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Interpreting Parables: One Point or Many?

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Abstract

Two modes of parable interpretation have dominated much of church history. The first and most dominant was allegorization, in which each element in the parable narrative was contrasted with a real life referent, thought to communicate an enigmatic or spiritual truth. In contrast to the allegorical exegetical method is the single-lesson interpretive model, which advocates that parables teach a single lesson. None of these interpretive models are adequate, for they either oversimplifying or unnecessarily allegorising the parables of Jesus. The model recommended by Blomberg, which views the parables as teaching one, two, or three lessons, contingent on the number of main characters in the parables, avoids the pitfalls on the two extremes, and ought to be adopted as the standard evangelical model.

1. Introduction

Henry Bosch, author of *Our Daily Bread*, once wrote that although Socrates taught forty years, Plato fifty, and Aristotle forty, Jesus's public ministry lasted less than three years, yet the influence of his life far outweighs the combined 130 years of the three greatest philosophers

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of all antiquity. The same is true of his parables. Although wise-men before and after him taught in parables, those spoken by Christ remain the best known and most studied stories in the world. Such popular attractiveness in both academic and lay contexts, however, has not prevented their frequent misinterpretation. Snodgrass (2000:177) is more severe in his expression, writing that 'throughout much of the church's history the parables of Jesus have been mistreated, rearranged, abused, and butchered'. The proper interpretation of the parables, therefore, is not only academically pertinent, but also spiritually imperative.

Thus, the methodological question that all parable interpreters must face is this: what hermeneutical rule governs their proper interpretation? Space does not permit an in-depth analysis of the various interpretive methods. Rather, this article is rooted in the deduction that Blomberg's interpretive hypothesis is distinguished, receiving less attention than it truly deserves. Thus, this short representation is an endorsement of Blomberg's model of parable interpretation.

Because no hermeneutical model exists in a historical or academic vacuum, this article shall commence with is a brief historical survey of parable interpretation. With the contextual placement of Blomberg's model defined, the focus will shift to a brief exposition, evaluation, and endorsement of his proposed hypothesis.

2. A Brief Historical Survey

Until the late nineteenth century, the broad-spectrum approach to parable interpretation was allegoricalism (distinct from *allegory* as a literary form). It was believed that the only method to recognize the accurate meaning and teachings of the parables was through the allegorical interpretive model. The *modus operandi* of the allegorical

interpretive system revolves around the supposition that each element of the parable narrative symbolizes something other than itself, namely, a corresponding spiritual item. Thus, the task of the interpreter is, firstly, to *allocate*² the proper meaning to each story element, and secondly, to *decode* the spiritual teaching of the parable story in light of the one-to-one corresponding spiritual elements. This method remained unvarying, 'the only development being the extent of the allegorizing, as later writers went into more detail, and in the Middle Ages they utilized the fourfold-sense method' (Osborne 2006:308). To illustrate the highly subjective and miscellaneous connotations assigned to the parable elements, Snodgrass (2008:4) highlights a typical allocation of the interpretive keys to the parable of the Good Samaritan, as given by Augustine:

The man is Adam; Jerusalem is the heavenly city; Jericho is the moon, which stands for our mortality; the robbers are the devil and his angels who strip the man of his immortality and beat him by persuading him to sin; the oil and wine are the comfort of hope and the encouragement of work; the donkey is the incarnation; the inn is the church; the next day is after the resurrection of Christ; the innkeeper is the Apostle Paul; and the two denarii are the two commandments of love or the promise of his life and that which is to come.

The level of Augustine's allegorization is unique only in the number of elements given significance (no fewer than 18), for church fathers and theologians both before (e.g. Marcion of Sinope 85–160,³ Clement of

² The process of allocating the spiritual meaning of each parable element was highly subjective. Hence, I chose to use the word *allocate*, instead of the word *discover*.

³ According to Stein (1981:43), the earliest record of allegorizing parables is found in the writings of the heretic, Marcion of Sinop, who equated the good Samaritan with Jesus Christ, appearing for the first time in history between Jerusalem and Jericho (so Roukema 2004:56-74).

Alexandria 150–215;⁴ Origen 185–254⁵) and after him (e.g. John Cassian 360–435;⁶ Thomas Aquinas 1225–1274⁷) devotedly employed the allegorical interpretive method.

Although dissenters were present (e.g. John Chrysostom 347–407;⁸ Theodore of Mopsuestia 350–428;⁹ John Calvin 1509–1564¹⁰), their

⁴ Clement allegorized the parables more fully than anyone before him. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he attributed a spiritualized element to the wine (the blood of David's wine), the oil (compassion of the Father), the wounds (fears, lusts, wraths, pains, deceits, and pleasures), and even to the binding of the wounds (love, faith, hope, and salvation) (Stein 1981:44).

⁵ Origen was so regular and *effective* with the allegorical method that he became known as the father of symbolic interpretation. Origen believed that Scripture 'contains three levels of meaning, corresponding to the threefold Pauline (and Platonic) division of a person into body, soul, and spirit. The bodily level of Scripture, the bare letter, is normally helpful as it stands to meet the needs of the more simple. The psychic level, corresponding to the soul, is for making progress in perfection. ... [The] spiritual interpretation deals with "unspeakable mysteries" so as to make humanity a "partaker of all the doctrines of the Spirit's counsel"' (Trigg 1983:120-121, 126).

⁶ Adding an additional dimension to Origen's threefold method, Cassian was an Origenist monk who proposed that Scripture speaks in four senses, namely, (a) the literal, (b) allegorical, (c) moral, and (d) anagogical senses. In explanation, Cassian wrote that 'the only Jerusalem can be understood in four different ways, in the historical sense as the city of the Jews, in allegory as the Church of Christ, in anagoge as the heavenly city of God "which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:6), in the topological sense as the human soul' (John Cassian, trans. Colm Luibheid 1985:160).

⁷ Thomas Aquinas inherited the fourfold method of biblical interpretation from his Christian ancestors, and seemingly left the method largely unaltered (Lusk 2000). However, his commentary on the parable of the Good Samaritan (in *Catena Aurea*) essentially became a compendium of scholastic and earlier allegorical interpretations (Stein 1981:48).

⁸ 'As an exegete, Chrysostom is of the highest importance, for he is the chief and almost the only successful representative of the exegetical principles of the School of Antioch. Diodorus of Tarsus had initiated him into the grammatico-historical method

voices were not only too soft, but too often they were inconsistent in applying the very method [non-allegorical interpretation] they advocated (Osborn 2006:308). Throughout the first 1800 years, the church essentially followed the Alexandrian interpretive method, allegorizing the parables.

The definitive break with allegorizing, filtering into mainstream theological thought, came only in 1888, through the two volume work on the parables by German New Testament scholar, Adolf Jülicher, whose work was ostensibly a vehement reaction to allegoricalism. In his two volume form-critical work entitled *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* ('The Parable-talks of Jesus'), Jülicher rejected allegory 'wholesale' (both as genre and interpretive method), identifying parables as extended similes that cannot be interpreted metaphorically. Jülicher's conclusion was threefold:

1. Parables contain a single picture and teach a single maxim, having only one point of contact between image and object (Osborn 2006:309; Snodgrass 2008:4-5; Plummer 2009:6).

of that school, which was in strong opposition to the eccentric, allegorical, and mystical interpretation of Origen and the Alexandrian School' (www.newadvent.org). For his protest against allegorizing, see John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 64.3.

⁹ Theodore likewise was a strong opponent of allegorism practiced by the Alexandrian school, staunchly defended the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation, namely, that the text should be interpreted according to the rules of grammar and the context of history (Ramm 1970:48; Virkler 1999:62).

¹⁰ Although Martin Luther was himself a protester of the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, often referring to allegorizing as *silly*, *absurd* and even *altogether useless* (Plummer 2009:11), it was Calvin who *consistently* (in both practice and theory) rejected the allegorical method in his interpretation of the parables. See Torrance D W and Torrance T F (1972).

2. Parables that contain allegorical elements are later explanatory additions inserted by the disciples. He encouraged attempts to discovering (reconstructing) the original parable forms.
3. Parables may be categorized into three groupings, namely, similitudes, parables proper, and example stories.

Such conclusions were extremely influential in the subsequent works by scholars such as C. H. Dodd (1961) and J. Jeremias (1954),¹¹ who further developed Jülicher's thesis by attempting not only to reconstruct the parables (by removing allegorical features added by the church), but also by emphasizing the importance of cultural, historical and eschatological context of the parables¹² (Snodgrass 2004:180). The literary-critical method of parable interpretation ensured further branching in terms of hermeneutical approaches. For example, the redactional-critical method introduced a number of significant 'developments'¹³ in terms of parable interpretation, chief among which were the focus on (a) highlighting of distinctive theological emphases of parallel versions, and (b) the setting of individual passages within a larger context contained by the outline of a particular Evangelist¹⁴ (Blomberg 1991:4-5). In addition, redaction critics began to consider

¹¹ Particularly noteworthy is Jeremias's depictions of the ten ways in which the early church altered the parables. According to Snodgrass (2004:180), this provided the blueprint for reconstructing the original form of the parables and their subsequent meaning.

¹² Especially important to mention are the works of Derrett (1970; 1977-1978) and Bailey (1976), both giving due emphasis to Jewish and Palestinian culture in attempts to interpret parables correctly. These included comparing Jesus's parables to rabbinic parables. Such emphases in parable interpretation even became a method in its own right.

¹³ I use this word with caution, for the various critical literary approaches are not immune to abuse.

¹⁴ Such emphases came to the forefront especially through the works of Carlston (1979), Labrecht (1981), and Donahue (1988).

the parables and their function within a specific gospel (Bailey 1976) or chapter (Kingsbury 1969).

A key figure in the single-point parable interpretation is Gordon Fee, who has done much to popularize this hermeneutical method. In his book *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Fee and Stuart 1993), he likens interpreting parables to interpreting a joke, in which the initial points of reference serve merely as a build-up to the final punch-line (139). Thus, the interpreter must avoid complicating the parables by adding additional lessons, drawn from merely context information.

The end of the 1960s also marked the birth of several new liberal-critical approaches to parable interpretation, such as the new hermeneutic,¹⁵ structuralism,¹⁶ and post-structuralism.¹⁷ Such methods waned both in popularity and credibility by the mid to late 1980s. As Snodgrass (2004:185) so aptly expressed, 'Partly because of modern literary criticism and reader-response approaches to literature, we have

¹⁵ The new hermeneutic refers 'to a movement which emphasizes the subjectivity of the process of interpreting the biblical text' (Blomberg 1990:134). The chief work is that of Thiselton (1970).

¹⁶ Structuralistic interpretations emphasize the thorough analysis of the form and structure of the parables, so as to derive the true meaning of a particular narrative text. As Snodgrass (2004:183) explains, structuralists 'did not seek the historical meaning of Jesus or of the evangelists. Instead, they compared both surface and deep structures of various texts to chart the movements, motives, functions, oppositions, and resolutions within the text.' The most notable structuralist work was that of Funk (1966).

¹⁷ According to Blomberg (1991:5), the two signature methods of poststructuralist interpretation of the parables are *reader-response criticism* (the interpretive method focusing on the readers of the text, whereby meaning from a particular text may be derived mainly through the readers' interaction with the text), and *deconstructionism* (the view that text cannot have an objective meaning in any sense of the word). See Seung (1982) and Tompkins (1980).

come full circle. Some scholars and their followers now allegorize in ways not unlike Augustine's.'

In the last ten years or so, a number of interesting models for parable interpretation have surfaced in scholarly circles. For example, some have suggested that the parables are in fact anti-ecclesiological rhetoric, aimed at rich authority figures and institutionalized powers of Jesus's day, who consistently ignored and perpetuated the plight of the poor (see Schottroff 2006). Others, like Hultgren (2000), rejected sweeping generalizations in parable interpretations (e.g. one point per parable, many points per parable, parables as apologetic against critics), and attempted to focus on interpreting each parable in its own right and canonical context (see Hultgren 2000; Kistemaker 2002). While others have even argued that 'various interpretations of biblical passages [i.e.: parables] are valued in their own right and given a level of authority and influence which sometimes equals or exceeds the inspired text' (Plummer 2009:6; cf. Treier 2008). Lastly, Young's (2008) work is worthy of mention, who expressed that although the parables generally teach a single lesson, they are open to diverse interpretations (i.e. the lesson is contingent on who is assumed to be addressed is being addressed). However, none of the above models have gained much support from their contemporaries.

At this point, it is perhaps important to note that in the last three decades a number of prominent scholars have returned to the allegorical model of parable interpretation. For example, Dominic Crossan initially rejected allegory but later conceded that the parables are indeed paradoxical and polyvalent (Crossan 2008; cf. Tolbert 1979).¹⁸

¹⁸ Mary Ann Tolbert likewise saw the parables as allegories, but argued for a limit in the number of parallels between object and real life, caused by the parables' placing in numerous contexts by the disciples (Thiselton 2009:56).

Likewise, Ulrich Luz 'tried to justify allegorizing—both the allegorizing of the ancient church and present-day allegorizing' (Snodgrass 2004; cf. Luz 2001). The crowning work on parable interpretation, however, belongs to Craig Blomberg, who brought much-needed order and common sense to the allegorical interpretive model.

From the above survey, it is clear that over the past two millennia, the pendulum of parable interpretive method has swung from subjective allegorization, to Jülicher's single point hypothesis, to a kind of poststructuralist polyvalence theory of unrestricted lessons in each parable as required by the context of its application. The following section is a brief outline of Blomberg's thesis, as he attempts to advance the methodological gap in parable interpretation.

3. Blomberg's Thesis

Blomberg's (date) primary concern is one of methodology, namely, to offer a responsible and controlled allegorical approach to parable interpretation that neither oversimplifies nor allegorizes unconstrained the message of the text. The tenets of Blomberg's thesis may be summed up in the following two broad points: (a) the parables of Jesus are sufficiently similar to other demonstrable allegorical works (e.g. rabbinic literature) that they too must be recognized as allegories,¹⁹ thus requiring *controlled* allegorical analysis (68); (b) the primary details

¹⁹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *allegory* in common usage means 'an extended or continued metaphor'. In light of this, parables are in some sense extended metaphors. As Hultgren (2000:13) correctly noted (referencing the conclusions of Brown 1965:324), 'parable and allegory were not sharply differentiated in the world of Jesus and his contemporaries'. It is therefore not wise to divide so sharply between the two.

which disclose an allegorical level of meaning are the narrative's principal characters (68). In other words, narrative characters control the degree of allegory. Hence, the parables of Jesus generally contain one, two, or three narrative characters, and hence each parable makes one, two, or three points appropriately (166). Additional details only provide local color and or human interest to enhance the fictional picture constructed.

3.1. Apologetic for Point 1: Parables Are Essentially Allegories, and Allegories Are Essentially Extended Metaphors

Space constraints permit only a brief statement on the nature of allegory. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *allegory* in common usage means 'an extended or continued metaphor'; thus parables are in some sense extended metaphors (Tate 2008:148). In fact, it seems that numerous literary linguists view parables as an extension of metaphor, or extended metaphors.²⁰ Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that 'parable and allegory were not sharply differentiated in the world of Jesus and his contemporaries' (Hultgren 2000:13, quoting the conclusion of Brown 1965:324). Evidently, then, the line between parables and allegories is a fluid one, and any attempt to sharply divide them is misplaced.

Reflecting on past scholarship, Snodgrass (2008:16) expressed his sentiments, writing that 'tremendous effort has been expended trying to distinguish parable and allegory, but in the end we must admit that the effort is a complete failure, despite the gallons of ink expended. ... Parables are allegorical, some more so than others.' This was likewise expressed by Ryken (2004:407): 'despite all that some (though not all)

²⁰ For parables as extended metaphors, see Wilder (1964), Funk (1966), Via (1967), and TeSelle (1975).

biblical scholars have said to the contrary, the parables fit any standard literary definition of allegory' (Ryken 1984). The parables are therefore allegories, differing only in degree to which they are symbolic.²¹

This is one of the three foundational deductions of Blomberg, offering the following points as evidence.

Firstly, although the parables were generally restricted to the Greek pater of rhetoric (i.e. Aristotelian), the specific Hebrew background of allegorical parables should be the key to understanding the parables of Jesus, especially since his parables used the language and thought forms of Aramaic (36). In other words, there is virtually no difference in structure or form between rabbinic parables, and the parables of Jesus. In fact, the parables may contain subtle allusions to various Old Testament texts not usually discussed as background to for these stories (45). Thus, 'it was unfair to oppose the parables of the rabbis so diametrically to those of Jesus (37). In light of this, Blomberg believes that rhetorically, the Aristotelian distinction between simile and metaphor is greatly exaggerated, for these two forms of writing and speaking were not poles apart in the Greco-Roman world (37).

Secondly, although form critics have pointed out the tendency of oral traditions to allegorize simple stories like some of the parables, this hypothesis is counterbalanced by the even more common tendency to abbreviate and de-allegorize them (41).

Thirdly, interpreting the parables emblematically is an unavoidable method of exegeting parables. Those who deny it in theory cannot avoid it practice (41). A great example of this inconsistency between theory and application is Dodd. Although he advocated a non-allegorical

²¹ An attractive model was proposed by Frye (1957:89-92), namely, an allegorical sliding scale continuum.

exegetical framework for interpreting the parables, Dodd wound up 'conceding that the natural meaning which Jesus most likely intended is that the vineyard is Israel; the tenants, the Jewish leaders; the servants, the prophets; and the son, Jesus' (Black, in Blomberg 1990:42). Blomberg then continues on the topic of the nature of parables, noting that it is not multiple points of comparison which make a narrative an allegory; rather, any narrative with both a literal and a metaphorical meaning is in essence allegorical (42).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, identifying a narrative as an allegory is a far cry from imposing an allegorical interpretation on a passage which was never intended to contain second level meaning (43).

3.2. Apology for Point 2: Main Characters of the Parables Control the Extent of the Allegory

Blomberg admits that viewing parables as allegories permits many of them to make more than one main point, but does not *per se* establish how many points to look for. Although lengthy, his reflections (1991:6) deserve full mention:

Newer movements like poststructuralism often support allegorical interpretations but from the standpoint of an unlimited polyvalence. Form criticism and redaction criticism suggest ways in which the tradition and the evangelists have creatively handled their sources, but they do not successfully dislodge the parables *en masse* from their well-established position as among the most undeniably authentic teachings of Jesus. In fact, more of the material sometimes assigned to later tradition may be authentic than is usually recognized. Structuralism and the literary study of parables as narratives point to a consistent triadic design for many of the stories and suggest the possibility of identifying

a central lesson with each of three main characters. Here lies an attractive middle ground between the Procrustean bed of Jülicher's one main point and the sea of relativism of some kinds of poststructuralist polyvalence. Perhaps the parables can be classified according to the number of main characters and the nature of the relationships among those characters. Perhaps each main character discloses an important lesson which a given parable wishes to communicate. Perhaps those lessons emerge as one treats the parables as allegories, at least to the extent that one assumes that the central actors represent spiritual counterparts.

He further adds that hermeneuts should carefully note that 'elements other than the main characters will have metaphorical referents only to the extent that they fit in with the meaning established by the referents of the main characters, and all allegorical interpretation must result in that which would have been intelligible to first-century Palestinian audience' (163).

Some scholars (e.g. Crossan 1980; Luz 2001; Ryken 2007) have admitted that parables often teach more than one main lesson. Even Fee has admitted that the kingdom parables have a two-fold thrust (already/not yet), communicating two lessons (1993:145). In light of viewing parables as extended metaphors, the important question that remains is to discern when to stop interpreting. 'As with metaphor, parable interpretation is about understanding the limit—and the significance—of the analogy' (Snodgrass 2008:28). But can the limits be set purely by observing from context the intent of the analogy, as further suggested by Snodgrass? The answer is no, for discovering the intent is not always possible. Some have suggested the feasibility of utilizing stock imagery for determining the extent of the allegory. For example, a father, a master, a judge, or a king always denotes God. Likewise, a son always represents Jesus, a fig tree, vineyard, or vine

always represent Israel or God's people. However, although understanding of stock imagery in parable interpretation is essential, it cannot set the limit for what is to be interpreted, and what is to be considered context. Therefore, viewing parables as allegories controlled by the main characters and limited by the historical, cultural, and religious context, as well as the specific location within the extant sources (Anderson 2008), yields much fruit in terms of understanding the parables of Jesus.

In light of the above, Blomberg offers the following classification of the parables:

Simple three-point parables: three main characters, including an authority figure (master) representing God, and two contrasting subordinates (good/wicked subordinate or focal/peripheral subordinate), representing respectively God's people and those who reject him. Examples include *the prodigal son* (Luke 15:11-32), the parables of *the lost sheep and the lost coin* (Luke 15:4-10; Matt. 18:12-14), the parable of *the two debtors* (Luke 7:41-43), and *the two sons* (Matt. 21:28-32).

Complex three-point parables: more than three main characters, ultimately displaying the same triangular structure as the simple 3-point parables.²² In other words, one particular role (usually the good/wicked subordinate) may be expressed and illustrated in multiple examples (e.g. priest and Levite in the Good Samaritan). Examples include the parable of *the talents* (Matt. 25:14-30), the parable of *the workers in the vineyard* (Matt. 20:1-16), and the parable of *the sower* (Matt. 13:1-23).

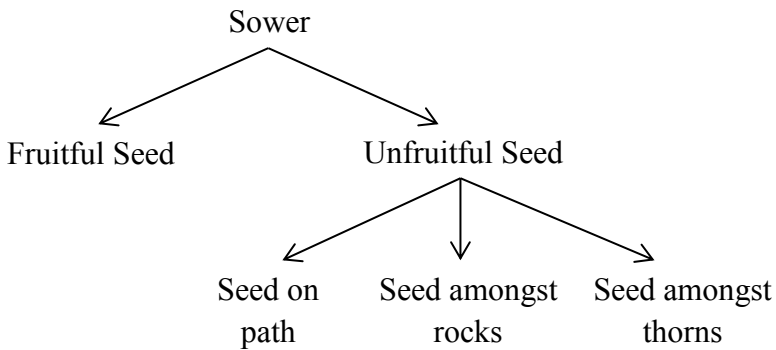
Two and one-point parables: only two or one main character per narrative, signifying less elaborate allegories. Examples of two-point

²² An exception is the parable of *the wicked tenants*, which defies the suggested categorizations, may make as many as four points.

parables include the parable of *the Pharisee and the tax collector* (Luke 18:9-14), the parable of *the two builders* (Matt. 7:24-27), and the parable of *the unprofitable servant* (Luke 17:7-10). Examples of simple one-point parables embrace parables such as *the mustard seed and leaven* (Luke 13:18-21) and *the tower builder and the warring king* (Luke 14:28-33).

4. An Example: The Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:5-15)

The parable of the sower is a complex three point parable, describing in detail four types of soils. More specifically, 'the three unfruitful soils are pitted against the fruitful one, and the sower is the unifying figure or third main "character"' (Blomberg 1992:226).



Applying Blomberg's interpretive hypothesis, the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants yields three lessons: (1) Like the sower, God sows his Word indiscriminately, amongst all kinds of people. (2) Like the three kinds of unfruitful soils, many who hear his Word will respond inadequately, be it (a) complete lack of positive response as a

result of the lure of evil, (b) fleeting superficiality camouflaged as true dedication, or (c) genuine interest accompanied by conviction that simply falls short of due to the rigorous demands of discipleship. (3) Like the fruitful soil, the only genuine response to God's Word is the obedience and perseverance which demonstrates true regeneration (Blomberg 1992:228).

For purposes of contrast, it is helpful to end this short discourse with a contrast between the Blomberg's interpretative model and the single-point method represented by Fee.

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16)	
<i>Key lessons according to Blomberg</i>	<i>Key lesson according to Fee</i>
1. None of God's people will be treated unfairly—no evil will be shortchanged. 2. Many seemingly less deserving people will be treated generously, due to God's sovereign choice. 3. All true disciples are equal in God's eyes.	God is gracious, and the righteous should not begrudge God's generosity.

It would be unwise and unwarranted to discard wholesale the conclusions of the single point parable interpretive scheme, for it certainly identifies the central thrust of the parable. Yet, however succinct and precise this conclusion, it seems forcefully oversimplified. Although in the case of two or three point parables it may be possible to gather the lessons into a single proposition or sentence, this may result in generalization, robbing the parable of its particular spectrum of application and context. The opposite seems less likely. In other words, it is rather implausible to propose that the three lessons drawn from

each of the main characters results in unnecessarily cluttered and effusive conclusions.

5. Conclusion

Although summarising the meaning of the parable under a single sentence is possible, it often leads to oversimplification, and consequently to a loss of important truths. At first glance, it seems that the hypothesis put forward by Blomberg avoids the pitfall of both uncontrolled allegorization and rigid one-point per parable interpretation. His interpretive model likewise permits a more natural integration of the various interpretive methods—methods in which canonical context, and cultural background studies remain the major focus.

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The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind

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Abstract

This journal article considers ways in which the Garden of Eden functioned as a primordial temple for humankind. An examination of the creation narrative points to Eden as the earliest-occurring sacred space. Because it is a prototype and archetype of future temples, Eden provides a conceptual framework for understanding and appreciating their purpose. Moreover, an analysis of the biblical data indicates that God intended Adam and Eve to serve as His sacerdotal vice-regents in the garden. Indeed, Eden is regarded as the starting point for fellowship between God and redeemed humanity.

1. Introduction

Meredith Kline, in his discussion of Eden, refers to it as a ‘temple-garden’ (2006:48) and the archetypal ‘holy mountain of God’ (49; cf.

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Gen 2:8–3:24). This implies that the primordial sanctuary is representative of all future shrines and provides a conceptual framework for understanding and appreciating their purpose. Kline also speaks of Eden as the 'vertical cosmic axis of the kingdom' and the metaphysical link 'extending from earth to heaven'. Later, in recounting the 'dream episode' Jacob experienced at Bethel (cf. 28:10–22), Kline pointed to the 'stair-structure' that the patriarch saw as representing the 'cosmic-axis, the holy mountain focus, the Presence-place of the Lord of glory' (375).

Succinctly put, a variety of terrestrial shrines in Scripture are regarded as sacred points of contact between the God of glory and His creation. Expressed in a different way, each of these sanctums is a physical localization of the axis mundi (or global nexus) that establishes a link 'between heaven and earth' (Waltke 2007:255; cf. Cohen 1981:54; McCurley 1983:126–127). This 'world axis' extends 'invisibly beyond what [can] be seen' of it 'into the heights and into the depths' (Talmon 1997:439). The preceding observations broach one important aspect of the temple motif as a conceptual and linguistic framework for understanding the 'drama of brokenness and restoration' detailed in Scripture (Brueggemann 2005:558).

2. Clarifying the Concept of the Temple

There is extensive scholarly discourse about the concept of the 'temple' within numerous ancient corpora. The latter include the following texts: the Old Testament (or Tanakh), the New Testament, and the Jewish writings penned during the intertestamental period (approximately 432–5 B.C.) and the era of Second Temple Judaism (approximately 515 B.C.–A.D. 70.; cf. Koester 1989:ix; Stevens 2006:3). Admittedly, there is some overlap between the intertestamental period and the era of Second

Temple Judaism. (Unless otherwise noted, the dates used throughout this essay are based on the timeline appearing in the Zondervan TNIV Study Bible, 2006:1656–1658).

The current discussion raises the important question, 'What is the temple?' In brief, it may be defined as a 'sacred, demarcated place' (Lundquist 2008:xi) in which the deity resides and 'cultic rituals' (Walton 2006:113) are performed (cf. Haran 1995:13; Lundquist 1994a:273; Marshall 1989:207). (The word 'cult' here refers to a group's 'social experience of the deity' through the 'performance' of rituals; McKenzie 1974:37). It was from 'very obscure beginnings' that the notion of the 'heavenly dwelling of God' became firmly entrenched in the 'mind of Judaism' and expanded to include the 'traditional hope of the eschatological or new temple' (McKelvey 1969:40). Like other religious symbols from the ancient Near East, the shrine concept is a 'multivalent ... iconic vehicle' and thus cannot be 'reduced to simply one meaning' (Ollenburger 1987:19).

The predominant 'sources of information' about the temple cultus include 'material artifacts and literary texts, both biblical and extrabiblical' (Stevens 2006:7). On the one hand, archaeologists have mainly focused on the 'constituent elements and minutiae', with the goal of surfacing 'ancient Near Eastern parallels for architectural features, furnishings, and decorative motifs'. On the other hand, specialists in biblical and theological studies have pondered the 'general religious significance of the structure' (Bloch-Smith 1994:18; cf. Baltzer 1965:263). The latter aim is most in line with the general intent of this essay.

3. Eden as a Primordial Temple

The literary backdrop for this paper is Eden with its idyllic garden (Gen 2:8). The focus of the narrative is not limited to the origin of the human race, but also includes the 'beginnings of life' (Fretheim 1994:336). The account of the latter starts in 1:1, the first words of which identify God as the originator of all creation. In fact, He is at the center of this narrative. Concededly, atheists insist that the notion of God is a fabrication (cf. Lioy 2008:18), and that each person is the 'center, the springboard, and the only frame of reference for moral guidelines' (Hamilton 1990:166). Be that as it may, the opening chapters of Genesis proclaim that 'creation is not a careless, casual, or accidental matter' (Brueggemann 1982:17). As the source of 'ultimate Reality', God alone gives 'meaning and significance to everything else'. Indeed, apart from Him there cannot be any 'meaning at all' (Gese 1981:222). Even individual human existence finds its selfhood and purpose in the Creator-King (cf. Johnson 2006:45; Lioy 2005:33).

With respect to Eden, the Hebrew noun rendered 'garden' (*gan*; 2:8) denotes a 'fenced-off enclosure', especially one that is 'protected by a wall or a hedge' (Dumbrell 2002:56; cf. 2 Kings 25:4; Neh 3:15; Jer 39:4; 52:7). It would be comparable to a 'park of trees' (von Rad 1972:77; cf. Hamilton 1990:161; Leupold 1981:1:117; Renckens 1964:199–200; Walton 2003b:202; Wallace 1992a:281). In Genesis 2:8, 'Eden' is more than a symbol. It refers to a 'geographical designation' (Speiser 1964:16). A number of conceptual and linguistic parallels in Scripture indicate that this lush, bucolic spot was a primordial temple or sacred space for humankind (cf. Stordalen 2000:294; Wenham 1994:399, 401). The Creator did not bring Eden into existence 'strictly for the habitation of humans'; instead, they were stewards whom He 'invited to enjoy and cultivate' His garden (Wallace 1992b:907).

The underlying premise is that ever since the dawn of time, the entire world has been God's sanctuary (cf. Levenson 1994:86; Lioy 2005:27). The preceding truth is affirmed in Isaiah 66:1, in which the Almighty declared that the heavens are His 'throne', and the earth is His 'footstool'. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from Today's New International Version, hereafter abbreviated, TNIV). The exalted King is depicted as reposing on His glorious royal seat and stooping down from His celestial temple to gaze at the heavens and the earth (cf. Isa 40:22, 26; Ps 113:4–6). According to 102:25, the Creator 'laid the foundations of the earth'. As well, the vast stretches of the universe are the 'work of [His] hands'. He is so powerful that, metaphorically speaking, He dresses Himself in a robe made out of light and stretches out the heavens like a tent curtain (104:2). He also uses the clouds as His chariot, and He rides upon the wings of the wind (v. 3). Moreover, the Lord of all creation placed the earth firmly on its foundations, ensuring that it will never be upended (v. 5; cf. 93:1–2).

From these sorts of passages one discerns that the entire universe is a 'sacramental place' as well as a window into 'transcendent reality' that points people beyond themselves and their material world to the 'beauty, truth and power' of the Creator (Vander Zee 2004:41). At one end of the axis of glory are the 'heavens' (Amos 9:6), where God built the upper rooms of His 'palace'. At the other end is the 'earth', the spot where the Lord placed the foundation supports of the entire cosmos. In this depiction of reality, the 'primary axis is vertical'. It signifies the 'relation between heaven and earth' as well as the 'cosmic order in relation to the social order' (Anderson 1999:204).

4. Eden as a Prototype and Archetype of Future Sacred Spaces

The original pristine universe that God brought into existence served as a prototype and archetype that looked ahead to future venues in which the Lord and the covenant community would enjoy fellowship together (cf. Hasel 1972:20; Starke 1996). These include the garden in Eden, the Israelite tabernacle in the wilderness, the temple in Jerusalem, and the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Brown 1986:787; Hyers 1984:54; Lundquist 2008:xii). Excluding the last-named item, perhaps the rest could be understood as smaller representations of what the universe in its unfallen state signified and prefigured (cf. Currid 1997:28; Palmer 2004:15). Based on the premise that these sanctuaries were 'in some way a replica of the divine heavenly abode', the veneration people offered in them were attempts to 'reenact creation' (Wenham 1994:400).

Admittedly, unlike the later-appearing shrines in early Israel, Eden had 'no architectural structure' (Beale 2005:7). In point of fact, 'it is not necessary for a sanctuary to be an edifice or structure' (Parry 1990:482). Furthermore, the cumulative evidence (to be discussed below) indicates that Eden functioned as a primordial temple-garden (cf. Poythress 1991:31). For that matter, throughout the ancient Near East, the 'first sacred spaces' existed apart from 'buildings' and were 'defined by some natural form that had come to possess some religious significance' (Turner 1979:15; for example, a hill, one or more trees, a stone, or a cave). Moreover, Eden, as a 'sacred center', was the 'earthly reproduction of the heavenly reality' (Kline 1996).

Because Adam communed with God in Eden, the latter was the temporal analog for the celestial archetype (cf. Wenham 1994:400–

401). According to Genesis 3:8, the first man and woman 'heard the sound' of their Creator as He was 'walking in the garden' at the breezy time of the day. The reader senses that 'God could make his presence known throughout the garden' (Longman 2001:6). Later, in reference to the tabernacle, the Lord declared to the Israelites that He would put His 'dwelling place' (Lev 26:11) among them. He also pledged to 'walk among' (v. 12) them to signify that He was their God and they were His chosen people. Centuries after that, the Lord told King David that during the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert, God moved from 'place to place with a tent' as His 'dwelling' (2 Sam 7:6; cf. v. 7). Similarly, Moses clarified to a new generation of Israelites who were about to enter the promised land that their camp had to be kept 'holy' (Deut. 23:14) because the Lord moved about in their midst (cf. Beale 2004:197; Palmer 2004:15; Parry 1994:144).

5. Adam and Eve as God's Sacerdotal Vice-Regents in Eden

God's decision to bring humankind into existence was no afterthought; rather, it was His final and climactic act, making the human race the 'apogee of creation' (Helm 2000:204; cf. Ciampa 2007:257 Cohen 1989:12; Curtis 1992:390; Lioy 2005:49). This truth notwithstanding, people remain creatures who are utterly dependent on God for their existence and are accountable to Him for their actions (cf. Paul 1997:360). Genesis 1:26 begins with God decreeing, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness'. The deliberative Hebrew plural pronoun rendered 'us' marks the 'significance and sublimity of the Creator's action' (Bonhoeffer 1997:61). Most likely, God and His heavenly court of angelic beings are in view (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; 38:7; Isa 6:8), though it is God who alone brings humankind into existence (Isa 40:14; 44:24; cf. Miller 2006:68;

Newsom 1992:249; von Rad 1962:145; Scullion 1992:943; Stager 2000:39; Walton 2001:129; Walton 2006:94). On the one hand, Adam and Eve are depicted as being 'real people'; on the other hand, they symbolize 'every man and every woman' who has ever lived (Walton 2007:250).

The Hebrew noun translated 'image' (*sēlēm*; Gen 1:26) is typically used in reference to such replicas as models and statues (cf. Eichrodt 1967:122; Fletcher-Louis 2004:83; Jacob 1958:166–167; Scroggs 1966:12). In contrast, the noun rendered 'likeness' (*demût*) is an abstract term derived from a verbal root that means 'to resemble' (cf. Dyrness 1977:83; Kaiser 2008:40; Levenson 1994:111; Renckens 1964:121). These observations notwithstanding, in this verse the two words are virtually synonymous (cf. Curtis 1992:389; Hafemann 2001:222; Kidner 1967:50; Leupold 1981:1:89; von Rad 1962:144–145; von Rad 1972:58) and collectively mean 'according to a similar but not identical representation' (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:23).

From a literary standpoint, 'poetic repetition' (Hess 2003:18) is used, in which 'likeness' provides an 'amplification and specification' of what 'image' means (Clines 1968:90). From a theological perspective, humans are the 'visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God' (101). More generally, because every person is a 'psychosomatic unity' (85–86), the image of God in them is reflected in both the material and immaterial aspects of their existence (cf. von Rad 1972:58; Van Leeuwen 1997:644). Furthermore, the divine likeness encompasses the moral character of individuals and the roles/tasks they undertake during their earthly sojourn (cf. Brown 1999:44; Helm 2000:210–211; Roop 1987:322; Walton 2006:212). For believers, the image of God not only includes temporal (physical) life, but also eternal life (cf. Gage 2001:23; Dahl 1964:434–435; Kreitzer 1993a:14; Kreitzer 1993b:810; Scroggs 1966:68–69).

Down through the centuries, the scholarly discussion about the divine likeness in humanity has often been an 'atomizing and reductionist approach' (Bird 1994:33). Despite this, the opinions of specialists have coalesced around three main areas of concern—on the ability of people to reason, make ethical decisions, and exercise dominion (cf. Clines 1968:61; Dumbrell 1985:175–176; Longman 2001:4–5). Possessing high mental abilities and behaving morally concern the nature of human life, while governing the rest of creation deals with the function of human life (cf. Bonhoeffer 1997:66–67; Kline 2006:43–44; Scullion 1992:944). From a New Testament perspective, the spiritual character of the redeemed needs to be considered. In brief, becoming increasingly more like the Messiah is closely connected with bearing the image of God (cf. Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Eph 4:22–24; Col 1:15; 3:9–10; Heb 1:3; Hamilton 1990:145–146; Smith 1993:245; Wright 2006:424). Even though within fallen humanity the image of God has been defaced through sin, people still bear the divine likeness to some degree (cf. Gen 5:1; 9:6; Jas 3:9), and this sets them apart from the rest of earth's creatures (cf. Birch 2005:37, 43; Childs 1993:569; Merrill 1991:19; Van Leeuwen 1997:645).

The more immediate context of Genesis 1:26–28 encompasses both the male and female genders (cf. Branch 2003:240) and focuses on rulership; in other words, the mandate for men and women to govern the world as benevolent vice-regents of the true and living God, is a reflection of His image in them (cf. Gen 9:2; Ps 8:5–8; Heb 2:5–9; Bird 1994:338–339; Levenson 1994:112–113; McCartney 1994:2; Paul 1997:360). By ruling over the rest of creation in a responsible fashion, people bear witness to the divine likeness placed within humanity (cf. Eichrodt 1967:127; Renckens 1964:126–127; Scroggs 1966:13). Also, as His sacerdotal agents mediate His presence, they actualize His will

on earth (cf. Matt 6:10; Brown 1999:44–45; Cohen 1989:22–23; Hafemann 2001:25).

6. Details from the Creation Narrative Pointing to Eden as a Primordial Temple

There are a number of details in the creation narrative that point to Eden as a primordial temple. For instance, according to Genesis 2:8, the Creator planted an 'orchard of various fruit trees' in Eden (Brown 1999:138). Deliberate representations of these were found in the 'wood carvings' placed within the temple of Solomon and which gave it a 'garden-like atmosphere' (Beale 2005:8; cf. Stager 2000:39, 41). The intent of the 'temple design' was to 'recreate the primordial landscape of creation' (Carroll 2005) and draw attention to its 'luxurious, pristine, and life giving' character (Lundquist 2008:xiv). First Kings 6:18 notes that the stone walls throughout the shrine were entirely covered with cedar paneling. In turn, the latter were overlaid with carvings of 'gourds and open flowers'. Verse 29 adds that the walls of the inner and outer rooms of the sanctuary had carvings of cherubs, palm trees, and flowers in bloom (cf. vv. 32, 35). A similar pattern could be found on the latticework that decorated the capitals of the two bronze pillars placed at the entrance to the holy place of the temple. Artisans encircled the latticework of both capitals with two rows of 200 pomegranate-shaped ornaments (7:17–18, 20). Also, the tops of the two pillars inside the portico were shaped like 'lilies' (v. 19; cf. Gage 2001:57).

Genesis 2:9 discloses that the Creator placed in the middle of the antediluvian sanctuary two distinctive trees: the first bore life-giving fruit; the second produced fruit that, when people consumed it, gave them a heightened awareness of right and wrong (cf. Childs 1962:696; Dyrness 1977:100; Gow 2003:286; Piper 1962:43; Walker

1997b:1259–1260). This ethical insight turned on the 'issue of moral autonomy' (Dunn 1998:83), especially the 'capacity to make the correct decision when confronted with alternatives' (Hamilton 1990:166; cf. Deut. 1:39; 1 Kgs 3:9). The ability to select the best possible option had 'sexual, intellectual, and social implications' (Wallace 1992c:658). The 'tree of ... knowledge', which symbolized the 'freedom of choice over good and evil' (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:26), foreshadows the deposit of the two stone tablets within the ark of the covenant (cf. Brown 1999:388–389; Dalman 2002:40–41; Ross 1988:95; Stordalen 2000:465; Waltke 2007:150; Wenham 1994:402–403). On the tablet were inscribed the Ten Commandments (Exod. 25:16, 21; Heb. 9:4), which many consider to be the moral law, or the basic list of God's universal ethical norms for proper human conduct (cf. Lioy 2004:6).

Moreover, in the shrine-garden was the 'tree of life', whose fruit enabled the first humans to enjoy unending existence in all its beauty and fullness with God (cf. Seebass 1986:84–85; Smick 1988:901–902; Starke 1996; Wallace 1992c:658). This tree was the prototype of the arboreal-looking lampstand that was placed within the holy place of the tabernacle and temple (cf. Barker 1991:90; Levenson 1994:94; Longman and Reid 1995:50; Parry 1994:128–129). Its various accessories (i.e. cups, flower buds, and almond blossoms) were attached on six branches and formed one solid piece with its stem and base. An ideal number of seven lamps (representing fullness and flawlessness) were mounted on the six branches and the central supporting shaft in order to provide continual light (cf. Exod. 25:31–37; Averbeck 2003:816–817; Birch 1986:559; Friberg 1992:1145; Pope 1962:564; White 1976:460). This light was intended to be a visible representation of the Lord's glorious presence and redemptive power among His people (cf. Exod. 29:43; Zech. 4; Rev. 1:13, 20; 2:1, 5; 11:4; Fletcher-Louis 2004:89–90, 93–94; Walton 2001:148, 182; Walton 2006:125).

In John's vision of the eternal state, he observed that a 'tree of life' (Rev 22:2) grew on each side of the 'river of the water of life'. One possibility is that the Greek noun rendered 'tree' (*xulon*) should be taken in a collective sense to refer to an orchard lining both sides of the riverbank. In any case, the apostle noted that the tree bore 12 different kinds of fruit, with a new crop appearing each month of the year. The fruit gave life, and the leaves were used as medicine to heal the nations. The presence of healing leaves does not mean there will be illness in heaven. Rather, the leaves symbolize the health and vigor that believers will enjoy in eternity (cf. Ezek. 47:12). As noted earlier, a tree of life first existed in the Garden of Eden, and it must have been lush. After Adam and Eve had sinned, God did not allow them to eat the fruit of the tree. In eternity, however, the all-powerful Lord will allow the redeemed to partake fully of eternal life, which is symbolized by the tree and its fresh, abundant fruit (cf. Gen. 2:9; 3:22; Bauckham 1993:316; Brighton 1999:627–628; Ford 1975:339; Mounce 1998:399; Osborne 2002:771–772; Slater 1999:199; Stefanovic 2002:592–593; Wall 1991:256).

Genesis 2:10 discloses that a river flowed in Eden and watered the temple-garden. Then, beyond this sacred locale, the river divided into four headstreams to distribute water throughout the remainder of the planet (cf. Clifford 1972:101–102; Dalman 2009:131; Giese 1997:1151; Stordalen 2000:276). The Solomonic shrine was portrayed as being a lush, fertile place (cf. Parry 1994:129–130; Walton 2001:148; Wenham 1994:402). For instance, Psalm 36 describes God's sacred house as a spot where the redeemed could 'feast' (v. 8) on His 'abundance'. Also, there His people could 'drink from [his] river of delights'. The poet explained that in the Lord's presence was 'the fountain of life' (v. 9), whose 'light' gave sustaining life to worshipers. Jeremiah, in his appeal to God for vindication, referred to the temple as the Lord's 'glorious

throne' (Jer. 17:12), which was 'exalted from the beginning' and the 'place of [His people's] sanctuary'. Verse 13 points to God as the 'spring of living water'. Those who put their 'confidence' (v. 7) in Him were comparable to a tree planted by a riverbank and whose roots extended deep into the water (v. 8). Despite the presence of excessive heat or prolonged drought, its leaves remained green and its branches continued to bear fruit (cf. Ps. 1:3).

The imagery is even more evocative in apocalyptic portions of Scripture (cf. Taylor 2004:70). For example, one of the most impressive descriptions in the entire book of Ezekiel is that of the river that flowed from the eschatological temple (47:1–12; cf. Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8; Barrois 1980:63–64; Joyce 2007:147). Wherever the river went, it gave life (cf. Caird 1999:280; Strong 1997:4:1319). Similarly, in John's vision of the eternal state, he saw a river that was crystal clear and whose waters gave life. It flowed from God's throne down the middle of the new Jerusalem's main thoroughfare (Rev 22:1). The river and its water are a symbol of the fullness of eternal life that proceeds from the presence of God (cf. Giese 1997:1151–1152; Roloff 1993:246; Stefanovic 2002:592; Walton 2003b:205). In this vision of the future, the Father and the Son are joint owners of the heavenly throne (cf. Bauckham 1993:139; Johnson 2001:322; Morris 1992:99; Moyise 1995:81; Slater 1999:167, 198; Thompson 1990:64).

Priestly terminology, which was later used in reference to the Israelite tabernacle and temple, first appears in Genesis 2:15 (cf. Stordalen 2000:458; Walton 2001:149, 185). The verse states that the Creator placed Adam in the shrine-garden 'to work it and take care of it'. The underlying Hebrew verbs—'*ābad* and *šāmar*, respectively—can also be rendered 'serving / worshiping' and 'guarding / protecting' (cf. Dumbrell 2002:59–60; Hafemann 2001:228; Parry 1994:143–144; Walton 2003a:165). Corresponding passages of Scripture focus on

priests performing their duties in the sanctuary and keeping it undefiled from profane objects (cf. Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chron 23:32; Ezek 44:14; Kline 2006:85–86; von Rad 1962:241–242; Walton 2003b:205–206). The logical inference is that the Creator originally wanted Adam and Eve to perform sacerdotal responsibilities in the Garden of Eden, including the cultivation and upkeep of the sacred space (cf. Averbeck 2003:817; Sailhamer 1990:45).

Genesis 3 reveals that the couple failed in their priestly role when they succumbed to the beguiling influence of the serpent (cf. Gow 2003:286; Sarna 1966:24; Waltke 2007:259). Tragically, even though Adam and Eve had all their earthly needs met, they still transgressed the 'one injunction given to them' (Wenham 2008:35). In turn, the introduction of sin and death to the human race led God to banish His sacerdotal agents from the hallowed orchard (Gen 3:23; cf. Rom 5:12). The Lord also stationed angelic sentinels (literally, 'cherubim') to police the garden and stand guard over the path to the 'tree of life' (Gen 3:24; cf. Baldwin 1986:280; Kline 2006:47–48; Miller 2006:66; Steinmann 2003:112; Walker 1997a:1260). This episode is later commemorated in ancient Israel by the placing of two 'cherubim of the Glory' (Heb. 9:5) on both ends of the lid of the ark of the covenant (cf. Bloch-Smith 1994:24; Poythress 1991:19, 31; Lundquist 2008:xv). The pair were 'hybrid creatures composed of the body of a lion with eagles' wings' (Hiebert 1992:510). The cherubim were symbolic guardians and protectors of God's kingly presence in the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple (cf. Exod. 25:18–20; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps. 99:1; Averbeck 2003:817; Harrison 1979:643; Parry 1994:132–133, 139; Wenham 1994:401).

According to Genesis 3:24, the entrance to the orchard in Eden faced 'east' (cf. Lundquist 2008:24; Parry 1994:131–132). Both the Solomonic shrine and the future temple envisioned by Ezekiel were to

face east and be located on a hallowed mountain (cf. Ezek.. 40:2, 6; 43:12; Dalman 2002:49–50; Turner 1979:48–49). Ezekiel 28 adds that Eden was called the 'garden of God' (vs. 13) and the 'holy mount of God' (v. 14; cf. v. 16; Clifford 1972:172; Dumbrell 2002:58–59; von Rad 1962:141). It was the 'primordial hillock', that is, the 'place that first emerged from the waters covering the earth during the creative process' (Carroll 2005; cf. Stager 2000:37; Turner 1979:25). In this biblical paradigm, God's cosmic mountain bore 'witness to the order and permanence of the created world' (Cohen 1981:31).

Similar characterizations are found in Scripture in connection with the Jerusalem temple as the 'architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain' (Lundquist 1994b:84; cf. Parry 1994:137; Talmon 1997:437). For instance, the Lord's 'holy mountain' (Isa 11:9) is Zion (Pss. 2:6; 87:1–2; 99:1–3, 9), which is also known as the 'mountain of [His] inheritance' (Exod. 15:17), the consecrated spot reserved for His own 'dwelling', and the 'city of God' (Ps 87:3; cf. Barker 1991:69; McKelvey 1969:11; Roberts 1982:100). Moreover, 'within the cult tradition of Jerusalem', Zion was a 'symbol of security and refuge', that is, the place where the ever-present Creator-King defended the righteous by vanquishing their foes (Ollenburger 1987:65–66; cf. Pss. 9:1–20; 10:1–18; 20:1–9; 24:1–10; 46:1–11; 48:1–14; 76:1–12; 89:1–18; 93:1–5). Zion is first mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:7 as a Jebusite fortress on a hill. After being captured by David, this fortress was called the City of David. Here Israel's king brought the ark of the covenant, thereby making the hill a sacred site (6:10–12; cf. Batey 2000:559; Clifford 1972:131; Eliav 2005:2–3; Groves 2005:1022; Klouda 2008:936; Strong 1997:4:1314).

Israel's sacred mountain conceptions and traditions draw upon mythological imagery, symbols, and archetypes found in nearby cultures, namely, 'Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Babylonian, Persian,

[and] Hellenistic' (Donaldson 1985:25; cf. Renz 1999:83; VanGemeren 2008:481). (For a systematic and detailed study of the meaning and function of the cosmic mountain theme in the Canaanite and Israelite religious traditions, cf. Clifford 1972; Donaldson 1985; Eliav 2005; and Niehaus 1995.) In general, religious mountain symbolism denotes 'more than a mere geographical location' (Clifford 1972:7). The ancient Near Eastern idea refers to a 'place set apart because of a divine presence or activity' among a group of people. According to this understanding of reality, the earth is the 'base of the mountain' (i.e. at one end of the axis of glory) and the 'top of the heavens' is its summit (i.e. at the other end of the axis of glory; 190). Moreover, the action of 'natural forces' at the 'point where the earth touches the divine sphere' gives the planet order, stability, and fertility (7–8).

The people of the ancient Near East regarded the 'universe ... as a gigantic world-mountain' that extended from the 'entrance of the subterranean abyss to the highest point of heaven' (Clements 1965:2). Furthermore, in the temple ideology of the era, such a mountain-shrine functioned as a 'powerful earthly center and point of contact with the heavens' (Lundquist 2008:xiv; cf. Walton 2006:278). For these reasons, the cosmic mountain was the de facto reference point for 'everything else' (Levenson 1984:283). By way of implication, the ancient Israelites viewed their shrine as the axis mundi, or 'peripheral pivot' and 'beginning point' (Cohen 1981:57), for the entire cosmos. In this schema, the temple was the 'navel of the world' (De Lacey 1991:396), having its 'roots in the underworld and its peak in the heavens' (Donaldson 1985:26). Moreover, because the sanctum and all of the creation stood 'in an intimate and intrinsic connection' (288), the temple became the 'moral center of the universe, the source from which

holiness and a terrifying justice radiated' (298; cf. Cohen 1981:32–33; McCurley 1983:127; Turner 1979:10–11, 21).

Concerning the garden within Eden (or possibly adjoining it; cf. Cornelius 1997:555; Stordalen 2000:284–286; Walton 2003b:202), the archetypal sanctuary was analogous to the holy place of 'Israel's later temple' (Beale 2005:10). Here the Lord's 'priestly servant' worshiped Him by living in obedience to His covenant stipulations. Similarly, Eden proper was akin to the most holy place of the Jerusalem shrine. This is where God—who is the 'source of both physical and spiritual life'—manifested His ineffable presence. In keeping with this comparison, the remainder of the earth beyond the confines of the antediluvian sanctuary was 'roughly equivalent to the outer court of Israel's subsequent temple'. According to the 'gradation in holiness' reflected in this depiction, the rest of the planet's continents and oceans would be comparably less sacrosanct than Eden proper and its orchard (cf. Abrahams and Rothkoff 2007:423; Lundquist 2008:25, 36; Walton 2001:168, 173–174, 181–183, 193–194; Walton 2004:144–145; Walton 2006:125).

It would be incorrect to conclude that the majority of earth is inconsequential (cf. Kline 1996). After all, Genesis 1:28 says that God 'blessed' humans, which means He endowed men and women with the ability to flourish and be successful in serving as His vice-regents across the entire planet (cf. Carroll 2000:24; Patrick 1992:436; Lioy 2005:52; Sailhamer 1990:38; Smith 1993:171–172). For Adam and Eve before the Fall, the creation mandate included expanding the 'contours of the garden' (Dumbrell 2002:62) until it encompassed all of the earth. Humanity's populating the world and bringing it under their control in a responsible fashion would be a testimony to God's abiding presence in and blessing on their lives. In the time period of Moses, the focus would have been primarily agricultural. Such endeavors as domesticating

animals, using trees to build homes, cultivating fields, and extracting mineral resources from the land would all be involved. Even today, as people use the resources of the environment in a sensible and responsible manner (e.g. in such vocations as agriculture, art, business, science, government, journalism, entertainment, scholarship, etc.), they are fulfilling God's original command to subdue the earth (cf. Ps 8:5–8; Walton 2009:149; Westermann 1982:98–99).

Genesis 1:31 declares that everything the Creator brought into existence was 'very good' or 'completely perfect' (von Rad 1972:61). From a theological standpoint, it is clear that 'God, by his powerful Word, transforms the chaos into a holy and blessed creation' (Ross 1988:114). Here God is depicted neither as a 'mighty warrior' nor as a 'cunning conqueror', but as an 'omnipotent artisan' and an 'omniscient architect' (Kline 2006:26) who is also 'serenely and supremely in charge' (Brueggemann 2005:153). Expressed differently, He is the quintessential virtuoso, who 'having completed his masterpiece, steps back a little and surveys his handiwork with delight, for both in detail and in its entirety it had emerged from his hand' (Cassuto 1978:59; cf. vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The Creator is also like a 'master chef' who brings a 'multicourse banquet before admiring guests'. In a manner of speaking, 'God kisses his fingers with each new delicacy that he brings from his creative workshop' (Wright 2006:398).

Walton (2006:197) advances the discussion by noting that the first chapter of Genesis is 'framed in terms of the creation of the cosmos as a temple in which Yahweh takes up his repose'. In turn, God resting on the seventh day (cf. 2:1–3) is the functional equivalent of Him 'being enthroned' and assuming His 'role as sovereign ruler of the cosmos' (cf. Hafemann 2001:29–30; Walton 2003a:165; Walton 2009:162; Wenham 1994:403). In this portrayal, God operates as the 'transcendent referent' whose 'purpose and ... will for creation' is the basis for its 'ultimate

meaning' (Brueggemann 1982:12–13). Moreover, God commissioned the human race to be His 'vice-regents' and 'reflect his glory throughout his creation', especially as they manage responsibly the planet on which they live (Ciampa 2007:257). The latter includes 'care-giving, even nurturing' the global ecosystem over which God has given them authority (Fretheim 1994:346).

7. Conclusion

This journal article has considered ways in which the Garden of Eden functioned as a primordial temple for humankind. The essay began by noting that Eden, in its function as a sacred space, is representative of all future shrines and provides a conceptual framework for understanding and appreciating their purpose. These later-appearing temples are regarded as hallowed spots where the Lord manifests His presence and worshipers perform a series of rites and rituals. The remainder of the paper delineates ways in which Eden operated as a backdrop for and antecedent of these sanctums, especially the tabernacle in the wilderness and temple in Jerusalem.

In summary, an examination of the creation narrative points to Eden as the earliest-occurring sacred space, as well as a prototype and archetype of future temples. Moreover, a theological analysis of the biblical data indicates that God intended Adam and Eve to serve as His sacerdotal vice-regents in the garden. Indeed, Eden is regarded as the starting point for fellowship between God and redeemed humanity. As discussed at length in *Axis of Glory* (Lioy 2010:135), the Lord's ongoing encounter with the covenant community is discernible in the priestly activity of His people in sacred locales during the early biblical period and in the sacerdotal practices connected with the wilderness tabernacle and various subsequent Jerusalem shrines. The prominence of the temple in

later biblical literature can be seen in the depictions of God's heavenly sanctuary recorded in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Furthermore, each of these sanctums function as sacred points of contact between the God of glory and His creation.

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Defining Christian Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

Christian Transformational Leadership is a major leadership theory whereby the Christian leader, most simply, seeks to influence (or transform) followers on the basis of his or her vision and character. However, definitions of the theory remain sketchy, and in their present form do not offer an adequate basis for research. This article details how a suitable body of Christian Transformational Leadership literature was selected and a definition extracted from the literature. It further suggests ways in which a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership may serve to advance research in the field.

1. Introduction

It is of the utmost importance that theories of Christian leadership should be defined. Without adequate definitions, it is not possible to distinguish one theory from another, it is not possible to determine who practices them, and it is not possible to research their efficacy.

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The purpose of this article is to define a Christian leadership theory which I here name *Christian Transformational Leadership*. This is a theory which bears many similarities to the well-known *secular* leadership theory, *Transformational (or Transforming) Leadership*.² It is *not* the purpose of this article to make any *assessment* of Christian Transformational Leadership, either from the point of view of theology or praxis.

Christian Transformational Leadership incorporates *several* Christian leadership theories. These include (in alphabetical order) connective leadership (Gibbs 2005:27), courageous leadership (Hybels 2002:12), relational leadership (Wright 2000:2), servant leadership (Hunter 2004:20), spiritual leadership (Sanders 1994:5), ternary leadership (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:96), and transforming leadership (Ford 1991:3). It may include other, similar theories which are not included in this research.³

As a group, these theories may represent the dominant Christian leadership theory today. It is endorsed by major theological seminaries, such as Fuller Theological Seminary (Gibbs 2005, Cover), Princeton Theological Seminary (Guder 1998, Cover), and Moody Bible Institute (Sanders 1994:ix), and by leading Christian organizations, such as Trinity Broadcasting Network (Munroe 2005, Cover), The Navigators

² In the Southern African context, Transformational Leadership needs to be differentiated from the *transformational agenda*, which focuses on the promotion of 'a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society' (African National Congress 2010:1). Transformational Leadership tends to refer to a *method* of leadership rather than specific *goals*.

³ Some theorists refer to Transformational Leadership *theories* (plural) (Kark, Shamir, and Chen 2003:2), thus suggesting that Transformational Leadership represents a *genus*. Yukl (1999:1) refers to 'versions of transformational leadership'. It will be seen in due course that all of these theories bear the same major characteristics.

(Stanley and CSwinton 1992:6), and World Vision (Thomas 1999, Cover).

Having briefly introduced Christian Transformational Leadership, it first needs to be considered how one may build a *definition* of the same as a *point of departure*. That is, it needs to be considered where the theory finds its *roots*. With this in mind, the following section describes the search for such a ‘starting point’.

2. Starting Point for the Definition

There is a strong body of Christian leadership literature which bears key characteristics of *secular* Transformational Leadership. Further, much of this literature records its *debt* to secular Transformational (or Transforming) Leadership. In fact, it records its debt to secular Transformational Leadership more often than it does to any other leadership theory (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:51; Barna 1997:21; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:17; Ford 1991:22; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:253; Stanley and CSwinton 1992:236; Wofford 1999:19; Wright 2000:2).

With this in mind, it seemed to stand to reason that I should search the Christian leadership literature for definitions of leadership which carried the labels ‘transformational’ or ‘transforming’. In this way, a definition could be worked out on the basis of *existing* definitions of Transformational (or Transforming) Leadership.⁴

⁴ This has in fact been attempted by Barna (1997:24). However, Barna largely bases his synthesis on *secular* Transformational Leadership theory. This is not entirely the same as Christian Transformational Leadership theory, as will be seen.

This, however, did not turn out to be as simple as imagined. Few books on Christian leadership identify themselves as 'transformational' or 'transforming' (the few which do are Daman 2006; Everist and Nesson 2008; Ford 1991; Lewis 1996; Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt 2000; Jinkins 2002; Wofford 1999). Further, when two-thirds of the distinctly 'transformational' Christian books had been obtained (the exceptions being Daman and Lewis), none of these offered a concise *definition* of Christian Transformational Leadership. It was clear that a more satisfactory approach was required.

As a second approach, it seemed that one might seek an *archetypal model* of leadership to which Christian Transformational Leadership could trace its roots. If such an archetypal model existed, a definition could be worked out on the basis of a common origin. On the surface of it, secular Transformational (or Transforming) Leadership provided such a model. This was first described by Burns (1978), and further developed by Bass (1985), whose names are now synonymous with the theory.

However, on closer examination, this approach could not be sustained either. There were at least two books on Christian leadership (Engstrom 1976; Sanders 1969) which predated Burns and Bass, yet manifested every major characteristic of secular Transformational Leadership. This raised the possibility that secular Transformational Leadership was derived from Christian Transformational Leadership; alternatively, that both secular and Christian Transformational Leadership originated in a common source.

There was, however, no common source to be found. For example, the New Testament could not readily be considered a common source, since Burns (1978:517, 522) makes only four references to the

leadership of either Jesus or Paul, and Bass and Riggio (2006:275)⁵ make none.

All things considered, *secular Transformational Leadership* is chosen as the point of departure for a definition of *Christian Transformational Leadership*, for two reasons. Firstly, secular Transformational leadership is a major leadership theory which offers a (mostly) clear definition which may serve as a point of departure for a Christian theory (Den Hartog et al. 1999; Leadership Theories, 2008; Van Wagner 2007:1), and secondly, again, secular Transformational Leadership is the one theory to which Christian Transformational Leadership most often records its debt.

A definition of Christian Transformational Leadership will therefore be worked out as follows: firstly, a definition of *secular Transformational Leadership* will be obtained; secondly, Christian leadership literature will be selected which reveals all the major characteristics of secular Transformational Leadership; and thirdly, a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership will be *extracted* from the selected Christian leadership literature.⁶

Having now chosen secular Transformational Leadership as the starting point for the selection of the Christian literature, I shall first provide a *definition* of secular Transformational Leadership.

⁵ This is the second edition of Bass' seminal work (Bass 1985). The first edition is now rare.

⁶ The fact that the Christian Transformational Leadership shares major characteristics of secular Transformational (or Transforming) Leadership does not exclude the possibility that it may have further, unique characteristics which are essential to its core definition, and differentiate it from secular Transformational Leadership.

3. Features of Secular Transformational Leadership

Secular Transformational Leadership is of course *secular*. The term 'secular' is used here for the purpose of distinguishing such leadership from its distinctively *Christian* variant, Christian Transformational Leadership. In this article, secular Transformational Leadership will refer to Transformational Leadership which does not declare a Christian or biblical approach to leadership, and makes little if any reference to Biblical leadership or biblical texts (examples are Burns 1978:517, 522; Bass and Riggio 2006:275).

A core feature of secular Transformational Leadership is *influence* (Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:1; Transformational Leadership, 2007; Tucker and Russell 2004:1). This means that the leader is a person who influences followers, or (less frequently) is influenced *by* them (Burns 1978:20). Influence is the concept from which the terms 'transforming' and 'transformational' derive. Rather than merely having a 'transactional' relationship with followers, the leader seeks to '[engage] the full person of the follower' (Burns 1978:4). The leader seeks to exercise 'influence without authority' (Cohen and Bradford 1990, Cover).

Influence necessitates, above all, two *characteristics* in the transformational leader.

Firstly, he or she needs to have '*charisma*' (Bass and Riggio 2006:25; Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:2). This may be described more accurately as *persuasiveness*, and means that the leader will have the ability to

persuade people about where an organization needs to go (Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:1; Clark 2007:3).⁷

Secondly, the leader will be a competent *strategist* (Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:1; Murphy 2008:2). Such strategizing is both a science and an art, and looks for the best way in which a plan may be made to work.

The *purpose* of influence is to achieve long-term *goals* (Bass and Avolio 1993:19; Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:6). A leader promotes such goals, and mobilizes others to reach them (Barna 1997:21; Martocchio and Ferris 2003:371). These goals are therefore said to be *shared by* the leader and followers (Bass and Riggio 2006:53; Ciulla and Burns 2004:151).

Finally, while each of these features is important to the definition of secular Transformational Leadership, a single feature is seen to lie at the *root* of them all. This is *character* (Burns 1978:74; Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:2; Fairholm 2001:2; Hunter 2004:141).⁸ Character may be described as the *core idea* of secular Transformational Leadership, and lays the *foundation* for influence (Burns 1978:43), persuasiveness (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:51), sound strategy (Burns 1978:74), and the formation of shared goals (Gilley, Callahan, and Bierema 2002:11).

I now draw these features together in a *definition*:

⁷ Charisma usually includes four *aspects* (Bass and Riggio 2006:228; Bass and Steidlmeier 1998:1). These are, however, often combined into one (Bass and Riggio 2006:25). The details are beyond the scope of this article, and are not important here.

⁸ Burns prefers the term 'values'.

Secular Transformational Leadership is leadership which is not distinctly Biblical or Christian. It holds that a leader’s character, persuasiveness, and ability to strategize guarantee that he or she will be influential (or transformational) to achieve shared goals.⁹

Having now obtained a definition of secular Transformational Leadership, in the following section Christian leadership literature will be selected which reveals the major characteristics of such leadership. A definition of Christian Transformational Leadership will then be *extracted* from this literature.

4. Selection of the Christian Leadership Literature

On the basis of the definition of *secular* Transformational Leadership, a body of Christian leadership literature comprising twenty-three books, or forty-six authors, is now selected: Barna (1997), Banks and Ledbetter (2004), Blackaby and Blackaby (2001), CSwinton (1988), Engstrom (1976), Everist and Nessian (2008), Ford (1993), Gibbs (2005), Guder (1998), Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt (2000), Hunter (2004), Hybels (2002), Jinkins (2002), Maxwell (1998), Munroe (2005), Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006), Sanders (1994), Stanley (2006), Stanley and CSwinton (1992), Thomas (1999), Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath (1999), Wofford (1999), and Wright (2000).

For the purpose of this selection, I made a wide search of the Christian leadership literature, then narrowed it down to those books which, on the information available, appeared to exhibit secular Transformational Leadership characteristics. The search was concluded when it seemed to be exhausted through repetition.

⁹ The term ‘transformational’ is merely used for context here. The term ‘influence’ is preferred, because it is far more common in the literature.

Eleven of the twenty-three selected books were chosen on the basis that they were ranked among the Top 100 books in their category by Amazon Books. The remainder were ranked in the top million either by Amazon Books or Barnes & Noble (in other words, they enjoyed modest popularity). Two exceptions were allowed, on the basis that these books were specifically labeled 'transforming' Christian leadership. These are Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt (2000) and Wofford (1999).¹⁰ All of the selected books take, as their subject matter, Christian leadership or Christian ministry, with the exception of Stanley and CSwinton (1992), who deal with a more specialised aspect of Christian leadership, namely *mentoring*.¹¹

Each book was rated for its conformity to the five major features of secular Transformational Leadership, namely character, influence, persuasiveness, the ability to strategize, and shared goals. All of the selected books revealed all of the five major features of secular Transformational Leadership. However, eight of these books (35%) were thought to reveal one of these features in a weakened form, while five of these books (22%) revealed *two* of these features in weakened form.¹²

Now that the Christian Transformational Leadership books have been selected, a definition of Christian Transformational leadership may be

¹⁰ These two books fell below the top million Amazon Books and Barnes & Noble.

¹¹ Mentoring is a key characteristic of both secular and Christian Transformational Leadership (Wright 2000:44). It is one of the four aspects of 'charisma' referred to earlier.

¹² By 'weakened' form is meant compromised clarity. For example, with regard to character, CSwinton (1988:74) states: 'Character is foundational if a leader is to influence people...' (a 'strong' form), while Thomas (1999:13) states: 'The Christian leader should be... continually building a substantive life' (a 'weakened' form). Thomas is almost certainly referring to character, yet his statement lacks some clarity.

extracted from these books. Firstly, however, definitions of Christian leadership which the books themselves provide will be discussed. This is the focus of the following section.

5. Definitions of Christian Transformational Leadership

Just over half of the twenty-three selected books offer a concise *definition* of Christian leadership. These definitions will first be listed, then examined both for commonalities and contradictions. Thirteen definitions follow.

- Banks and Ledbetter (2004:16): 'leadership involves a person, group, or organization who shows the way in an area of life—whether in the short- or the long-term—and in doing so both influences and empowers enough people to bring about change in that area'.
- Barna (1997:25): 'A leader is one who mobilizes; one whose focus is influencing people; a person who is goal driven; someone who has an orientation in common with those who rely upon him for leadership; and someone who has people willing to follow them'.
- Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:20): 'Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God's agenda'.
- CSwinton (1988:14): 'Leadership is a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given capacity influences a specific group of God's people toward His purposes for the group'.
- Engstrom (1976:24): 'the concept of leader ... means one who guides activities of others and who himself acts and performs to bring those activities about. He is capable of performing acts which will guide a group in achieving objectives. He takes the capacities of vision and faith, has the ability to be concerned and to comprehend, exercises action through effective and personal

influence in the direction of an enterprise and the development of the potential into the practical and/or profitable means'.

- Everist and Nesson (2008:40): 'Leadership [is] the art of "mobilizing people to make progress on the hardest problems"'.
- Hunter (2004:32): '[Leadership is] the skills of influencing people to enthusiastically work toward goals identified as being for the common good, with character that inspires confidence'.
- Maxwell (1998:17): 'Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less'.
- Munroe (2005:54): 'Leadership is the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by a passion, generated by a vision, produced by a conviction, ignited by a purpose'.
- Sanders (1994:27): 'Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead'.
- Stanley (2006:139): '[Leadership is] the ability to command the attention and influence the direction of others'.
- Stanley and CSwinton (1992:38): 'Mentoring is a relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources'.
- Wright (2000:2): 'leadership is a relationship—a relationship in which one person seeks to influence the thoughts, behaviours, beliefs or values of another person'.

All of the above definitions emphasize *influence*, or use *synonyms* for influence, including 'moving' others (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:20) 'mobilizing' others (Everist and Nesson 2008:40), and 'empower[ing]' others (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:16; Stanley and CSwinton 1992:38). Half of these definitions state unambiguously that leadership is exercised by an individual (Barna 1997:25; CSwinton 1988:14; Engstrom 1976:24; Everist and Nesson 2008:56; Sanders 1994:27;

Stanley and CSwinton 1992:38; Wright 2000:2), while others would seem to *imply* this (e.g. Hunter 2004:32; Stanley 2006:139).

Half of the definitions state that leadership has a *goal* (Barna 1997:25; Everist and Nesson 2008:63; Hunter 2004:32), or use words which are *suggestive* of a goal, including 'objectives' (Engstrom 1976:24), 'direction' (Stanley 2006:139), 'God's agenda' (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:20), and 'God's purposes' (CSwinton 1988:14).

Just two *conflicts* appear in these definitions. Banks and Ledbetter (2004:16) specifically state that leadership may be exercised by *groups or organizations*, and not by individuals alone, and this conflicts with definitions which specifically state that leadership is exercised by an individual. Maxwell (1998:17) reduces leadership to a single characteristic (influence), and others arguably do the same (e.g. Sanders 1994:27, and Stanley 2006:139). However, Barna (1997:22) contradicts this by stating that 'there are specific attributes which must be involved in leading', which go beyond merely 'mobilizing others' or 'a goal shared'.

Several of the definitions exhibit features which do not overlap with those of others. For example, Hunter (2004:32) includes *character* in his definition, while others do not. Engstrom (1976:24) includes *faith* in his definition, while others do not. Barna (1997:25) includes 'functional competencies' in his definition, while others do not.

This does not mean, however, that these authors disagree among themselves. Rather, their *definitions* emphasize different *aspects* of Christian Transformational Leadership. In fact, far more commonalities are to be found in the literature than the definitions suggest. For example, all of the selected authors refer to the ability to *strategize* in their books, while none of their definitions do; all of the authors refer to

the need for *character*, while only one of their definitions does; and all of them refer to the need for *vision*, while only two of their definitions do.

The following section serves to reveal the common characteristics of the Christian Transformational Leadership literature which, mostly, are missing in the 'pre-packaged' definitions.

6. Characteristics of Christian Transformational Leadership

The above definitions omit major features of Christian leadership which are found throughout the texts. When the texts are studied in detail, far more commonalities emerge between the various authors than is evident in the definitions. Therefore, in this section, each of the major commonalities is *extracted* from the literature, then combined in a definition.

6.1. Christian

It need hardly be noted that Christian Transformational Leadership is *Christian*. However, the meaning of 'Christian' in the context of this article needs to be clarified.

It seemed to stand to reason that Christian Transformational Leadership, being *Christian*, might be *Christ-centred*. Therefore I first searched the literature for evidence that Jesus Christ might be regarded either as the *model* of leadership, or the Object of *faith*.¹³

¹³ This distinction is made, as an example, by Stortz (2008:5).

I first searched for indications that Jesus Christ might be presented in the literature as the *model* for Christian leadership. However, while I found that He was indeed presented as a model (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:111; Barna 1997:19; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001; CSwinton 1988:195; Engstrom 1976:37; Ford 1993:11; Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt 2000:48; Jinkins 2002:xiii; Wofford 1999:16),¹⁴ this was by no means a universal feature of Christian Transformational Leadership. In fact, much of the literature had no special emphasis on Jesus as model (Gibbs 2005; Guder 1998; Hunter 2004; Hybels 2002; Maxwell 1998; Munroe 2005; Roxburth and Romanuk 2006; Sanders 1994; Stanley 2003; Stanley and CSwinton 1992; Thomas 1999; Thrall, McNicol and McElrath 1999).

I continued by searching for indications that Jesus Christ might represent the Object of *faith* to the Christian leader. However, this search was less productive. While faith was sometimes portrayed as a welcome aspect of Christian leadership (CSwinton 1988:117; Sanders 1994:51), and in a few cases was considered to be *foundational* to Christian leadership (Engstrom 1976:118; Banks and Ledbetter 2004:31; Wofford 1999:16), this, too, was by no means a universal feature of Christian Transformational Leadership.

However, all of the selected literature *declared* a Christian approach to leadership (Barna 1997, Cover; Banks and Ledbetter 2004, Cover; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:xi; CSwinton 1988:2; Engstrom 1976:2; Ford 1993, Cover; Gibbs 2005, Cover; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:4; Hunter 2004:Dust Cover; Hybels 2002:11; Sanders 1994, Cover; Wofford 1999, Cover), or was specifically directed to the Church (Everist and Nessian 2008, Cover; Guder 1998, Cover; Jinkins

¹⁴ Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt (2000:19) refer to God Himself as the model of Christian leadership.

2002, Cover; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:Dust Cover; Stanley 2006:ix), or, more generally, declared a Christian foundation (Thomas 1999:12; Stanley and CSwinton 1992:2; Thrall, McNicol and McElrath 1999:2) or a Biblical foundation (Maxwell 1998:iii; Wright 2000, Cover).

The only exception to the above was Munroe (2005). While Munroe declared no Biblical or Christian commitment, he included six pages of Scripture references in his book, most of which were gleaned from the New Testament (Munroe 2005:290). This was considered sufficient to regard him as a *Christian* author.

Therefore 'Christian' is defined here as those books which *declare* a Christian or Biblical foundation, or those which are specifically directed to the Church.

6.2. Influence

The concept of *influence* is of primary importance to Christian Transformational Leadership.

Maxwell (1998:17) states it most boldly: 'Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less.' The literature may also use *synonyms* for influence, such as moving people (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:20), forming people (Everist and Nesson 2008:1; Guder 1998:183), or having 'an effect on outcomes' (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath 1999:10). Most Christian Transformational Leadership authors in this study consider *influence* to be of central importance to Christian Transformational Leadership (Barna 1997:24; CSwinton 1988:101; Engstrom 1976:24; Gibbs 2005:22; Hunter 2004:68; Hybels 2002:127; Munroe 2005:52; Sanders 1994:27; Stanley 2006:139; Thomas 1999:31; Wright 2000:31).

Most Christian Transformational Leadership authors emphasize the *one-way* influence of a leader on followers (CSwinton 1988:178; Everist and Nesson 2008:55; Hunter 2004:31; Maxwell 1998:56; Sanders 1994:27; Stanley 2006:139; Thomas 1999:138; Wright 2000:13).¹⁵ However, a few include the influence of followers on the leader (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:127; Gibbs 2005:22).

It is again *influence* from which the term 'transformational' derives. Influence is seen to transform people's *motives* in the pursuit of a goal, rather than using other means to reach it, such as manipulation (Everist and Nesson 2008:207; Ford 1991:43; Hunter 2004:108,187; Munroe 2005:43; Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath 1999:21), coercion (Everist and Nesson 2008:207; Hunter 2004:53), command (Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:219), or transaction (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:51). That is, 'influence' means that followers pursue a goal because something *within* them has changed. Christian Transformational leaders 'change attitudes' (Wofford 1999:17), they 'change what people talk about and dream of' (Ford 1991:15), and sometimes, they aim to bring about total transformation of the individual and community (Jenkins 2002:xii).

6.3. Persuasiveness

Christian Transformational Leadership routinely emphasizes that, in order for influence to *work*, a leader needs to have *persuasiveness*. This differs from *influence* in that it emphasizes the *capacity* of the leader to influence others (Gibbs 2005:21; Munroe 2005:76; Sanders 1994:27), while influence has a greater emphasis on the *method* of leadership, as contrasted, for example, with mere transaction or coercion. Such

¹⁵ In this respect, Christian Transformational Leadership mostly parts with Burns (1978:20).

persuasiveness usually has four *aspects*.¹⁶ However, these are not of crucial importance here.

Persuasiveness refers to 'the capacity to guide others to places they... have never been before' (Gibbs 2005:21), the skill of being able to motivate followers (Thomas 1999:146), or 'the power to persuade' (Engstrom 1976:64). Sometimes it is referred to as '*charisma*' (Everist and Nesson 2008:56; Gibbs 2005:39; Wofford 1999:27). Every Christian Transformational Leadership author in this study, in one way or another, advances *persuasiveness* as a necessary trait of the Christian Transformational leader (Barna 1997:23; Banks and Ledbetter 2004:40; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:17; CSwinton 1988:14; Engstrom 1976:64; Ford 1993:25; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:51; Hunter 2004:185; Maxwell 1998:162; Sanders 1994:73; Stanley 2006:118; Stanley and CSwinton 1992:145; Wright 2000:18).

6.4. Strategy

Influence further needs the support of sound *strategy*. Such strategy looks for the best ways in which a course of action could be made to work.

Maxwell (1998:203) considers that a leader needs the right action at the right time to guarantee success. Sanders (1994:113) states: 'The leader must... employ tactics that lead to success'. Thomas (1999:31) considers: 'Timing, creativity, and discipline are crucial skills'. Stanley (2003:79) states that every good coach (that is, leader) goes into the

¹⁶ In the secular Transformational Leadership literature, these are 'idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration' (Sosik 2006:18; Yukl 1999:2). They may be referred to together as 'charisma' (Bass and Riggio 2006:25).

game with a strategy. Most Christian Transformational Leadership authors have a strong emphasis on strategy (Barna 1997:25; Banks Ledbetter 2004:133; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:70; CSwinton 1988:88; Everist and Nesson 2008:101; Ford 1993, Cover; Gibbs 2005:99; Guder 1998:201; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:130; Hybels 2002:55; Munroe 2005:243; Thrall, McNicol and McElrath 1999:181; Wofford 1999:89; Wright 2000:71).

6.5. Shared Goals

Influence, persuasiveness, and strategy all serve long-term *goals*. These are seen to be *shared* by the leader and followers.

Hunter (2004:31) states that the leader works towards goals for the common good. Sanders (1994:27) quotes Bernard Montgomery: 'Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose'. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:17) state that leaders induce 'a group to pursue objectives'. Engstrom (1976:20) considers that 'individuals collaborate under a leader's stimulation and inspiration in striving toward a worthy common goal'. All of the selected Christian Transformational Leadership authors have an emphasis on a shared goal (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:18; Barna 1997:22; Engstrom 1976:20; Everist and Nesson 2008:160; Ford 1993:202; Gibbs 2005:109; Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt 2000:54; Hybels 2002:63; Munroe 2005:55; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:44; Thomas 1999:45; Wofford 1999:66; Wright 2000:14).

6.6. Character

Character is of crucial importance to Christian Transformational Leadership.

Hunter (2004:30) states: 'Leadership has everything to do with character'. Wofford (1999:107) considers that nothing is more important for a Church leader than character. CSwinton (1988:74) maintains that integrity is the foundation of effective leadership. Gibbs (2005:114) summarizes Paul's requirements for leadership as 'character first and foremost'. Similarly, every Christian Transformational Leadership author, in one way or another, emphasizes the fundamental importance of character (Barna 1997:25; Banks and Ledbetter 2004:107; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:17; Engstrom 1976:190; Everist and Nesson 2008:133; Ford 1993::20; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:19; Hybels 2002; Jinkins 2002:39; Maxwell 1998:58; Munroe 2005; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:126; Sanders 1994:41; Stanley 2006:xii; Stanley and CSwinton 1992:158; Wright 2000:15).

More than this, character is seen to lie at the *root* of every other characteristic of Christian Transformational Leadership. The Christian Transformational Leadership literature specifically links character with each of the features listed above (CSwinton 1988:74; Wofford 1999:109; Maxwell 1998:58; Hunter 2004:32; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:141). Character may therefore be described as the *core idea* of Christian Transformational Leadership. It lays the *foundation* for influence, persuasiveness, sound strategy, and the formation of shared goals.

6.7. Vision

One more feature needs to be added to the above, which does not appear consistently in the *secular Transformational Leadership* literature. This is *vision*. While this does not mean that vision is not *important* to secular Transformational Leadership, it is, however, not always present there (e.g. Burns 1978:529).

Christian Transformational Leadership frequently describes the leader's *goals* in terms of *vision* (Banks and Ledbetter 2004:45; Everist and Nesson 2008:174; Ford 1993:54; Hybels 2002:27; Jinkins 2002:26; Maxwell 1998:56; Munroe 2005:280; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:125; Stanley 2006:81; Stanley and CSwinton 1992:117). Not seldom, a leader's vision may be said to be *God-given* (Barna 1997:29; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:75; CSwinton 1988:117; Gangel 1997:48; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:185; Hybels 2002:36; Sanders 1994:55; Wright 2000:66). It may further be equated with a leader's *calling* (Gibbs 2005:191; Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt 2000:65; Hybels 2002:37).

The need for *vision* is present in all of the selected Christian literature. Three-quarters of the selected books refer specifically to 'vision', while the remainder refer to 'reality in terms of what can be' (Engstrom 1976:201), 'the requirement to see' (Thomas 1999:22), 'the eyes' to find one's destiny (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath 1999:146), and 'building a fire within' (Hunter 2004:185). Therefore *vision* is included in the definition of Christian Transformational Leadership, where this does not appear in the definition of secular Transformational Leadership.

6.8. Definition

I now draw these features together in a *definition*. It differs in one major respect (namely *vision*) from secular Transformational Leadership.

Christian Transformational Leadership is leadership which declares a Biblical or Christian foundation, or is specifically directed to the Church. It holds that a leader's vision, character, persuasiveness,

and ability to strategize guarantee that he or she will be influential (or transformational) to achieve shared goals.¹⁷

With a definition now in hand, it should be helpful, in conclusion, to sketch just why a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership should be important. That is, it would be in the interests of further research to sketch its possible *application*.

7. Application of the Definition

There are at least three major reasons why a *definition* of Christian Transformational Leadership should be important.

Firstly, in recent decades, *semantic* critique has grown in importance, not least through the popularity of the method of *deconstruction*. This may rely heavily on the definition of terms (Blackburn 2005:90), and provides a powerful means of analysis (Scarborough 2009:3). With this in mind, a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership would represent an important starting point for semantic critique.

Secondly, dropout from Christian *ministry* (which is an important *aspect* of Christian leadership) is very high—up to 95 percent.¹⁸ The selected literature repeatedly points to a high dropout from Christian leadership in general (e.g. Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:19, 45, 230; CSwinton 1989:328, 356; Gibbs 2005:19). Christian Transformational Leadership exists within this context, and its presence is not small, as

¹⁷ Again, the term ‘transformational’ is merely used for context here. The term ‘influence’ is preferred, because it is far more common in the literature.

¹⁸ According to Chun (2007:2), dropout in the USA may be as high as ninety-five percent, while Gibbs (2005:79) gives a figure of fifty percent dropout from local-church ministry in the USA during the first ten years. If dropout should remain constant over the duration of ministry, Gibbs comes to within two percent of Chun.

has been noted. However, without an adequate definition of Christian Transformational Leadership, in order to differentiate it from Christian leadership in general, there is no reliable means of assessing whether Christian Transformational Leadership might contribute to the high dropout from Christian leadership. In fact, an expert in the field was unaware of any data relating to dropout among Christian Transformational leaders.¹⁹

Thirdly, a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership promises to resolve three further issues relating to *statistics*. There are three problems in particular.

Firstly, a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership is crucial to the *collection of data*. Currently, the only *quantitative* data relating to Christian leadership are *generic*. That is, the statistics refer only to Christian leadership *in general*, not to Christian Transformational Leadership in particular (examples of generic data are Chun 2006:1; Driscoll 2006:1; James 2007:2; MacDonald 2007:1; Morris and Blanton 1994:1; Price 2003:2; Willis 2007:4; Wood 2005:2). An expert in the field was unaware of any statistics which make a distinction between Christian leadership in general and Christian Transformational Leadership in particular (Burch 2008).²⁰ Such differentiation would be critical to a statistical critique of Christian Transformational Leadership.

Secondly, a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership may avert a problem that is often referred to as 'moving the goal posts', or

¹⁹ The Professor of Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary wrote to me: 'I have no data on this' (CSwinton 2005).

²⁰ 'I don't know of any studies reporting the data you seek' (Burch 2008). Burch is the Associate Dean of the Academy for Transformational Leadership, Atlanta, Georgia.

'begging the question' (Walton 1995:375). In effect, this means that secular Transformational Leadership authors change the definition of leadership to exclude the latest critique. The best known examples appear in a seminal paper by Bass and Steidlmeier (1998:17), in which they dismiss all critique as applying to 'pseudo-transformational' leadership, not 'authentic' transformational leadership.²¹ This fallacy has been repeated, too, in more recent literature (e.g. Ciulla and Burns 2004:179; Price 2005:131; Sosik 2006:134; Van Knippenberg and Hogg 2004:178; Clegg et al. 2006:453), and there is a similar tendency in the Christian Transformational Leadership literature. For example, if vision fails, then such vision was not authentic (Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt 2000:80,182), or if a leader drops out, then one is not dealing with a true Christian Transformational leader (Halcomb, Hamilton, and Malmstadt 2000:187). Therefore, a *definition* of Christian Transformational Leadership might help to 'pin down' the core features of the theory, and to open them to more effective examination and critique.

Finally, a problem of a lack of *control data* is pervasive both in the secular and the Christian Transformational Leadership literature.²² Most if not all of the secular literature surveyed omitted control data (e.g. Albritton 1995:191; Bass and Riggio 2006:143; Pearce and Conger 2002:166; Singh and Bhandarker 1990:17; Jablin and Putnam

²¹ As an example, secular Transformational Leadership had been criticized for being *manipulative*. Bass and Steidlmeier (1998:6) respond: 'But, in fact, it is pseudo-transformational leaders who are... manipulative.'

²² The lack of control data may also be referred to as 'confirmation bias' (Confirmation Bias, 2008:1), or the fallacy of 'affirming the consequent' (Wilson 1995:273). In terms of the fallacy of affirming the consequent, one may reach invalid conclusions even if the premises are true (Mautner 2000:8). For instance, it may be true that most leaders who endure have mentors (CSwinton 1991:1-1). However, it may also be true that most leaders who do *not* endure have mentors.

2004:406). Data on 'failed transformational leaders' is missing (Clegg et al. 2006:453), and this problem is repeated in the Christian Transformational Leadership literature (e.g. CSwinton 1989:7; Wofford 1999:212). A definition of Christian Transformational Leadership, by clearly delineating what such leadership is, should make it better possible to assess *control data*.

8. Summary

It is of utmost importance that theories of Christian leadership should be *defined*. Without adequate definitions, it is not possible to distinguish one theory from another, it is not possible to determine who practices them, and it is not possible to research their efficacy.

The purpose of this article was to define a Christian leadership theory here named *Christian Transformational Leadership*. The chosen method of defining Christian Transformational Leadership was to begin with a definition of *secular* Transformational Leadership, then to select Christian Transformational Leadership literature which revealed the major characteristics of this definition, and finally to *extract* a definition of Christian Transformational Leadership from this literature.

It is hoped that, by providing a more rigorous definition than any which is available today, research in this field may be advanced, in particular as it relates to the *efficacy* of Christian Transformational Leadership theory.

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Review of Swinton and Mowat, *Qualitative Research and Practical Theology*

Kevin G. Smith¹

Swinton J and Mowat H 2006. *Qualitative research and practical theology*. London: SCM Press.

1. Purpose

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat state their purpose as follows: ‘The primary purpose of this book is to address the question: How can we faithfully use qualitative research to provide accurate data for theological reflection?’ (vii). In other words, the book is about the use of qualitative research for practical theology. To be more specific, their objective is to show how practical theologians can use qualitative research to form or transform practices which are faithful to the gospel.

2. Summary

The book divides into two approximately equal halves. In the first half (chs. 1-3), Swinton and Mowat seek to answer three fundamental questions: (a) What is practical theology? (b) What is qualitative research? (c) How can practical theology use qualitative research

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methods? These three chapters constitute the theoretical core of the book. The second half (chs. 4-8) offers five concrete examples of the use of qualitative research for practical theological reflection. My summary will focus on the three key questions in chapters 1-3.

2.1. What Is Practical Theology?

Swinton and Mowat define practical theology as 'critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world' (6). The primary task of practical theology is to facilitate faithful practices—Christian communities practicing their faith in ways that are consistent with God's redemptive mission in the world, that is, faithfully participating in the continuing gospel narrative. There is nothing pragmatic about this; practical theology strives for *faithfulness* more than effectiveness.

Practical theology seeks to reflect theologically on human experience, with the twin objectives of illuminating and transforming experience. It approaches experience with a hermeneutic of suspicion, wondering if what seems to be happening is what is really happening. Therefore, the practical theologian must *complexify* situations so as to explore them theologically. Complexified situations lend themselves to theological reflection because practices are theory- and value-laden. That is, practices embody particular beliefs; therefore, they are suitable objects of critical theological enquiry.

2.2. What Is Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research is a method of studying things in their natural settings. It takes human experience seriously, and seeks to understand the meanings people ascribe to phenomena and experiences.

It assumes that human beings are by definition 'interpretive creatures'; that the ways in which we make sense of the world and our experiences within it involve a constant process of interpretation and meaning-seeking. ... Identifying and developing understandings of these meanings is the primary task of qualitative research (29-30).

Unlike the scientific method, which focuses on *nomothetic truth* (scientific knowledge that meets the criteria of falsifiability, replicability, and generalisability), qualitative research deals with *ideographic truth* (knowledge discovered through unique, non-replicable experiences). It seeks to understand and interpret such experiences. Qualitative research can provide three types of knowledge: (a) knowledge of others: understanding how individuals or groups view and interact with the world; (b) knowledge of phenomena: what certain practices mean to people; and (c) reflexive knowledge: the role of the researcher in constructing the world he is researching.

All forms of qualitative research are (a) narrative focused and (b) participatory. The researcher listens to people's stories, endeavouring to understand the meanings they ascribe to their world and their experiences. In all qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, the researcher participates in the process of retelling people's stories and interpreting them. The researcher is 'involved with the research process not as a distant observer, but as an active participant and co-creator of the interpretive experience' (35).

Constructivism is the epistemological framework underlying qualitative research. 'Constructivism assumes that truth and knowledge and the ways in which it is perceived by human beings and human communities is, to a greater or lesser extent, constructed by individuals or communities. ... it presumes that "reality" is open to a variety of different interpretations and can never be accessed in a pure, uninterpreted form' (35). Christians can never be pure constructivists, because we believe in an ultimate reality. Nevertheless, we still recognise that social realities are interpretive constructs, and that in the process of trying to describe them the researcher influences the description.

One of the challenges with qualitative research is applying it to others. The qualitative researcher's task is not to generalise, but to provide a thick description of a particular situation. Nevertheless, shared experiences allow for transfer through the concepts of *identification* and *resonance*. The experiences described resonate with others in similar situations, so they identify with the experiences. This can lead to 'transformative resonance' (47). *Theoretical generalisation* is also possible: the documented experiences lead to theory formation; the theoretical model can be applied to other situations.

Triangulation is the use of a multiple-method approach to qualitative research, in order to validate the descriptions. 'Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations' (50). Using multiple methods secures a thicker description, capturing more perspectives than a single-method approach.

The researcher must clearly understand the objective of the research from the outset. Swinton and Mowat identify four general purposes (51-52): (a) *describing* something, (b) *explaining* the reasons for

something, (c) *evaluating* the effectiveness of something, or (d) *generating* theories, strategies, or actions.

Reflexivity is a key concept for qualitative research. 'Put simply, reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings' (59). The researcher must realise that she cannot stand outside the research process. In conducting the research, she will 'both influence and be influenced by the process ... A reflexive approach recognizes this reciprocal relationship and seeks to make it explicit' (60). There are two kinds of reflexivity that the researcher should bear in mind: (a) personal reflexivity: the ways in which the researcher's values, experiences, interests, beliefs, and so on impact the research process; and (b) epistemological reflexivity: how the researcher's assumptions about the world and about the nature of knowledge impact upon the research.

2.3. How Can Practical Theology Use Qualitative Research Methods?

Having described first practical theology and then qualitative research, Swinton and Mowat turn their attention to way in which two disciplines with vastly different epistemological foundations—theology and qualitative research—can come together.

Practical theology seeks to interpret 'situations, scripture and tradition, [and] Christian practices' (75).

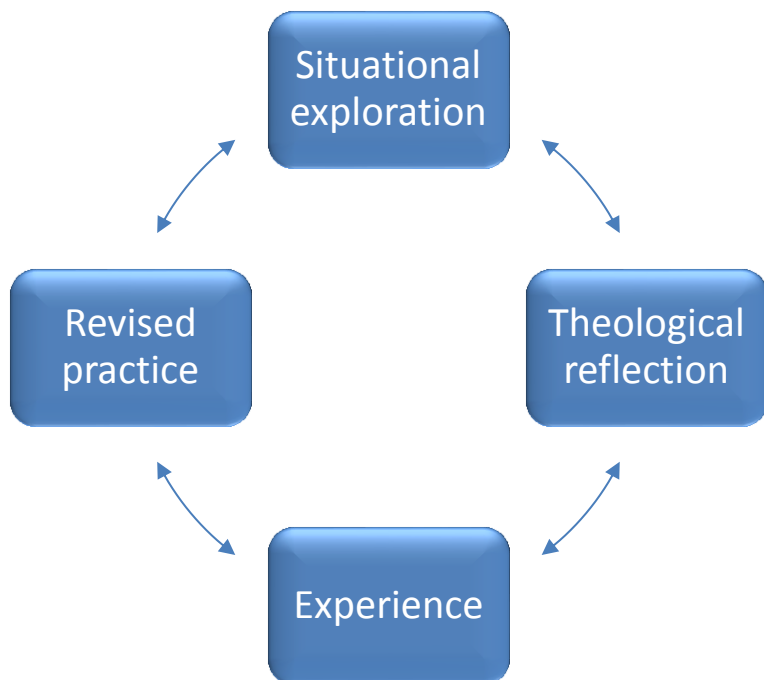
Practical theology ... is fundamentally hermeneutical, correlational, critical and theological. It is hermeneutical because it recognizes the centrality of interpretation in the way that human beings encounter the world and try to 'read' the texts of that encounter. It is correlational

because it necessarily tries to hold together and correlate at least three different perspectives—the situation, the Christian tradition and another source of knowledge that is intended to enable deeper insight and understanding. It is a critical discipline because it approaches both the world and our interpretations of the Christian tradition with a hermeneutic of suspicion, always aware of the reality of human fallenness and the complexity of the forces which shape and structure our encounters with the world. It is theological insofar as it locates itself in the world as it relates to the unfolding eschatology of the gospel narrative, a narrative that indicates that truth and the grasping of truth is possible. Any methods used by the practical theologian will need to reflect and hold in tension all of these dimensions (76-77).

Swinton and Mowat explore both *mutual critical correlation* and *mutual critical conversation* as models for bringing theology and qualitative research together. Paul Tillich (1951) developed *critical correlation*, in which the social sciences (reason and experience) raise questions to which theology provides answers; modern practical theologians consider this model inadequate because it is one-sided and uni-directional. David Tracy (1975) modified it to *mutual critical correlation*, in which the correlation of questions and answers is two-sided, theology and the social sciences conversing as equals. 'Christian tradition and practice and other forms of theory and practice are brought together in mutually constructive critical dialogue' (79). This lead to the following definition:

Practical Theology is the mutually critical correlation of interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian fact and the interpreted theory and practice of the contemporary situation (Tracy, quoted in Swinton and Mowat 2006:79).

The authors particularly like Stephen Pattison's (2000) model of mutual critical correlation, which he calls *mutual critical conversation*, because it revolves around a mutually critical conversation between the



Christian tradition, the social sciences, and a particular situation.

Figure 1: Mutual critical correlation as a model for practical theological reflection

However, Swinton and Mowat do not believe theology and the social sciences should be *equal* conversation partners. They favour a model where, in the field of practical theology, theology has logical priority, without in any wishing to diminish the value of the social sciences. This

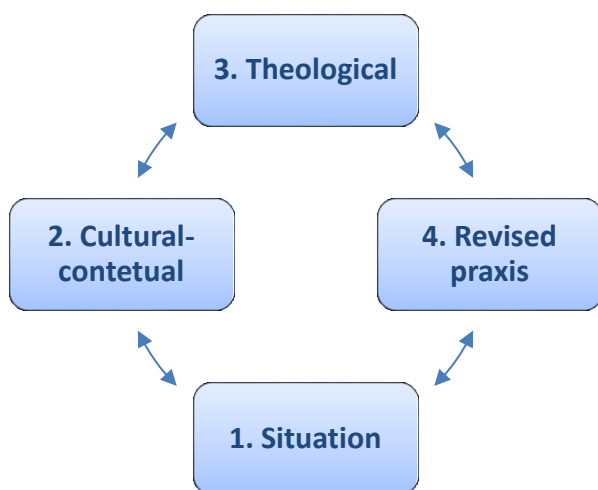
is tied to their realist ontology and their belief in revelation (that God really speaks in scripture).

In the end, Swinton and Mowat propose a four-stage process for practical theological research (see Figure 2):

1. The *situation* refers the intuitive, pre-reflective stage; we begin to explore the nature of the situation and identify what we suspect of the key issues.
2. In the *cultural-contextual analysis*, we use qualitative research and draw on theories from the social sciences to 'develop a deep and rich understanding of the complex dynamics of the situation' (96).
3. *Theological reflection* is 'critical reflection on the practices of the church in the light of scripture and tradition' (95). Theological reflection is present in steps 1-2, but takes centre stage in step 3.
4. Formulating revised praxis: 'the conversation [between stages 1-3] functions dialectically to produce new and challenging forms of practice that enable the initial situation to be transformed into ways which are authentic and faithful' (97).

Figure 2: Swinton and Mowat's model of practical theological research

In the book's conclusion,² Swinton and Mowat endorse the view that practical theology is a form of *action research*, in which the goal is not only to understand practice, but also to transform it. 'The basic dynamic of action research is the dialectical movement from practice (action) to theory, to critical reflection on practice, to revised forms of practice



developed in the light of this spiralling process. The data and practice

² Swinton and Mowat include five reports of qualitative research projects, as illustrations of how to conduct different types of studies. The reports are examples of researching personal experience (ch. 4), a local church (ch. 5), ministry (ch. 6), pastoral issues (ch. 7), and participatory research (ch. 8). For each report, they use the following method of reporting: (1) the situation: an initial analysis of some of the complexities of the situation; (2) the method: presentation and motivation of chosen research methods; (3) theological reflection: an example of theological reflection on the data; and (4) suggestions for revised forms of practice: indicative suggestions for forms of revised practice based on the findings.

are constantly challenged, developed and revised as they interact critically and dialectically with one another' (255). Throughout this process, the goal is not primarily pragmatic—to solve problems and help communities function more effectively. Rather, the practical theologian has 'the goal of interacting with situations and challenging practices in order that individuals and communities can be enabled to remain faithful to God and to participate faithfully in God's continuing mission in the world' (257). Action is never an end in itself; it is always in service of revelation and mediation of the gospel.

Evaluation

Swinton and Mowat have provided an excellent primer for the use of qualitative research methods in practical theological research. Their descriptions of (a) practical theology and (b) qualitative research are most helpful, as is their simple vision of how practical theology can make use of qualitative research methods without compromising its own epistemological foundations. I find myself in complete agreement with their theoretical basis for bringing practical theology and qualitative research together through a mutually critical correlational model in which theology takes logical priority over qualitative research. *Qualitative research and practical theology* should be required reading for any theological student undertaking empirical research as part of a practical theological research project.

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Smith, 'Review of *Qualitative Research and Practical Theology*'

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Review of Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*

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Osmer RR 2008. *Practical theology: an introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

1. Purpose

Osmer's² primary purpose is to equip congregational leaders to engage in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts that confront them in ministry. A secondary purpose is to equip theological educators to train students in the skills of practical theological reflection.

2. Summary

Osmer proposes a model of practical theological interpretation with four tasks:

1. The *descriptive-empirical task* asks, 'What is going on?'
2. The *interpretive task* asks, 'Why is it going on?'

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² Richard Osmer is a professor of Christian education at Princeton Theological Seminary.

3. The *normative task* asks, 'What ought to be going on?'
4. The *pragmatic task* asks, 'How might we respond?'

The book is organised around these four tasks, with one major chapter devoted to each task. In addition, there is an introductory chapter which introduces the four tasks and places them within the framework of congregational leadership, and an epilogue dealing with teaching practical theology in Christian higher education.

In the interests of helping students embarking on research in the field of practical theology for the first time, I shall offer a fairly detailed, chapter-by-chapter summary of Osmer's book.

Introduction: The Four Tasks of Practical Theology

Although he is conscious it will be used by academic practical theologians, Osmer's book is intended primarily for *congregational leaders*. He embraces Gerkin's (1997) model of pastoral leadership, namely, the pastor as *interpretive guide*. His primary objective is to equip leaders³ to be effective interpretive guides for their congregations by teaching them how to engage in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts.⁴ Osmer offers the four tasks of practical theology (see *Figure 1*) as a model that interpretive guides can use to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts theologically.

³ Osmer prefers the term 'congregational leaders' to 'pastors' because the role of interpretive guide is not restricted to pastors.

⁴ Osmer consistently distinguishes between episodes (single incidents or events), situations (broader patterns of events or relationships in which episodes occur), and contexts (the social and natural systems in which a situation unfolds).

Task	Descriptive	Interpretive	Normative	Strategic
Question	What is going on?	Why is it going on?	What ought to be going on?	How might we respond?
Function	Priestly listening	Sagely wisdom	Prophetic discernment	Servant leadership

Figure 1: The four tasks of practical theology

Osmer uses the concept of the hermeneutical circle (or, better still, the hermeneutical spiral) to clarify the relationship between the four tasks (see Figure 2). Although the four tasks are distinct, they are also connected. The interpreter must constantly move between tasks, which leads to an interpretive spiral.

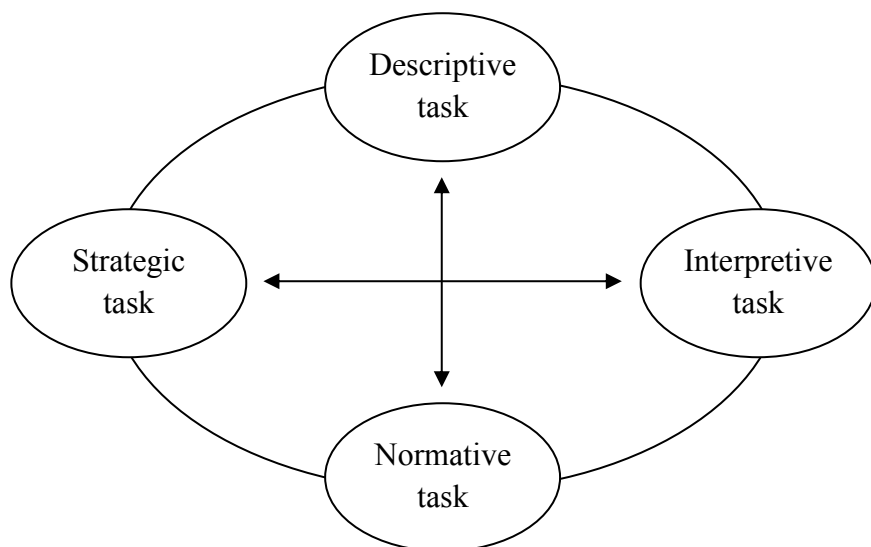


Figure 2: Relationships between the four tasks

Osmer embraces the belief that all scholarship is hermeneutical, that is, it is not neutral and objective, but is an interpretive experience affected by preunderstanding. 'All interpretation begins with preunderstandings that come to us from the past' (22). He supports Gadamer's (1975) five-stage depiction of hermeneutical experience, namely, (a) preunderstanding, (b) being brought up short, (c) dialogical interplay, (d) fusion of horizons, and (e) application. It is the experience of being brought up short that causes people and congregations to question their preunderstandings; in such settings, interpretive guides can apply the four tasks of practical theological interpretation to discern God's will in a particular setting.

Chapter 1. The Descriptive-Empirical Task: Priestly Listening

The first task is *the descriptive-empirical task*. Practical theology begins with episodes, situations, or contexts that call for interpretation. Therefore, practical theology invites 'students to interpret the texts of contemporary lives and practices, ... "living human documents"' (32). The descriptive task seeks to answer the question, What is going on?

Osmer grounds the descriptive task in terms of 'a spirituality of presence' (33-34). 'It is a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations' (34). He refers to such attending as *priestly listening*.⁵ In a congregational setting, priestly listening can be informal, semiformal, or formal. While valuing informal and semiformal attending, Osmer focuses on formal attending, which he defines as 'investigating particular episodes, situations, and contexts through empirical research' (38). He argues that qualitative

⁵ The term is based on the idea that true intercessory prayer involves more than praying for people; it involves listening closely to their needs so that one can represent their needs to God. In other words, it begins with priestly listening.

research methods do not necessarily treat people as objects, and are thus consistent with priestly listening.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to explaining how to conduct empirical research. His discussion, which is pitched at the level of novice researchers (especially congregational leaders), is amongst the most helpful portions of the book. His proposed research design has four key elements: (a) the purpose of the project, (b) the strategies of inquiry, (c) the research plan, and (d) reflection on the metatheoretical assumptions.

The purpose of the project. Osmer emphasises the importance of being able to state the primary purpose of the study in one short paragraph, and the need to identify two or three key research questions related to it. That would refer to the specific purpose. He also lists five *general* purposes of research, namely, basic, applied, summative, formative, and action research. Most academic research falls into the category of *basic research*, which aims 'to contribute to fundamental knowledge and theory' (49).

The strategies of inquiry. The first strategic choice is whether to adopt a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method. Quantitative is ideal for extensive research, while qualitative is best for intensive research. A combination, previously frowned upon, is now considered acceptable. Osmer proceeds to discuss six specific types of research: (a) narrative research: telling individuals' stories; (b) case study research: studying a small number of cases in depth; (c) ethnographic research: describing a cultural or social group; (d) grounded theory research: developing a theory related to the context of a phenomenon; (e) phenomenological research: seeking the *essence* of an activity or experience for a group of people; and (f) advocacy research: contributing to social change (with an explicit political agenda).

The research plan. 'A research plan involves decisions about the following: (1) the people, program, or setting that will be investigated, (2) the specific methods that will be used to gather data, (3) the individuals or research team that will conduct the research, and (4) the sequence of steps that will be followed to carry out the project in a specific time frame. Inevitably, decisions about these matters involve trade-offs, determined by the constraints of time, financial resources, and the availability of those being studied' (53).

Osmer lists and briefly explains six methods of empirical research, namely, interviews, participant observation, artefact analysis, spatial analysis, demographic analysis, and focus groups. He also offers a helpful summary of the four general steps in the empirical research process: (a) data collection, (b) data transcription, (c) data analysis and interpretation, and (d) research reporting. In the data analysis phase, the objective is to discover patterns and themes in the data.

Reflection on the metatheoretical assumptions. Osmer calls this 'reflexivity'. There is a double crisis confronting empirical research: (a) representation: observation itself is theory-laden, so representation of data is never purely factual; and (b) legitimation: the criteria for legitimising research vary, 'depending on the kind of research being conducted and its guiding purpose' (57). Therefore, researchers need to reflect self-consciously on their metatheoretical perspectives, such as their views on the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and science (philosophy of science).

Chapter 2. The Interpretive Task: Sagely Wisdom

The interpretive task seeks reasons for the phenomena that were observed in the descriptive task. The key question now becomes, What is it going on? Here the interpretive guide must identify the issues

embedded within the episodes, situations, and contexts he has observed, and draw on theories from the arts and sciences to help him understand the issues.

Osmer refers to this process as applying 'sagely wisdom'. Sagely wisdom requires the interplay of three key characteristics: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation, and wise judgement. *Thoughtfulness* is the quality of a leader who is committed to reflecting deeply about the questions that life throws at him, especially when experiences of being brought up short challenge his congregation's preunderstandings.⁶ *Theoretical interpretation* denotes the ability 'to draw on theories of the arts and sciences to understand and respond to particular episodes, situations, and contexts' (83). Osmer emphasises the fact that all theoretical knowledge is fallible and is grounded in a particular perspective, and must be used with a full understanding of these limitations. *Wise judgement* is 'the capacity to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts in three interrelated ways: (1) recognition of the *relevant particulars* of specific events and circumstances; (2) discernment of the *moral ends* at stake; (3) determination of the most *effective means* to achieve these ends in light of the constraints and possibilities of a particular time and place' (84). Wise judgement relates to Aristotle's idea of *phronēsis*. 'It involves discerning the right course of action in particular circumstances, through understanding the circumstances rightly, the moral ends of action, and the effective means to achieve these ends' (84).

Osmer grounds his interpretive task in two strains of biblical wisdom literature, namely, Israel's wisdom tradition and Jesus Christ as God's hidden wisdom revealed. Israel's wisdom literature (specifically Job,

⁶ Thoughtfulness also refers to treating others with kindness and consideration; Osmer embraces the dual meaning of the term.

Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) models 'deriving general insights from the observable patterns of nature and human life' (89). Much like the human and social sciences, the wisdom writers carefully observed everyday life and formulated theories based on their observations. The practical theologian does the same, and also draws on the theories of others, both biblical and scientific. The other key strand of wisdom is Jesus Christ. The scriptures portray him as 'Wisdom incarnate, who reveals God's secret Wisdom' (98). Jesus provides a radical, counter-cultural framework within which Christians must interpret wisdom literature. As sage, Jesus 'qualifies our reliance on experiential, creation wisdom alone. While the church continues to learn in the wisdom way, reflecting on the meaning of the discernable patterns of life, it places such knowledge in a new and different theological context: the redemptive wisdom of Christ. This wisdom has strong elements of reversal and subversion, pointing to the counterorder of God's royal rule' (100).

Osmer argues that interpretive guides should judge theories according to 'a communicative model of rationality' (100-103), which contains three basic elements: (a) *argumentation*: people offer rational arguments in support of claims, leading to consensus or dissensus; (b) *perspectivalism*: the reasons offered are always ground in a particular perspective; and (c) *fallibility*: scientific theories are fallible; they should be offered with humility and used with caution. Furthermore, the communicative model of rationality offers three ways to evaluate scientific theories, according to their root metaphor, their disciplinary perspective, or the soundness and strength of their arguments.⁷

⁷ On the final point, Osmer contrasts dialectical arguments with dialogical arguments (121-122). He also devotes six pages to discussing the parts of an argument (122-127).

Chapter 3. The Normative Task: Prophetic Discernment

The normative task asks, What ought to be going on? It seeks to discern God's will for present realities. Osmer refers to this task as *prophetic discernment*. Although the Old Testament prophets spoke normatively for God, they were also interpreters of past traditions and present revelations. The term 'prophetic discernment' is intended to capture 'the interplay of divine disclosure and human shaping as prophetic discernment. The prophetic office is the discernment of God's Word to the covenant people in a particular time and place' (133). 'Prophetic discernment involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word' (134-135).

Prophetic discernment uses three methods to discover God's word for the present: (a) theological interpretation, (b) ethical reflection, and (c) good practice.

Theological interpretation, as it forms part of Osmer's normative task, must not be confused with the traditional disciplines of biblical studies, biblical theology, or systematic theology, which study the scriptures on their own. While theological interpretation is informed by biblical and systematic theology, it 'focuses on the interpretation of *present* episodes, situations, and contexts with theological concepts' (139). It draws on theological concepts, such as the distinction between Law and Gospel in the Lutheran tradition, to interpret present events and realities.

Ethical reflection refers to 'using ethical principles, rules, or guidelines to guide action towards moral ends' (161). Since 'present practices are filled with values and norms' (149; cf. Browning 1991), and those

While not particularly advanced, his overview of this important topic could be helpful for novice researchers, such as new MTh candidates.

values and norms are often in conflict, interpretive guides must 'develop ethical principles, guidelines, and rules' (149) to channel behaviour in episodes, situations, and contexts towards moral ends. He can draw on the communities own traditions for principles to guide its conduct.⁸

Good practice plays two very different roles in Osmer's model of prophetic discernment. First, the interpretive guide and draw on models of good practice, whether past or present, to 'reform a congregation's present actions' (153). Second, analysis of present examples of good practice 'can generate new understandings of God, the Christian life, and social values beyond those provided by the received tradition' (153).

Osmer closes this chapter with a lengthy discussion of how to engage appropriately in cross-disciplinary dialogue. His treatment of the subject, which is a little too complex to summarise here, would be valuable reading for anyone engaged in reason which brings practical theology into dialogue with other disciplines (or even other sub-disciplines or theology). Osmer summarises several models of cross-disciplinary dialogue in an attempt to answer the question, 'How is the worldly wisdom of the arts and sciences appropriately related to the Wisdom of God?' (162).

⁸ Osmer commends Ricoeur's (1992) 'three-part account of the moral life' as an aid to ethical reflection. In his three-part account, '(1) the identity-shaping ethos of a moral community that is embodied in its practices, narratives, relationships, and models; (2) the universal ethical principles that a moral community uses to test its moral practices and vision and to take account of the moral claims of others beyond this community; (3) the *phronesis*, or practical moral reasoning, that is needed to apply moral principles and commitments to particular situations' (Osmer 2008, 149).

Chapter 4. The Pragmatic Task: Servant Leadership

The objective of this chapter was to provide congregational leaders with guidance for leading congregations through the process of change. It seeks to answer the question, How might we respond? Osmer explores various aspects of leadership (e.g. task competence, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership), but frames the overall task as *servant leadership*.

Perhaps because I read this book from the perspective of an academic in the field of practical theology rather than from the perspective of a congregational leader needing to guide a congregation through change, I found this chapter the least helpful in the book.

Epilogue: Teaching Practical Theology in Schools of Theology

The epilogue addresses seminarians about how to teach practical theology in a way that promotes competent theological reflection and interpretation. He criticises the 'encyclopaedic paradigm'⁹ of theological training for creating a disciplinary 'silo mentality', which is better suited to the needs of a research university than to the goal of preparing pastoral practitioners capable of practical theological reflection. He urges that the excessive isolation of the various sub-disciplines be replaced by models that encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue and thinking. By cross-disciplinary he has in mind both

⁹ The encyclopaedic paradigm is the division of theology into separate specialisations, typically biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. 'Each task pursues its distinctive tasks along the lines of a modern research discipline, with specialized language, methods of inquiry, and subject matter' (233). The goal of the first three disciplines is to produce new knowledge, whereas 'the specific task of practical theology is to relate the scholarship of the other theological disciplines to the work of clergy and congregations' (234).

intradisciplinary dialogue (between theological sub-disciplines) and interdisciplinary dialogue (between theology and other fields of study).

Osmer laments that educators' obsession with covering content is the single biggest barrier to true learning; pressure to process more data prevents students taking the time to integrate what they have learned into their thinking. To combat the overemphasis on mastery of content and disciplinary segregation, he proposes that educators make greater use of 'case studies and critical incident reports to practice practical theological interpretation in relation to particular episodes, situations, and contexts' (227).

3. Evaluation

How are we to evaluate and appropriate Osmer's four-task model of practical theological reflection in the context of an evangelical institution, such as the South African Theological Seminary.

3.1. Strengths

There is much to commend Osmer's approach. He has produced a useful and helpful introduction to practical theology. These are some aspects I appreciated about Osmer's book.

1. His objective of equipping congregational leaders to engage in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts affecting their congregations and members is refreshing. This model of doing theology 'in ministry' would be an invaluable skill for all pastors to master. Seminaries intent on equipping graduates for the realities that confront pastors should seriously consider training students to engage in this kind of thinking throughout their curriculum.

2. The fourfold model of practical theological thinking is a useful and simple tool in itself. Even without formal training in their proper application, congregational leaders would benefit greatly by pondering the four questions thoughtfully: What is going on? Why is it going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?

3. His treatment of the descriptive-empirical task is the best introduction to empirical research for theological students that I have seen. For first time master's or doctoral students in practical theology, the book is worth buying just for this helpful orientation.

4. When compared with standard textbooks on practical theology (e.g. Heyns and Pieterse 1990; Browning 1991; Heitink 1999; Hendriks 2004), Osmer is surprisingly reader-friendly. He strikes a rare balance, grounding the presentation in scholarship without over-burdening ordinary readers with technical terminology and philosophy.

5. I wholeheartedly support Osmer's call for theology to begin to break away from silo mentality, that is, the overemphasis on specialised sub-disciplines. Theological educators must embrace a more integrated model of theological interpretation, training thinking practitioners who can serve the church effectively as exegetes of the world and the word.

3.2. Weaknesses

Given its purpose and perspective, the book has few real weaknesses. What I consider 'weaknesses' arise from two sources. First, Osmer approaches the tasks of practical theology from a liberal Protestant perspective, whereas I prefer a conservative evangelical approach. Second, he has written for congregational leaders, but I hope to appropriate his model for seminary-based research projects. These are some elements of the book that I found disappointing.

1. The fact that the book is geared more towards congregational leaders than practical theologians is both a strength and a weakness. It contributes to its user-friendliness and practical value for pastors, but limits its value for students who hope to use it as a primer for thesis research (admittedly, that was not its intended use).

2. I would like to see greater emphasis on the scriptures, especially in the normative task. To be fair to Osmer, there is a reasonable focus on scripture, and his model is certainly usable even by those who hold more conservative theological views. However, he relies more heavily on theological concepts and on theories from the arts and sciences to guide practical theological interpretation than on in-depth study of scripture. For anyone with a high view of scripture, even practical theology must be exegetical theology.

3. I am distinctly uncomfortable applying the label 'normative' to new understandings of God or Christian life and values derived by observing contemporary models of good practice. For Osmer, all theories and theologies are fallible and perspectival, so such new understandings would be held lightly. However, for the overwhelming majority of faith communities in Africa—and indeed in my theological views—Christian doctrines and ethical norms are deemed to be based on the infallible word of God, and hold an authority akin to the very word of God. While believers recognise that human interpretations of the scriptures are imperfect, they place great stock in views based on scripture. For such communities, fallible human observation and evaluation of models of good practice is too shaky a foundation upon which to base new understandings about God. This is not to deny that such believers may perceive God at work in models of good practice, as a result of which they may perceive the teachings of scripture in new ways, which deepen their understanding of God, his will, and his ways.

4. I was particularly disappointed with Osmer's chapter on the pragmatic task. My disappointment may say more about my context than his content. I was hoping to find a system for developing a theological theory of action based on the three foundational tasks, closing the circle of reflection from praxis through theory and back to praxis. Instead, I found a discussion of how to lead a congregation through change.

4. Recommendation

Is *Practical Theology: An Introduction* worth reading? Definitely. It is an excellent introduction to the tasks of practical theology, and is well worth reading. I will prescribe for many of my MTh candidates in practical theology. It is a must read for thinking pastors committed to practical theological reflection.

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