the Bible, much of which he considers to be metaphorical. But while many evangelicals dismiss him outright, Borg is obviously trying to build a bridge between the conservative and liberal factions in the church. For example, Borg talks about the "earlier paradigm" of Christianity and an "emerging paradigm". He discusses the history of the "earlier paradigm" and provides useful insights such as the recent notions of Biblical infallibility (post-Enlightenment) and Papal infallibility (1870), which many may assume have always been a big part of the Christian tradition.

Some may be surprised at some of his thoughts, like his suggestion that liberals begin using the term "born-again" to describe their transformation from an old way to a new way of being Christian. He also strongly stresses how important it is to have an intimate relationship with God, and he tries to encourage those who have become disillusioned with conservative Christianity to give it another chance, because the times have changed, and from those changes a new, inclusive paradigm has emerged.

If one could summarise Borg's theology, it would be something like this. As we live a life in God, and take seriously what God takes seriously, which we see in the person of Jesus, we are transformed in this life, saved in this life, so that we bring about the kingdom of God on earth. For Borg, and many of his persuasion, that is what really matters, not believing in a set of propositions so that we can get to heaven. Borg cares little for traditional Christianity with its salvific and exclusivistic functions, and rather sees historical, metaphorical, and sacramental richness in the practices of Christianity, which, in his view, is seriously lacking in the church today.

Clearly, his books, and this one in particular, are not for 'fundamentalist Christians' unless they are willing to reconsider some of their most strongly held views. However, for those who are willing to take a deeper look at the philosophy of Progressive Christianity, this book is an interesting read.