

# Conspectus

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# **‘Resist him’ (1 Pet 5:9): Holiness and Non-Retaliatory Responses to Unjust Suffering as ‘Holy War’ in 1 Peter**

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## **Abstract**

1 Peter exhorts readers to respond to unjust suffering with non-retaliatory righteous behaviour, while looking forward to vindication at the Lord’s return. Although several literary-theological and sociological approaches to the epistle have shed considerable light on this exhortation, a number of interpreters maintain that ultimately, the epistle engenders a paralyzing sense of passive victimhood in believers. This article examines the theological significance of several military metaphors throughout the epistle, to show that the exhortation to resist the devil in the final chapter is a climax to a consistent theme in the epistle, aimed at galvanizing spiritual warriors whose weapons are peaceful non-retaliation, hope, and holiness through Christ’s redemptive work. It also argues that Peter’s approach is in line with the New Testament’s transformation of the holy war motif of the Old Testament. Rather than being paralyzed into helplessness, the first readers of the epistle would have been emboldened by the call to holy resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The problem

The recent 'rehabilitation' of 1 Peter, the epistle once described as 'second-class status ... exegetical step-child' (Elliot 1976:243), has shed considerable light on its socio-historical and situational context, as well as Peter's<sup>2</sup> overall pastoral response to the issues that confronted his readers. That the over-riding focus of the epistle was to encourage an appropriate Christian response to persecution is evidenced by the fact that the issue is addressed in each chapter.<sup>3</sup> As the epistle describes it, the believers were facing moderate forms of persecution characterized by 'various trials' (1:6), being 'maligned as evildoers' (2:12), having to 'suffer for doing what is right', and being threatened along with it (3:14), again being 'maligned' and 'abused' (3:16), having to 'suffer in the flesh', i.e. faced corporal punishment of some kind (4:1), verbal abuses (4:4), 'fiery ordeal' (4:12), 'reviled' and 'disgraced' (4:14-16), and miscellaneous unjust sufferings (5:8-9). With this much, interpreters are in agreement.

Interpreters are also broadly in agreement that in a summary, Peter adopts a three prong strategy in this epistle, namely, (a) reshaping the believers' understanding of their Christian identity as the immediate

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<sup>2</sup> Theories of pseudonymity or of a 'Petrine school' as author of the epistle fail to convince, and certainly create more difficulties than solve the questions they purport to answer. This article therefore accepts that 1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter, 'through Silvanus' (5:12; NRSV). For a recent review of the arguments against the pseudonymity and Petrine school hypotheses, see Jobes (2005:5-19).

<sup>3</sup> Earlier theories that the epistle was a baptismal liturgical homily or a patchwork of several different exhortations have now been largely abandoned by interpreters in favour of a consistent paranaesis. For a recent examination of the genre of 1 Peter, see Prasad (2000:47-52).

reason for their persecution, (b) urging them to persist in a life of holiness and peaceful non-retaliation in response to the unjust suffering, and (c) instilling a sense of hope in the midst of this suffering by stressing their forthcoming vindication at the day of the Lord. This strategy is exemplified by the instructions he gives to subjects of the government, slaves, wives, and husbands in the Petrine *haustafel* (2:11-3:7). As demonstrated in the summary to follow, the application of literary-theological and sociological methodologies to the epistle (over the last three decades) has tremendously enhanced our understanding of the details of this strategy, even if disagreement still exists as to some of its twists and turns.

Several interpreters, however, have criticized this strategy for fostering a sense of passivity that paralyzes believers into seeing themselves as helpless victims. Edward Schweizer, for example, describes the strategy as 'pagan Christianity' (1977:410). David Balch thinks it is 'repressive' (1986:97). And David Horrell warns of the 'dangers' inherent in the epistle's theology: 'The issue is not only whether the hope which the author encouraged is merely "pie-in-the-sky" but also whether using such a hope as a motivation for quiet submission amid the injustices and sufferings of the world does not place 1 Peter rather firmly into the role of "opiate of the masses"' (1998:17-18). In calling upon persecuted Christians to 'bear such suffering quietly and without complaint', Peter, Horrell continues, 'extinguishes any pressure for change with the promise of reward in heaven' (1998:55).

Writing from a feminist perspective, Kathleen Corley also criticizes Peter's use of Jesus' suffering as example of his exhorted strategy. She concludes, 'The basic message of 1 Peter does not reflect God's liberating Word' (1995:357). Similarly, Warren Carter believes that Peter's strategy, more or less, offers the obedient submission of Christian wives and slaves as 'sacrifice' to the Empire, in exchange for

the peace and tranquillity of the Christian religion (2004:14-33; cf. Dowd 1998:370-372; Fiorenza 1989:260-266). In a nutshell then, Peter's exhortation is judged by these interpreters to be weak capitulation to oppressors.

Such trenchant objections may be justifiably dismissed as worse than unfair characterizations of the epistle motivated by anachronistic modernist concerns.<sup>4</sup> Even so, they cannot be justly branded as empty incendiary rhetoric. For it is an undeniable fact, that some Christians today, wrongly apply Peter's teaching. For example, in her examination of the phenomenon of domestic violence in a number of U.S. churches (published in the *Los Angeles Times*), Teresa Watanabe narrates a story in which a woman, who was being subjected to physical abuse by her husband, pleaded for help from her church. Without exploring what other avenues for addressing the desperate situation were available, her pastor, evidently believing that he was correctly applying 1 Peter, asked her to go back, 'be a kinder wife; then you will win him to Christ because that is what the Bible says' (1998:9). Similarly, in their masterful evaluation of resources for counteracting domestic violence, Kroeger and Nason-Clark identify misunderstandings of 1 Peter's message as one of the fundamental problems in evangelical approaches

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<sup>4</sup> Predictably, these objectors have not offered any reasonable ancient alternative to Peter's approach. One issue, for example, is whether it is being suggested that Peter should have encouraged the Christians to resort to violent resistance to the authorities, a reaction which was indeed adopted by some disenfranchised peoples to Roman Colonial rule. Indeed, Moffatt thinks that Peter's conciliatory attitude was exactly aimed at discouraging Christians from adopting such revolutionary responses—'a Christian, especially under the influence of apocalyptic hopes, might incur the suspicion of treason by encouraging disobedience among slaves, for example, or by sympathizing with revolutionary movements, in exasperation against the persecuting authorities. The risk of an extreme left wing among Christians was not unfounded at this period' (1928:158).

to violence in Christian homes: 'First Peter 3:1-6 is often used to argue that women should endure domestic abuse heroically in order to convert their husbands' (2010:125). Steven Tracey also points out, that such examples of misinterpretations of 1 Peter's teaching give 'credence to the feminist assertion that evangelical theology contributes to the abuse of women' (2006:279).

Accordingly, the question cannot be left unanswered. If Sarah Tanzer's conclusion, that 1 Peter's approach is 'a lofty justification for victimization, violence and abuse' (2000:498; cf. Clark 1984) is to be shown to be incorrect, an examination of whether Peter's strategy can be labelled as encouraging a sense of helpless victimhood is warranted. In other words, would the first readers of Peter's letter have understood his exhortations as encouraging a passive paralyzing acceptance of their statuses as victims, or, would they have been emboldened by it?

## 1.2. Recent insights into the problem

The revival in Petrine studies has followed several trajectories,<sup>5</sup> two of which have shed considerable light on the problem at hand—literary-theological and sociological approaches to the epistle. The literary-theological approaches to 1 Peter have improved our understanding of the text by revealing the immense influence of Old Testament theological thought on Peter's strategy. This has been in two main forms, namely, (a) regarding the influence of the traditions of the persecution and eventual vindication of the righteous sufferer of Psalm 34 and of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and (b) in the application of the Old Testament's exodus theology to the situation of the believers in Asia Minor.

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<sup>5</sup> For summaries of the recent developments, see Boring (2004:358-367) and Dubis (2006:199-239).



The influence of Psalm 34 on the theology of 1 Peter is widely recognized, and its teaching regarding how the righteous are to respond to persecution in positive anticipation of their vindication clearly governs several aspects of Peter's exhortation. As Gilmour puts it, 'Psalm 34 proposes that hope and peace may be found in the midst of affliction, a theme that appears to have shaped Peter's first letter' (2004:405). This theology, according to 1 Peter, is exemplified in Jesus, whose righteous response to his sufferings was followed by his vindication at the resurrection (cf. 2:3; 3:10-12; cf. Gilmour 2004:404-411; Gréaux 2009:603-613; Kelly 1969:87; Senior and Harrington 2003:49). Similarly, the influence of Isaiah on 1 Peter has also been acknowledged (Dryden 2004:317-320; Moyise 2005:175-188; Osborne 1983:381-408; van Rensburg and Moyise 2002:275-286; Williams 2007:37-55). And in the particular case of persecution, Peter found the Suffering Servant Songs as one of the keys for shaping the self-understanding of the believing community, as well as their responses to unjust suffering (Achteimer 1993:176-188; Borchert 1982:451-462).

This understanding of unjust suffering is coupled with Peter's transformation of the New Israel exodus imagery, to apply to the identity of the believers (Deterding 1981:58-65; Feldmeier 2008:21-27; Gupta 2009:61-76; Horrell 2007:361-381; Scharlemann 1976:165-170). In so doing, the recipients of 1 Peter are shown to share in the identity and experiences of the biblical people of God as bearers of his mission, a mission which involved experiences of servitude and exiles, interspersed with periods of deliverance and vindication.

Put together, the literary-theological examination of 1 Peter firmly places the apostle's strategy in line with scriptural traditions. Believers are persecuted because of their uniqueness and their mission as God's people. As God's exiles, they are to counter their suffering by persisting in their life of holiness and the proclamation of God's mighty acts,

while expectantly awaiting their vindication. The first readers, who would have been keenly attuned to these traditions, would have found such a message reassuring and reinvigorating, rather than paralyzing.

It is an oversimplification, but nevertheless helpful, to summarize that the sociological approach to 1 Peter categorizes its strategy with three different models, namely, inversion, acculturation / assimilation or resistance. In a pioneering contribution, John Elliott (1981) argued that the statements that the recipients of the letter were *παρεπιδήμους* (exiles of the diaspora, 1:1), *παροίκους* (aliens, 2:11) and *παρεπιδήμους* (exiles, 2:11) technically identified them as displaced resident aliens in Asia Minor. According to Elliott, this social identity means that we should understand Peter's exhortations as directed largely to Christian immigrants, and marginalized people in Asia Minor with limited rights and very few options for redressing their grievances, apart from, of course, compromising their faith. Even so, Elliott argues, Peter's exhortations were aimed at constructing a Christian community identity that acted as a safe haven for the persecuted minority. The Petrine strategy was, he writes, 'to avert ... forces of social disintegration through a reinforcement of the distinctive identity of the Christian community' (Elliott 1981:217; Elliott 2000; Elliott 2007; cf. Jobses 2005:33).

The exhortations to submission, when seen in this light, were more or less equivalent to Jeremiah's letter to Jewish exiles, exhorting them as immigrants to seek the peace and tranquillity of the host nations (e.g. Jer 29). Other interpreters have pointed out that Jewish groups, such as the Qumran community, adopted similar inversion approaches to their social situation of marginalization. While not all interpreters have

agreed with Elliott's interpretation,<sup>6</sup> almost all agree that the extent of the social and political rights of the Christians should be considered as a major factor when evaluating Peter's strategy. In other words, Peter's exhortations must be re-contextualized in contemporary non-colonial situations, where social and political rights of Christians are less constricting (cf. Chin 1991:96-112; Green 2007:316).

One critic of Elliott, David Balch, put forward an alternative model for evaluating the Petrine exhortations. In contrast to Elliott, Balch proposed that Peter's strategy was aimed at acculturation or assimilation of Christians into the predominantly Greco-Roman culture. Drawing his insights from Hellenistic philosophy, he argued that the ultimate goal of the strategy was apologetic, namely, to reduce the criticisms by the larger society that the behaviour of the Christians was socially destabilizing. Subordination to authority, honouring the emperor, and non-retaliation would show that Christians were willing to assimilate. And this, the writer of 1 Peter reckoned, would result in a dividend of peace for the religion (Balch 1981; Balch 1986:92-94). Balch himself thought that this strategy was ultimately counterproductive to the Christian faith. Even if in the short term, it ensured that the Christians were less molested by society: 'The Jewish Christian author of 1 Peter is exhorting these sectarians to accept and maintain a norm of behaviour that differs radically from the way of life legislated and encouraged in Scripture ... This tendency reinforced Roman hierarchical society' (1986:96-97). Thus contrary to the

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<sup>6</sup> Some have argued, correctly in my view, that we need not take the identification of the recipients as 'resident aliens' literally. Even so, it is admitted by most interpreters that the fundamental problem was that these Christians, be they Jewish, gentiles or more likely of mixed ethnicities, had limited social and political rights by virtue of being Christians. This is quite an important contribution by Elliott.

conclusions of the literary-theological approach, Balch thinks that Peter's approach contradicted scriptural traditions.

Balch's thesis served as linchpin for many critics of the epistle's strategy, especially feminist theologians (cf. Fiorenza 1989). Nevertheless, one benefit of his proposal was that it correctly underlined the fact that Peter's strategy encouraged Christian engagement with society that was albeit rejecting its ethics, and not the tendency toward isolationism that Elliott's approach may lead one to believe. However, Balch's thesis was rightly criticized for its anachronism, and failure to take account of the theological basis of Peter's strategy (cf. Bauman-Martin 2004:259; Martin 1983:103-105). Moreover, Balch's privileging of Hellenistic philosophy over the predominantly Jewish hermeneutics of the writer of the epistle is a major methodological flaw (Bauman-Martin 2004:263; Seland 2005:147-89; Volf 1994:15-30). As shortly demonstrated, Peter's exhortation, in the light of his Jewish hermeneutics, his call for engagement with society was in line with the holy war tradition of the Old Testament.

Paradoxically,<sup>7</sup> it has taken the introduction of postcolonial sociological approaches to the epistle to establish the exact nature of this engagement. Peter's strategy, in this view, was not inversion or assimilation, but a call on the believers to employ their non-retaliatory submission and holy character to resist the powers that be. Drawing from studies by sociologists and political scientists on forms of subversive resistive behaviours of colonized, oppressed, enslaved, and

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<sup>7</sup> Paradoxically, because postcolonial approaches to 1 Peter, as exemplified by several feminist approaches, have tended to criticize the strategy of the epistle, rather than attempt to read it from the most likely effect of Peter's teaching on the ancient readers. For an overview of the various different camps in postcolonial biblical interpretation, see Segovia (1998:49-65).

marginalized peoples, aimed at resisting unjust authority,<sup>8</sup> a number of interpreters have found that in many ways Peter's strategy fits this pattern of resistance very well (Horrell 2007:111-143; Horsley 2004).

Bauman-Martin, for example, criticizes the failure of feminist interpreters 'to distinguish between the patriarchal misinterpretation of the letter over the years and the possibilities of interpretation it may have offered for the original readers' (2004:258). She draws on several examples of second and later century women's interpretation of the epistle to conclude that 'the actions of the Petrine women have more to do with marginal resistance than with suffering for its own sake' (2004:247; cf. Horrell 2007:111-143). This subversive and resistive stance of 1 Peter is epitomized by the hierarchy of honour, which Peter creates in 2:17: 'Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor'. In other words, God is to be feared, and the brothers and sisters loved; but, the emperor, just as everyone else, is to be merely honoured (cf. Grudem 1988:131). The first readers would have taken the hint of subversion in this placement of limitations on the degree of allegiance to the emperor.

The resistance approach to understanding the apostle's strategy has a lot in its favour. It interprets pragmatically the epistle from the stance of its recipients, and seeks to explore how they would have understood Peter's exhortation, under their ancient colonized and oppressed situation. The fact is, all 'oppressed peoples everywhere [wear] masks in their relations with those who parasitized them' (Pettersen 1982:338; cf. Callahan and Horsley 1998:133-152). A simplistic evaluation of

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Scott (1985); Scott (1990); Webster and Cooper (1996); Barclay (2005). These are wide ranging cross cultural studies examining records of Jewish behaviour under roman colonial rule, the behaviours of the African American slaves, contemporary illegal immigrants and other minorities.

Peter's strategy, without taking the nuanced nature of responses of the marginalized to their situation, was therefore bound to be inadequate.

Moreover, the resistance approach highlights that Peter's exhortations were not a call to accommodation and compromise, but a call to believers to persist in their Christian faith and praxis, and yet also to be prepared to bear the inevitably painful consequences of their holy and peaceful behaviour. Ironically, the documented popularity of 1 Peter and other New Testament slavery texts among African American slaves of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century supports the view, that like their counterparts in 1<sup>st</sup> century Asia Minor, they detected the resistive language in the epistle (Martin 1998:203-233; Patterson 1982:175).

What remains is to demonstrate how this resistance fits into Peter's thoroughly theological strategy. Put another way, how does Peter's overall theological language relate to his strategy of encouraging resistance to the bullying culture?

### **1.3. The present proposal**

In what follows, the aim is to confirm this resistive nature of Peter's theological strategy, by examining several military and quasi-military metaphors that are employed throughout the epistle, and which climax with the exhortation to resist the devil in the final chapter. By also investigating how the holy war motif in the Old Testament was reinterpreted by subsequent prophetic and New Testament writers, I will contend that Peter's strategy amounted to encouraging the use of peaceful non-retaliation, and the hope and holiness inaugurated by the redemptive work of Christ, as resistive weapons in a spiritualized holy war. The first readers of 1 Peter were seemingly empowered to see themselves as spiritual warriors, rather than being paralyzed to see themselves as helpless victims.

The basic tenet of the present proposal is that biblical metaphors are not just literary devices, but often serve as the most effective tools for shaping how the first readers responded to scripture (cf. Adams 2008:291-305; Howe 2006; Jindo 2009:222-243). Military metaphors in particular, are employed in the New Testament in several different settings and to various effects for this purpose (cf. Brink 2005:191-201; Krentz 1993:105-127). The significance of Peter's use of military metaphors should therefore be sought by investigating their theological background, especially from the Old Testament.

The article will proceed in the following three-step fashion. I will firstly summarize the features of the holy war motif in the Old Testament, and its subsequent reinterpretation as spiritualized warfare, characterized by peace and righteousness. This will be followed by exegesis of several military metaphors in 1 Peter's exhortations, which have similar connotations of holy war. The article will conclude with a brief discussion on the relevance of Peter's strategy to contemporary reflections on Christian engagement with a postmodern culture that is increasingly rejecting and marginalizing its stance.

## 2. Holy War and its Reinterpretation in the Bible

Also called 'divine warfare', 'Yahweh's war', 'wars of Yahweh', or '*herem*', holy war may be simply defined as physical and/or purely metaphorical military combat that is mandated by God, and fought either by him alone, or with or wholly through the agency of his people.<sup>9</sup> As the definition suggests, such a war has a number of

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<sup>9</sup> The commonest terminology in the old testament is 'wars of Yahweh' (Num 21:14; 1 Sam 18:17, 25:28), but the other features make 'divine warfare' or 'holy war' more preferred by interpreters (cf. Jones 1975:642-658; Walzer 1992:215-228). For a recent

distinctive characteristics, namely, (a) God is the initiator of the war, (b) the war involves superhuman miraculous elements, (c) the victory is assured and attributed to God, (d) the war is regarded as part of the mission of God and so of His people, and (e) because of its relationship to God's mission, the concept pervaded several aspects of the life of God's people, including the cultic, worship, and ethical dimensions.

In this respect, many interpreters of the Old Testament have argued that the biblical concept has some continuity with the conception of holy wars among the Ancient Near Eastern people, and reflects the geopolitical tensions of the tribes jostling for existence in the Mediterranean region (Cross 1966; Kang 1989; Miller 1973). So, among the non-Israelite, ancient near eastern tribes, for example, the creation of the world was conceptualized as resulting from a holy war that was fought among the gods. Accordingly, holy war was regarded as part of the cosmic conflict between the gods of the nations. The physical battles fought between the tribes were therefore considered as extensions of this cosmology.

Be that as it may, the holy war concept had five different, but overlapping, types throughout Old Testament history. In the first type, the war was a purely cosmological spiritual combat between God and other gods, without human involvement. This type is more often expressed in the hymns of the Old Testament (e.g. Exod 15; Ps 18, 24; 74, 77, 89; Job 26). The depiction of God as surrounded by armed angels, as 'the Lord of hosts', is a reflection of this concept (e.g. Exod 12:41; 14:24; Deut 4:19; Josh 5:14; 2 Kgs 6:17).

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examination of the evangelistic significance of the contemporary misuse of the 'holy war' terminology in Islamic circles, see Love (2001:65-68).



The second type of holy war involved limited human combat that was an extension of the spiritual combat waged by God, in the sense that the miraculous elements of the military combat are elaborated in the biblical account. God is, in this case, depicted as fighting human enemies on behalf of his people, whose role involved largely the ransacking of the defeated army and the collection of the spoils after the holy war. Examples of this type of holy war include the war against Amalek (Exod 17), the fall of Jericho (Josh 5:13-7:26), and the retreat of the Syrian army after hearing sounds of approaching horses and chariots (2 Kgs 6-7).

The third type, which was mostly fought during the period of the judges and kings of Israel, involved much more elaborate physical military combats against geo-political and religious enemies, but with features clearly defined as holy war (e.g. Deut 32; Judg 5; 2 Sam 22; cf. Lind 1980:32).<sup>10</sup> Often, these wars were accompanied by attempts to either seek God's mandate before the war (e.g. 1 Sam 23:1-6), or some indication of divine permission and justification, accompanied by divine encouragement not to fear the enemy (e.g. 2 Chr 20:15-17; Deut 1:21, 3:21, 31:8; Josh 8:1, 10:8; Isa 8:12-15; 41:10). Other features include acts of ritual sanctification of the army before the war (e.g. Deut 23:13-15; Josh 3:5, 7:13), and victory celebrations with offerings of praises, liturgical rituals, sacrifices and/or temple building after the war (e.g. 1 Sam 17:54; 2 Sam 8:11-12; Ps 24:7-10; cf. Kang 1989).

The fourth and fifth types of the holy war involve various degrees of mixtures of apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical reinterpretations of the previous three types, and began with the ministry of the prophets.

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<sup>10</sup> It is sometimes possible to think of all the wars of Old Testament Israel as 'holy' (Firestone 1996:99-123). However, the holy war motif is restricted to subsets of wars with explicit characteristics.

The fourth type, which is mostly apocalyptic and eschatological, depicts God as divine warrior, who wages war against his enemies. And these enemies are by that virtue underlined as ethically opposed to him (Christensen 1975; Collins 1975:596-612; Hanson 1975; Millar 1976). The apocalyptic element of such a war is characterized by metaphorical and/or visionary depictions of God in warrior armour and accessories, accompanied by hosts of angels on military transport systems, such as horses and chariots, to wage war against his enemies (e.g. Dan 7, 10-12; Isa 11, 51, 59; Ps 2; Zech 9-14 cf. Collins 1975:596-612; Lynch 2008:244-263; Neufeld 1997).

The eschatological element tended to stress the futuristic aspect, and depicted the battle as occurring on 'the day of the Lord' (e.g. Isa 13: 6,9; 22:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; Amos 5:8-20; Zeph 1:7-8; Zech 14:1; cf. Miller Jr. 1968:100-107; Stuart 1976:159-164; von Rad 1959, 97-108). The ethical element is often assumed, rather than elaborated, in the fourth type of prophetic holy war. But, the enemies of God are identified, not by virtue of their wrong doing, but principally, by their lack of allegiance to him. Israel is never God's enemy in this category of spiritual warfare, and indeed, the promise of eschatological holy war serves the function of assuring God's people of their impending deliverance and vindication.

The fifth type of holy war depiction, like the fourth, also contains apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical components. But the ethical dimension is considerably more emphasized than in the previous one. God's enemies are identified, not only by their lack of allegiance to him, but also, because of their lack of moral qualities such as justice, peace and righteousness. In this regard, also, sinful Israel, and specifically those in its midst who have broken the covenant, are equally God's enemies against whom he conducts this spiritual warfare

(e.g. Isa 59; Dan 11:32-33; cf. Banwell 1977:55-60; Janzen 2003:21-31).

For example, in Isaiah 59, God is depicted as a warrior threatening to turn against his people because of their 'transgressions', 'iniquities', and lack of 'justice' (Isa 59:9-11). As part of this spiritualized holy war against sin, God would put on 'righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle' (Isa 59:17) to march against his people, who behaved like drunkards that 'stumble at noon as in the twilight' (Isa 59:11). Similarly, in Isaiah 11, the Messiah is depicted as a divine warrior dressed in his armour, 'righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins' (11:5). And the result of his holy war is eschatological peace and knowledge of God—'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (11:9).

This Isaianic reinterpretation of the holy war motif, as a divine warfare to establish peace and holiness, is made even more striking for our purposes in the Servant Songs, where it intermingles with the idea of the persecuted fate of the faithful servant (cf. Blenkinsopp 1983:242-251; Hanson 1975:209-228). Neufeld has indeed argued that the depiction of God as a divine warrior in Isaiah 59 was a response to the earlier complaint in Isaiah 50 by the persecuted faithful that God had been slow to intervene in their suffering (1997:17). God's response to this complaint by the persecuted faithful, in Isaiah 59, was to promise an eschatological holy war, characterized by righteousness and peace. As Neufeld puts it, 'the author of Isaiah 59 has adapted the scenario of the faithful servant who is abused by faithless people to the fate of Yahweh's virtues at the hands of those who have turned against their God' (1997:35). In other words, the promised holy war to establish

righteousness and peace was God's way of dealing with the persecuted situation of the righteous.

This reinterpretation of the holy war motif in apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical directions continues in the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Most interpreters believe, for example, that Jesus' exorcisms were part of a wider holy war theme of his ministry, which climaxed with his victorious resurrection (Duff 1992:55-71; Gombis 2010; Huie-Jolly 1997:191-217; Kovac 1995:236-247; McCurley 1983; Riccoeur 1967). That he achieved this victory through his redemptive suffering not only underlines his fulfilment of Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecies, but also, indicates the tremendous transformation of the holy war motif itself. In Jesus, and subsequently through him and his people, enduring righteous suffering becomes a weapon through which God wages war against his enemies.

The theme is also present in other parts of the New Testament. The apocalyptic aspect of holy war receives its most extensive treatment in Revelation (cf. Collins 1976; Day 1985). Three Pauline epistles also apply the motif, in which God's redeemed people partake of the spiritualized holy war in apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical dimensions. In Ephesians 6, for example, believers are exhorted to put on the divine armour, which was previously described by Isaiah, in order to wage war against evil spiritual powers (cf. Asumang 2008:1-19; Janzen 2003:21-31; Neufeld 1997). It must be noted that the list of weapons in Ephesians 6 includes Christian virtues that are inaugurated by Christ's redemptive work. As Timothy Gombis has shown, the

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<sup>11</sup> Within the inter-testamental literature the motif is continued in several different directions. The Qumran War Scroll, for example, demonstrates a tendency to mix the apocalyptic and ethical element with a literal interpretation of the holy war motif. The Maccabean literature, on the other hand, moved in the direction of regarding martyrdoms as extension of this motif (cf. Brownlee 1983:281-292).

Ephesian account of spiritual warfare in the final chapter is actually preceded by the divine warrior interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection in Ephesians 2, through which believers are redeemed and the church established (2004:403-418). The army of God is thus created by Christ's resurrection.

Asumang has also shown that Paul's ethical exhortations in Romans 13:11-14 are derived from this reinterpretation of the holy war motif (2007:1-22). A similar phenomenon occurs in 1 Thessalonians 5, where the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions of the holy war motif are combined with ethical instructions as part of preparations for the second coming of Christ (cf. Longman III 1982:290-307; Neufeld 1997:73-91).

It must therefore be concluded that the three dimensional interpretation of the holy war motif in Isaiah continues in the New Testament, where believers share in God's mission by employing weapons of righteousness and peace to wage spiritual war. As demonstrated in the following section, Peter's specific contribution to this trend is to underline the manner in which this war may be waged by the persecuted righteous, as it was the case with Isaiah's Suffering Servant.

### **3. Holy Resistance as Holy War in 1 Peter**

Most interpreters now accept that 1 Peter has an organic unity. And as a diasporic paraenetic letter-homily, it is designed to climax in the final chapter (e.g. Feldmeier 2008:18; Horrell 1998:12; Jobes 2005:53-54; Thomas and Thomas 2006). This indeed is demonstrated by the increasing intensity of its three major themes as the letter proceeds:

1. The scattered christological passages of 1:18-21, 2:21-25, 3:18-22 are in fact chronologically arranged to follow 'the story of Christ' that climaxes in the final instalment in his triumphal post

resurrection proclamation of victory to the imprisoned spirits (cf. Dalton 1989; Horrell 1998:69-72), a christology which itself, is patterned after the holy war motif.

2. The accounts of the sufferings of the believers are gradually unveiled in degrees of intensity, peaking in the final exhortation, with the reference to being 'devoured' by the devil, the roaring lion.
3. This gradual unveiling of the sufferings is matched in a parallel fashion by a similarly progressive intensity of the responses that believers are to make to the sufferings, culminating in the final exhortation to 'resist' the devil in 5:8-11.

First Peter 5:8-11, therefore, acts as the *peroratio* of the letter-homily (cf. Feldmeier 2008:245; Thurén 1995:181-184). And accordingly, it is prudent to begin the examination of Peter's strategy from this final exhortation.

### **3.1. Resisting the devil, the roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8-9)**

In his final exhortation, Peter challenges the believers to be sober and watchful while resisting the devil, the roaring lion. Several features of that exhortation echo the holy war motif. Firstly, the identification of the devil, as the enemy to be firmly resisted, places that exhortation in the holy war context. As astutely put by Horrell, 'The terse imperatives here sound like the instructions given to those who must face a battle, indeed the author doubtless believed that the end-time, the last days in which he and his readers were living, would be a time of evil and suffering, and time of climactic conflict between good and evil' (1998:96; cf. Grudem 1988:203). As shown below, 'resist [the devil]' in 5:9 only makes explicit the implicit call to spiritual war throughout the epistle.

Secondly, the depiction of the devil as a 'roaring lion', who devours unwatchful Christians, links the persecution of the believers with the devil's influence, and so, underlines their persecution as part of spiritual warfare. The exact source of this roaring lion imagery for the devil is debated by interpreters. Paschke (2006:489-500), however, has cogently argued that contrary to the popular view that it was derived from Psalm 21:14 (LXX) or the book of Daniel, the imagery was more likely based on the Roman *ad bestias* executions in the circuses of the empire at the time. Whichever is the most likely source, most interpreters agree that the metaphor represents 'human agents under the devil's power' (Elliott 2000:857; cf. Bigg 1978; Michaels 1988), or the ungodly 'world systems deformed by the powers of darkness and sin' (Jobes 2005:314). In either case, the imagery places the devil at the centre of the persecution of the believers in Asia Minor, and hence, underlines Peter's strategy of response as an exhortation to spiritual warfare.

Thirdly, in describing the believer's enemy as ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος (adversary the devil), Peter closely associates the devil with the unjust suffering that the believers were facing. The word ἀντίδικος is a *hapax legomenon*, usually reserved as a technical term for official court prosecutors or accusers (e.g. Prov 18:17 LXX; cf. Job 1:6). And διάβολος is used in the LXX to identify the devil as the slanderer (cf. 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1-2). What is striking in 1 Peter's use is that these two functions of the devil—accusations and slander—are previously used throughout the epistle to describe some of the unjust sufferings that the believers were facing (e.g. 2:12, 15; 3:16; 4:14-16). In other words, in strategically identifying the enemy as ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος, Peter unveils the devil as the slanderer and accuser-in-chief spearheading the persecution of the believers.

It is true that Peter does not put all the blame of the persecution on the devil. But, any notion that this final identification of the believers'

opponent as the devil is unrelated to the previous description of their difficulties in 1 Peter, as if 5:8-11 was an after-thought, is mistaken. Horrell, (1998:97) for example, argues that while Peter elsewhere exhorts subordination to authority, honour for the emperor, and respect for human persecutors, he calls for resistance of the devil, thus making a distinction between the devil and the human persecutors. What Horrell, however, fails to acknowledge, is that in Peter's strategy, subordination and non-retaliation are weapons of resistance.

If it is true, as most interpreters believe, that 1 Peter 5:8-11 is the *peroratio* of the letter (cf. Feldmeier 2008:245; Thurén 1995:181-184), then that final exhortation must be read as recapitulating points that have already been made, rather than introducing new ideas *per se*. As summarized by Aristotle, *peroratios* had four functions, namely, (a) securing the favour of the audience and making them reject the opposing view, (b) accentuating the main facts, (c) exciting the emotions to impress the main points on your hearers, and (d) refreshing the memory about the points by recapitulation (*Rhetoric* 3:19). Similarly, Quintilian distilled these functions of the *peroratio* into two: (a) recapitulation of the main points, and (b) arousal of the audience's emotions (*Institutio Oretaria* 6:1.1-55). Certainly, introducing new unrelated concepts was contrary to the nature and purpose of the *peroratio*.

First Peter 5:8-11 excites the emotions with the intensely fierce metaphors of a pacing lion seeking to devour Christians. And its exhortations recapitulate the already stated strategy of the letter in an abridged fashion. It must therefore be concluded that the holy war motif is not restricted to 5:8-11, but also occurs in the rest of the letter (cf. Leigh 2004:122-140).



Fourthly, outside of 1 Peter's triple use (1:13; 4:7; 5:8), the call to sobriety is rare in the New Testament. It is however employed as part of ethical exhortations in a spiritualized holy war context in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 and Romans 13:11-14, where as in 1 Peter 5:8, they are also linked with spiritual conflict and a call to wakefulness.<sup>12</sup> As stated earlier, the Old Testament background of this phenomenon, namely, associating sobriety with the holy war motif, is in Isaiah 59, where the opponents who are at the receiving end of God's fury, are metaphorically depicted as disoriented drunkards (59:10). As it will be shown, a similar linkage (call to sobriety with holy war) occurs in 1 Peter 1:13. The spiritual battle requires a focused resolution of the mind against the enemy, in whatever guises he appears.

Fifthly, the New Testament often uses the specific word ἀντίστητε (resist, 5:9a) in the context of spiritual warfare associated with persecution and/or temptations. It is certainly used by James (4:7) against the devil, by Jesus against evil in general (Matt 5:39) and persecuting adversaries in particular (Luke 21:15; cf. Acts 6:10), and by Paul in describing the spiritual opposition of Moses by Pharaoh's magicians (2 Tim 3:8).<sup>13</sup> So, the call to resistance in 1 Peter 5:9 specifically summarizes the epistle's exhortations as a call to spiritual warfare.

Sixth, while the exhortation in 5:9b to be 'steadfast' does not, on its own, demand a holy war interpretation, given the present context, it may well be related to it. As a military metaphor, στερεοῖ (literally, 'solidly stand against') is used to describe the solid front with which the

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<sup>12</sup> The only other place where it is employed, outside a holy war context, is in the pastorals as part of qualifications for church leadership (1 Tim 3:2, 11; Tit 1:8; 2:2, 4, 6; cf. Feldmeier 2008:244).

<sup>13</sup> The only place in the New Testament that ἀντίστητε is used outside this context is in Romans 13:2, where it involved resisting human authority.

army is to stand its ground against the enemy on the battle field. And it is in this sense that its cognates are used in Ephesians 6:11-13. Given the other evocations of the holy war motif in 1 Peter 5:8-11; the call to steadfastness should also be regarded as complementing the holy war imagery.

Finally, the qualifying statement providing the context and motivation for resisting the devil in 5:9c, εἰδότες τὰ αὐτὰ τῶν παθημάτων τῆ ἐν [τῷ] κόσμῳ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότητι (literally, 'knowing that the same sufferings are occurring in the world of your brothers and sisters') stresses that the call to holy resistance is directly related to the persecution of the believers. Grudem (1988:204) and Horrell (1998:97) have pointed out that Peter's aim here is to remind the believers that they were not alone in their sufferings. This is correct. However, the main point of this qualification, as the construction εἰδότες (having known, i.e. on the basis of the information just stated) indicates, is to stress that resisting the devil was directly related to their persecution. The qualification of 5:9c, therefore, establishes that the exhorted strategy of the epistle (responding to persecution with hope and holiness) was part of resisting the devil, the arch slanderer.

Put together, the call to vigilance, sobriety, steadfastness, and resistance in Peter's final exhortation (5:8-9) was the recapitulation of several battle cries throughout the epistle to the persecuted believers. They cannot approach their Christian engagement with the persecuting society as helpless victims, but as emboldened spiritual warriors resisting the devil in the midst of their experience of unjust suffering. And this climactic development of the holy war motif is the high point of several of its other themes in the rest of the epistle, to which attention now turns.

### 3.2. Continually guarded by God's power (1 Pet 1:5)

Within the context of the *berakah* of 1 Peter 1:3-12, in which the apostle praises God for his work of salvation, the word φρουρουμένουσ (guarded) is used to describe one of the benefits of our salvation. This word is a technical military term for describing a military guard, who protects the city against invasion, while at the same time, keeping the beleaguered inhabitants from escaping (Louw and Nida 1988).<sup>14</sup> As several interpreters have underlined, the background of this use of the word in 1:5 is the exodus theology of the epistle, in which salvation is depicted as entering the Promised Land to take possession of the believer's inheritance (e.g. Grudem 1988:63; Fieldmeier 2008:71). In that case, the use of φρουρουμένουσ evokes the imagery of the military fortifications of the cities of the Promised Land, an interpretation that was quite common with inter-testamental Jews (e.g. Philo's *Moses* 1.235; *Wisdom* 17:16; *Judith* 3:6). This then begins the military connotations of the exodus theology as of 1 Peter.

As stated earlier, holy war in the Old Testament usually began with rituals aimed at fortifying the army in preparation for the war. Here, in 1 Peter, it is stated in the *berakah* that the resurrection of Jesus has resulted in the new birth of these believers. And their resultant life involved a holy war, in which they are guarded from the effects of the external attacks, as well as from escaping from God's powerful fortification. It is from that vantage point of a secure salvation that they engage the persecuting enemy. The reference to the instrumentality of faith in 1:5b also buttresses this point. As in Ephesians 6:16, faith in God's guarding power is a key part of the believer's spiritual armour.

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<sup>14</sup> The NIV's 'shielded' is thus a weak translation, dealing only with protection against invasion.

### 3.3. Girding up the loins of your minds (1 Pet 1:13)

The anatomically contorted, 'almost unintelligible phrase' (Grudem 1998:80) in 1:13, urging the believers to gird up the loins of their minds, does not, on its own, immediately evoke military ideas. In the ancient Semitic and Mediterranean context, it simply refers to gathering and putting the fringes of one's clothing in shape and around the hips as part of preparation for a swift action of some sort. 'Roll up your sleeves' is its modern equivalent (Jobes 2005:111). It is certainly used in this general sense in the Old Testament, among others, in relation to Elijah (1 Kgs 18:46), Elisha's instructions to his servants (2 Kgs 4:29, 9:1) and God's challenge to the self-absorbed Job (Job 38:3; cf. Jer 1:17).<sup>15</sup> In that case, 1 Peter 1:13 calls upon the believers to abandon mental sloppiness and fogginess of thought, and get themselves in shape for the dual responses of hoping in 'the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you', and being holy (1:13-16). This underlines that the believers were to regard hope and holiness as positive responses, rather than part of passive resignation to their situation.

However, there are several indications that Peter may have had the specific scenario of girding up of military clothing for military action in mind. Firstly, given the preponderance of the new exodus imagery of the passage (Deterding 1981:58-65; Gupta 2009:61-76; Jobes 2005:111; Scharlemann 1976:165-170), the call to gird up the loins of the mind, is directly meant to allude to Israel's preparations for exodus as instructed in Exodus 12:11: 'This is how you shall eat it: *your loins girded*, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord'. In that case, it is reasonable to

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed it could be legitimately taken that the job reference echoes here in 1 Peter 1:13. Peter exhorts the believers to desist from a muddled self-absorption in their suffering and respond to it with a clear-minded active alertness.

conclude that the military imagery, which started in 1:5, continues here in 1:13. For as Lind (1980:46-47) has shown, the depiction of the preparations for the exodus in the Pentateuch, underlines it, and the crossing of the Red Sea, as a holy war, and the Israelites represented as spiritual warriors (cf. Kang 1989:114-121).

Secondly, the call to 'gird up the loins of the mind' is linked to the call to sobriety in 1:13. The call to sobriety (5:8) enhances the holy war imagery there. Its presence in 1:13, alongside other features, also seem to support the view that the holy war motif is present.

And thirdly, in Ephesians 6:14, Paul describes the girdle as a key component of the spiritual armour of the believer. The military interpretation of 1:13 is therefore not an isolated description in the New Testament. In Paul's writings,<sup>16</sup> the metaphorical girdle is described as truth; and, in Isaiah 11:5, the divine warrior's girdle around his waist is described as righteousness and faithfulness. The exact referent of the girdle in 1 Peter 1:13 is not stated, even though it is related to mental alertness. Given that the recipients of the epistle are urged to action with sobriety, discipline, hope, and holiness, the impression is that the idea in 1:13 correlates with the girdle imagery of the armour in both Isaiah and Ephesians. The mental alertness holds their resistive actions together.

### **3.4. Fleshy desires which war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11)**

It is unanimously held by interpreters that the Petrine *haustafel* begins in 2:11, with 2:11-12 serving as the summary introducing the *haustafel's* basic principles, and that the subsequent verses explicate the

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<sup>16</sup> For a recent review of the implications of the similarities between the Pauline and Petrine letters, see Jobes (2005:11-13).

details of this summary (cf. Bauman-Martin 2004:253-279; Feldmeier 2008:144-150; Grudem 1988:121; Horrell 1998:45; Jobes 2005:166). Hence, these two verses lay out the key features of Peter's practical exhortations on Christian engagement with society. The features may be categorized as follows: (a) Christians should accept their identity as foreign bodies in society, (b) they should abstain from desires which war against the soul, (c) they must positively employ honourable conduct and good works towards non-Christians, (d) they must desist from retaliation when maligned, but instead look forward to 'the day of visitation'. Even when these features are not stated in each of the four scenarios of the *haustafel*, they should be taken as assumed in the background of 2:11-3:7 (cf. Jobes 2005:172).

In this regard, the military metaphor *στρατεύονται* (wage war) in 2:11 clearly situates Christian existence in the world as in itself an internal spiritual conflict between the old and new natures, a conflict which requires the believer's constant assertion of victory and self-control. *Στρατεύονται* was part of a common vocabulary of exhortations to moral development in Hellenistic circles (cf. Fieldmeier 2008:148; Volf 1994:25). It will however be a mistake to miss the thoroughly Jewish nature of the concept in 2:11. In its Diasporic Jewish sense, *στρατεύονται* was essentially used to refer to the fight for inner spiritual integrity as part of maintaining one's relationship with God (e.g. Philo [*Ebr* 111; *QG* 4.74; *Leg* 2.106; *Opif* 79-81]; 4 *Macc* 3:5; *Apocalypse of Moses* 19:3; 25:4; 28:4).

Peter places this call for subjugating 'the enemy within' first as the prelude for strong engagement of society, and for good reasons. In the context of the holy war idea, this relates to the requirement for the sanctification of soldiers, self-control, and abstention from sexual relations as part of the preparations for, and conduct of, battle (cf. 2 *Sam* 11:11; *Deut* 23:10). Peter has evidently reinterpreted and

transformed this to become a general exhortation to ensure internal spiritual integrity, as precursor to a confident Christian's engagement with society. The choice of military metaphor in 2:11 was therefore deliberate.

A point in support of the holy war idea in this passage is Peter's reference to 'the day of visitation' in 2:12. This 'day' clearly refers to the eschatological time of the Lord's second coming (Michaels 1988:118; Jobes 2005:172; contra Elliott 2000:47). But, its linkage with the exhortations in 2:11-12, no doubt, evokes the holy war connotations of 'the day of the Lord' imagery of the Old Testament. As observed earlier, holy war was apocalyptically conceptualized as occurring on 'the day of the Lord' (cf. Miller Jr. 1968:100-107; Stuart 1976:159-164; von Rad 1959:97-108). In the Old Testament, the specific designation of 'the day of visitation' is more explicitly stated in Isaiah 10:3 to refer to the time of God's judgement. Hence, it is the same as 'the day of the Lord', which, as has been observed, is linked to the eschatological aspects of the holy war motif (cf. Fieldmeier 2008:150; Horrell 1998:48; contra Grudem 1988:124). Peter does not repeat the holy war language within the rest of the *haustafel*. However, the holy war language in the introductory summary in 2:11-12 firmly places the specific exhorted actions of the *haustafel* under the holy war rubric.

### **3.5. Do not fear what they fear ... but ... sanctify Christ as Lord (1 Pet 3:14-15)**

It is universally agreed among interpreters that the encouragement not to be afraid, but 'in your heart sanctify Christ as Lord', is a modification of Isaiah 8:12-13: 'Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your

fear, and let him be your dread'. As this statement stands in Isaiah, the holy war concept is clearly present. Firstly, the statement is made to Isaiah and Judah, because the Southern Kingdom was militarily threatened by an alliance of the Northern Kingdom and Syria. Secondly, and as was earlier observed, the encouragement by God not to fear, and in the context of a threat of war, was a feature of the holy war motif (e.g. Exod 12:41; Deut 1:21, 3:21, 4:19, 14:24, 31:8; Josh 8:1, 10:8; Isa 8:12-15, 41:10; 2 Chr 20:15-17; Josh 5:14; 2 Kgs 6:17). Thirdly, the description of God as 'the LORD of hosts' also features in a holy war context. Therefore, Isaiah 8:12-13 certainly evokes a holy war setting.

Whether in his modification of the words of Isaiah Peter also intended to transfer the holy war idea, may, on the other hand, be argued. In the case of 1 Peter, the threats the first readers faced to their faith and allegiance to Christ were severe enough, and Peter may well have found *only* the words of encouragement to Isaiah and Judah in Isaiah 8 fitting for the believers, without wanting to transfer the whole holy war setting with his citation. As Jobes understands it, 'First Peter takes the quote up in an entirely different historical context, but with the same purpose of encouraging his readers in the face of threat, applying it to Christians who are not facing hostile powers beyond their borders but adversaries from within their own society' (Jobes 2005:229).

However, since throughout the epistle Peter depicts the believers as inheriting the identity and promises of Israel, it is not unlikely that he aims to depict the engagement with the hostile society as a reinterpretation of the holy war motif of Isaiah 8. The encouragement not to fear adversaries, taken together with the quotation of Isaiah 8:12-13, implies that Peter also intended to adopt the holy war setting.

It may also be countered that the phrase 'the LORD of hosts' in Isaiah 8:13 is christologically modified by Peter, and hence, reduces the holy



war imagery in 3:14-15. But, the evocations of the holy war motif in 1 Peter 3:14-15 are not completely muted. As already noted, in Peter's conceptualization, the 'story of Christ', especially his resurrection which immediately follows this quotation (3:16-22), is depicted as a holy war. The christological modification of 'the LORD of hosts' in Isa 8:13 into 'Christ as Lord' in 1 Peter 3:15 does not, therefore, remove the holy war context of the citation, but rather, reinforces it. For, it is the victorious Christ who is to be revered as Lord by his followers facing persecution. Peter has accordingly adapted the motif to address the believers as spiritual warriors, whose apologetic mission is to be regarded as holy war (cf. Poe 1991:189-193; Wagner 2008:76-106). This passage indicates that the first readers would not have seen themselves as passive victims.

### **3.6. Arm yourselves with the same intention as Christ's (1 Pet 4:1)**

First Peter 4:1 is one of several verses in the epistle, in which Jesus is presented as model for the believers to emulate. Here, Peter refers to Jesus' suffering, and urges the believers to *ὀπλίσασθε* (literally, 'arm yourselves') as part of the mind-set and disposition to face the unjust suffering of the world. Apart from the explicit use of the military metaphor, the direct relation to Jesus' suffering underlines this passage as a call to holy war. As stated earlier, like the rest of the New Testament, Peter's christology depicts the suffering and death of Christ as holy war, followed of course by his resurrection and proclamation of victory to the imprisoned spirits (3:17-22). Peter thus naturally compares the military connotations in Jesus' sufferings and resurrection to the mission of the believers. They must face up the persecuting world as soldiers of Christ, on whom they model their response. Peaceful non-retaliatory response to unjust suffering, by which Jesus wrought his victory, was equally their spiritual weapon.

In a summary, the explicit call to resist the devil in the final exhortation of 1 Peter is the peak of several descriptions in the letter, that the believers were involved in a spiritualized holy war. Peter's exhortations to holiness and non-retaliation were weapons of spiritual battle, designed and employed by their Lord, for defeating the enemy. The first recipients of 1 Peter would have read his epistle as a call to resistance, and not to passive resignation.

#### **4. The Relevance of Peter's Strategy for Today**

Peter's strategy has important significance to Christian engagement with contemporary culture. In many parts of the world, conservative evangelical Christians are increasingly faced with intimidation and antagonism to their faith and practices. While the degree of persecution in the West may not be to the extent that the first recipients in Asia Minor experienced, the temptation they faced, as to whether to withdraw into themselves, or to accommodate, compromise and assimilate to the demands of popular culture is the same for us as it was for them. In Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and the Middle East, the persecution may even be at a higher level of severity. The temptation to believers, however, is the same today as it was for the brothers and sisters of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The message of 1 Peter is therefore as immensely relevant to Christian praxis today, as it was to the first readers.

In that case, the present study makes two basic contributions to the current discussion on how best to respond to the antagonistic environment Christians are increasingly finding themselves in—one negative and the other positive. On the negative side, this article confirms that resistance is the correct response to a culture that seeks to bully Christians into 'toeing the line'. The way of the Lord, and as

reiterated by the apostle, is one in which his mission must be served not through compromise, and retreat, but through an emboldened resistance that is prepared to suffer for the consequences of that stance.

Positively, the present study underlines that the weapons of resistance are very different from what the world would imagine. They are weapons of holy character, peaceful non-retaliation, and Spirit-empowered witness. Far from being weak, these and other Spirit-filled qualities are spiritual weapons of the holy war that Christ has fought and won. As his following soldiers, we can engage the bullying world with emboldened resistance, just as 1 Peter aimed to achieve in its first readers.

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# The Anointing or Theological Training? A Pentecostal Dilemma

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to propose a solution to a dilemma that was characteristic of the Pentecostal movement from its inception, one that is still current, not only in some sections of the movement, but even in modern Evangelicalism. This dilemma is, should prospective ministers seek the empowerment of the Spirit for service in preference to theological education, or, should they pursue theological training as a principal means towards effective service? The article investigates the classical Pentecostal attitude to theological education, before examining later modifications to the original Pentecostal view. The classical position is then evaluated before a conclusion is drawn, namely, the anointing and theological training should not be regarded as contradictory, but rather, as complementary imperatives.

## 1. Introduction

The question as to whether Pentecostals, particularly those called to the pastoral or evangelistic ministry, need formal theological training, or whether the ‘anointing’ of the Spirit is sufficient, is one that was settled in some countries many years ago. However, in other countries, including South Africa, the issue is still a live one in certain Pentecostal

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

and evangelical Christian communities. This article attempts to (a) describe the classical Pentecostal position with regard to theological education, as opposed to the anointing, (b) investigate how that position changed over time, and (c) critique the classical Pentecostal stance *vis-a-vis* theological education. The article will conclude with a suggested solution to the dilemma.

## 2. Theological Education: the Classical Pentecostal Attitude

Donald Gee, the well-known Pentecostal Bible teacher and former chairman of the Assemblies of God of Great Britain, observed that many early Pentecostals were characterised by their lack of education (1961:51). Allan Anderson pointed out that in view of the tension that exists between academic integrity and spirituality, the history of Pentecostalism has been characterised by a tenuous relationship with theological education (2004:244). Prominent Pentecostal leaders such as the British evangelist and former miner, Stephen Jeffreys, had no theological training (Gee 1941:101). In early British Pentecostalism, personal consecration was generally considered to be all that was required for both discipleship and leadership (Gee 1941:99). The hostility of the early Pentecostals to theological education is illustrated by Gee's perception that the ministry of his day was frequently characterized by 'utterly arid intellectualism' (1961:51). Ruthven alluded to the antipathy of the Pentecostal pioneers and their followers to what was termed 'theological cemeteries' (i.e. seminaries) (n.d.:1). William Burton, a British Pentecostal missionary, who founded one hundred churches in what was then known as the Belgian Congo, recalled his criticism of a bishop with whom he once stayed in England. While Burton was reading his Bible, the bishop was reading an article on higher criticism in a church magazine. Burton advised the cleric to

'get back to God's Word' (1973:20). The Pentecostal attitude to education elsewhere in the world seems to have been similar. In the South American Pentecostalism of the early 1970s, for example, 56 per cent of pastors surveyed had not completed primary school (Wagner 1973:93). This was not considered a hindrance because Pentecostals emphasised the primacy of what they called the 'anointing' in the ministry of the Word (Gee 1963:34).

The main feature of this 'anointing' was the energising of the recipient to serve Christ effectively. The experience was received after regeneration. Pentecostals also applied the term to subsequent 'fillings' of the Spirit during or for special occasions (Pearlman 1981:316). However, in this paper, the term is used to denote the initial experience of being filled with the Spirit or baptized in the Spirit, with accompanying spiritual manifestations (Williams 1953:64). The anointing was conceived as being linked to another concept: the 'endowment of power for service' (Acts 1:8). This 'endowment of power' was associated with yet another Pentecostal doctrinal distinctive: the 'baptism in (or *with*) the Spirit' (Pearlman 1981:308-309). This 'baptism' was interpreted as being accompanied by the supernatural manifestation of speaking in tongues, and by the energising of the recipient for effective service (Pearlman 1981:310, 312). Amos Yong agrees that this represents the traditional Pentecostal position (2005:101). The statements of faith of the Pentecostal Protestant Church and the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa accurately reflect this concept: 'We believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, empowering and equipping believers for service, with the accompanying supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit' (Pentecostal Protestant Church. Articles of Faith: Article 10) and 'We believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is...the endowment of power from on

high' (Full Gospel Church. Doctrines of the Church: Section 16). Some Charismatic groups and believers hold a similar view (Mathole 2005).

In South Africa, Oosthuizen's investigation into the progress of Pentecostalism among the Indian community in Kwazulu-Natal revealed that in Pentecostal groups, where emotionalism was highly emphasised, intellectualism and theological training were disparaged (1975:262). Peter Watt, in his history of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa, commented that in the Assemblies of God, Bible schools were sometimes referred to as 'sausage machines', and that 'no value was placed on academic education for ministers' (1992:43-44). The pioneers of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, and the early adherents of that movement, were also not well educated. Their doctrinal beliefs, therefore, tended to be experientially based (Hwata 2005:102). Knowledge derived from education was regarded as dangerous, in that it could quench the work of the Spirit (Hwata 2005:106). The evidence is therefore unambiguous: Pentecostals have sometimes characterised theological education as being no more than a 'dead intellectualism' (Anderson 2004:244). However, it should be noted that Jacobsen's view is that the early Pentecostals were not so much opposed to theology *per se*, as to the use of theological terminology without the appropriate religious experience to support the terminology. He commented that some Pentecostal leaders used to describe traditional theology as being akin to dry 'chips, shavings and wind' (2006:5).

The early Pentecostals' enthusiasm for genuine spiritual power and direct knowledge of God through personal experience is understandable, especially in the light of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical context in both the U.S.A. and Europe. Brumback noted that many churches had departed from the historic position of the faith, and had succumbed to theological liberalism and the ideas of the

Enlightenment. In general terms, he described many churches as being characterised by formalism, non-experiential religion, 'worldliness', an over-emphasis on a professional clergy, class consciousness, and spiritual coldness (Brumback 1961:2-6). Meyer commented on the formality, 'religiosity', and the growing number of adults who no longer attended church in Victorian England (1969:271).

Some early Pentecostals, however, gave evidence of being anointed, and yet, were academically trained. For example, Dr Charles S Price, who was greatly used in evangelism and in healing the sick (Lindsay 1980:35), studied law at Oxford University in England. Sam C Perry joined the Church of God in Tennessee as one of the first university-trained preachers in that Church (Nichol 1966:230). Lillian B Yeomans was a Canadian medical doctor (Brumback1961:134-135). However, such examples remained the exception rather than the rule.

### **3. Changes in the classical Pentecostal position**

Since approximately 1940, the perceptions of many Pentecostals regarding the necessity for formal theological training began to change (Nichol 1966:230). As early as 1920, some Pentecostal leaders had begun to realize that many Pentecostal young people and converts were not well grounded in Pentecostal and Christian principles, and that this was not advantageous (Nichol 1966:231). The Assemblies of God in the U.S.A. instituted short-term Bible training in 1915, but soon realized that permanent Bible schools needed to be established. Some opposed this initiative on the grounds that it represented a step towards formalism and towards substituting the mind of God for the mind of man. However, proponents of Bible school training responded with the following three arguments:



1. The mind of the Spirit was expressed in 2 Timothy 2:15: 'Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (AV). Only a thorough study of the Word could lodge within the mind that which the Spirit would later be able to bring to remembrance (John 14:26).
2. Samuel's school of the prophets and Jesus' three-year 'school' for his twelve disciples should be regarded as ample justification for latter-day Bible schools.
3. Some of the most anointed Pentecostal preachers had been trained at Bible schools such as the Nyack Missionary Training Institute and the Moody Bible Institute in the U.S.A. (Brumback 1961:226-227).

Pope maintained that one of the indications that a religious movement is progressing beyond a sectarian status is when it begins to insist on academic training for its ministers (Pope, in Nichol 1966:230). Oosthuizen noted in 1975 that there was an evolutionary period underway in South African Pentecostalism, in which theological training for pastors was becoming increasingly acceptable (1975:261). John Bond of the Assemblies of God completed a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at the University of South Africa. In so doing, he took a courageous stand against the anti-education stance that typified the South African Assemblies of God of the time (Watt, in Bond 2000). The Apostolic Faith Mission began to show a keen interest in theological education from 1949 and opened the Apostolic Bible College in 1950 (Hwata 2005:106).

In the U.S.A., in spite of the fact that the Assemblies of God passed a resolution during its General Assembly of 1949 that a university degree would never be a prerequisite for ordination, by the end of the Second World War, more than 2000 Pentecostal applicants had to be turned

away from Bible colleges (Nichol 1966:231). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Gee described the Pentecostal Bible schools there as being filled to capacity. Furthermore, Gee (1961:41) claimed that 'thousands of our keenest, most consecrated, most spiritual, and most intelligent young men and women are devoting themselves to the study of the Scriptures' in such schools.

While there have been changes to the traditional Pentecostal view, there remain some, even today, who continue to adhere to the earlier position. Chan commented that even in recent times, Pentecostals have been afraid that the "letter" might kill the "spirit" (2000:12). According to the information service of the South African government, 'Hundreds of independent charismatic churches have mushroomed across the country' (Burger 2010). The attitude of the leadership of these churches to theological education is not uniform. The senior pastor of a Pentecostal independent church wrote in the following terms (Nathan 2011):

The long-accepted practice of training prospective ministers through Bible colleges and seminaries cannot be recognized as being scriptural, or as being the most effective means of achieving this objective. Tradition, Jesus taught, 'makes the Word of God of no effect', and this holds particularly true in the area of training ministers.

An elder (Sykes 2011) in an Assemblies of God church in Johannesburg, wrote the following:

I believe the 'head of the Body', the Lord Jesus, teaches and prepares us through the gift ministries He has given to the church. The ministries grow and develop in the body of Christ and are not taught outside of the body. Teaching and the development and 'proving' of ministries take place within the body of Christ. There

is therefore no need for ‘theological training’ outside of the body of Christ. The fellowship is the greatest ‘Bible School’ there is, and has the greatest Teacher – the Lord Jesus Christ. The only text books that are needed are the sixty-six books contained in the Bible and the pattern of the Church and how it should operate and be taught are found in the New Testament.

Such views have survived even in some evangelical circles. For example, Mike Raiter, principal of Victoria Bible College in Australia, set out the opposition of some cross-cultural Christian workers to theological education in the following way, ‘there is an increasing number of cross-cultural workers who have pursued little or no formal study and who would testify that they’re coping just fine. Theological training, some say, is simply not necessary’ (2009). Collins Sentumbwe, a Ugandan pastor, writing of the 1980s and 1990s in Uganda, commented, ‘Sadly, this was the same time when the attitude that theological training was irrelevant, unnecessary and simply religious became popular. The assumption that the Holy Spirit showed himself powerfully by using illiterate, untrained, unskilled people was embraced by many’ (2006).

## 4. Critique of the Classical Pentecostal View

### 4.1. Faulty exegesis

The following three examples of faulty exegesis illustrate why it was necessary to reconsider the classical Pentecostal view:

1. Ken Horn recounted how a woman approached him at the close of a service at which he had been the guest speaker. She claimed that in her church, they believed in the Bible, but not in doctrine (2004). Horn observed that it is impossible to believe in the

Bible but not in doctrine, for whenever Bible teaching is undertaken, doctrine is involved (Horn 2004). Whenever one takes a stand on a particular interpretation of the Bible over against some other interpretation, then one is taking a doctrinal position. The danger is that if one's doctrinal convictions are unconscious and unreflected, they will also be unsystematic, arbitrary, and prone to misinterpreting the full counsel of God.

2. Deuteronomy 22:5, 'A woman must not wear men's clothing', provides another example of faulty exegesis within the South African Assemblies of God. This was interpreted as being a prohibition on women wearing trousers, rather than on forbidding transvestism or homosexual practices (Kalland and Barker 1985:270). The conviction that women should not wear trousers received a severe challenge during the 'hippy' revival in the 1970s. The crisis was precipitated by the attendance at services of the author's home church of large numbers of young men with long hair and young women without head coverings who dressed in jeans. Some had converted to Christianity, and consequently, flocked into church packing it to capacity. The church leadership was compelled to revisit its doctrinal stance on both the issue of women's clothing and men with long hair.
3. Daniel 12:4, 'Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased' (AV), is another example of a text that was exegetically misunderstood. 'Many shall run to and fro' was thought to refer to the great number of motorists thronging modern highways, and 'knowledge shall be increased' was believed to refer to the pronounced increase in secular knowledge characteristic of recent times. A more probable interpretation of the passage within its context is this: people will run to and fro in the end times, searching for answers to their questions about the last days, the answer to which they will

find in Daniel's prophecy. In so doing, their knowledge of the end times will increase (Wood 1976:321).

## **4.2. Contradictory theological positions**

An additional dynamic that highlights both the necessity and importance of theological study was the contradictory theological positions adopted by some leading pastors and teachers of the writer's own denomination (Assemblies of God). The majority had not been trained theologically and, consequently, had seemingly adopted their biblical views somewhat arbitrarily and unsystematically. For example, one respected teacher proclaimed the merits of eternal security, while another condemned it as non-biblical heresy. The outlook towards opposing doctrinal views was often characterized by perplexity that such obviously 'self-evident' biblical truths could be misunderstood. Seemingly, there was no informed, let alone sympathetic, understanding of differing doctrinal positions. E S Williams, former General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in the U.S.A., made the same point (1953:vii-viii):

I have noticed that some attack the beliefs of others, while they know little as to the reasons why others hold to beliefs which differ from their own ... Where there are differences among God's devout children, we do well, as far as we are able, to understand the nature of these differences.

## **4.3. Undesirable consequences emanating from the lack of formal training**

The South African Assemblies of God, associated with James Mullan (distinct from the U.S.A.-based International Assemblies of God, also active in S.A.), were hostile to theological training. Several undesirable

consequences flowed from this. The following three examples provide further confirmation that the classical Pentecostal view was in need of modification:

1. The lack of formal training resulted in some enthusiastic young pastors becoming so disillusioned that they left the ministry (Watt 1992:44). Many of these ministers had an extremely limited repertoire of subject material for their preaching and teaching (Watt 1992:119).
2. James Mullan's practice of moving ministers from congregation to congregation within a time span of only a few years, did not encourage such ministers to deepen their biblical and theological knowledge. Many such ministers simply continually reused the material they had researched previously. However, once the members of congregations became better educated, the ministers found themselves at a disadvantage. Some congregations began to diminish in size as confidence in the ministers' grasp of biblical and theological issues waned (Watt 1992:119).
3. The ministers and their congregants' seeming lack of theological expertise also led to setbacks as a result of challenges from the doctrines of the Word of Faith groups such as Ray McCauley's Rhema Bible Church. McCauley based many of his beliefs on the teachings of Kenneth Hagin. McCauley was converted in the Norwood Assembly of God in Johannesburg, but then pursued his studies at Hagin's *Rhema Bible Training Center* in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He graduated in 1979 (Bond 2000). Some ministers and their members were unable to gainsay the teachings of these Word of Faith groups and, consequently, left the Assemblies of God and joined the 'Faith' groups (Watt 1992:120-121). However, not all leaders of the South African Assemblies of God shared James Mullan's conviction that Bible schools were

unnecessary. Nicholas Bhengu, the famous evangelist, was, like Mullan, a member of the Assemblies of God General Executive. He attended the South African General Mission Bible School at Dumisa (later known as the Union Bible Institute, Sweetwaters), from 1934 to 1936. In 1950, he opened the Pilgrim Bible School in Port Elizabeth (Millard 1991).

4. The following disparaging enquiry, directed by a senior denominational leader to a young Pentecostal Bible student, serves as a case-in-point: 'Is theological college filling you with head knowledge?' Yet, when this same minister was asked to preach at one of his former churches, he refused on the grounds that he had spent three years with them, and so, had nothing new to impart. Such theologically illiterate preachers tended to concentrate on the repetitive teaching of their favourite biblical doctrines and practical instruction on how to live the Christian life (Watt 1992:105).

#### **4.4. A challenge to the classical Pentecostal view of Bible colleges and seminaries**

The generalised view that Bible colleges and seminaries inevitably lead to arid intellectualism and loss of spiritual power should be challenged on the basis that the colleges should be no more than a means to an end. John Stott correctly observed that the Lord never intended knowledge to be an end in itself, but rather, as a means to an end (2006:79). Colleges are therefore not intrinsically inimical to genuine spirituality, by virtue of their essential nature. Factors such as the aims and content of the curriculum and the expertise, competence, attitudes, and spirituality of the staff are crucial. As seen from a kingdom perspective, colleges and seminaries can be good, bad, or somewhere in between. For example, Wagner observed that there is a Bible institute in Central America that

has been highly successful in promoting evangelism and church planting for many years (1973:99).

#### **4.5. The danger of a wholesale rejection of the faith of our predecessors**

Karl Barth (n.d.:10) urged that both in the church and in theology, the commandment, 'Honour your father and your mother', should continue to be observed. Barth's point, that urges us to guard against a wholesale rejection of all that our predecessors in the faith believed, is a valid one. We should not be so arrogant as to think that God has revealed his truth to us only, and that he never revealed anything substantial to those who preceded us. A more fitting attitude would be one in which we prayerfully (with discernment) evaluate (from a biblical perspective) what others have taught in the past, and what our contemporaries teach and believe now. We should seek to know why some, who might love the Lord as much as we do, hold different doctrinal positions from our own. Our critique of their convictions can be defensible only when it is conducted in the light of a meticulous and unbiased understanding of the grounds upon which they base their views.

#### **4.6. An inconsistent attitude towards 'book-learning'**

Lastly, one would expect that those who oppose 'book learning', should themselves not write books. However, this is not always the case. A Pentecostal teacher, who immigrated to South Africa from England during the 1950s, vehemently rejected the spiritual value of commentaries and similar theological works. In spite of this, he did not shy away from authoring books himself, apparently, because he believed that whatever he wrote was necessarily doctrinally pure. In so doing, he was following the example of one of his lecturers in the Bible



school that he had attended in England. This lecturer also rejected the theological writings of others, yet produced his own books.

## 5. Complementary Rather than Contradictory

Any attempt to substitute personal experience for biblical doctrine, and to favour orthopraxy over orthodoxy, should be rejected in favour of a sound balance between the two. There is no such thing as a pure theory, and there is also no such thing as a pure practice. Practice cannot exist without theory, and those who are unaware of this fall prey to exercising their practice under the direction of an unconscious, unreflected, and unsystematic theory. Theory must continually test practice and the insights of practice should be utilised to modify and improve theory (Wolfaardt 1975:11-12). The traditional evangelical position takes its stand unambiguously on the trustworthiness of the biblical record. There is a sense, therefore, in which evangelical theory based on scripture cannot be modified. However, it is important to beware of believing that one's own interpretations of the scriptures are entirely correct and free of error in every point. The insights of practice can therefore identify some of the areas in which our interpretation of biblical teaching falls short of pure doctrine. Seen in this light, theory is required to guide and test practice, while practice, as the concrete outworking of theory, is essential in providing theory with feedback about the validity of its tenets in pastoral, evangelical, and missionary contexts. An example of this is the abovementioned illustration of the challenge to a particular doctrinal position, posed by the presence of jean-clad women in a church that condemned wearing of trousers by woman, on the basis of a faulty interpretation of Deuteronomy 22:5.

Gee observed that a danger of theological training is that students may lose their evangelistic fervour, and be imbued with an exaggerated view

of academic achievement and intellectualism. Gee's sober assessment is that evangelism, supported by supernatural signs and theological training, should be regarded as complementary, rather than contradictory components of the fully-orbed Christian mission (1961:42). In similar vein, John Stott commented incisively, 'I am not pleading for a dry, humourless, academic Christianity, but for *a warm devotion set on fire by truth*' (2006:18).

There is no doubt that God can use anyone who is obedient to him, irrespective of their level of education. Throughout history, both biblical and secular, he has used those who were educated, and those who were not. History, therefore, demonstrates that the issue should not be one of 'either or', but rather 'both and'. The Lord's requirements for ministry comprise his specific call and our obedient response. God's call will be accompanied by God's empowerment. Accordingly, there may well be circumstances in which untrained individuals are called to particular ministries, and these ministries may flourish and be successful. It is unwise, however, to make the exception the rule, by arguing that education as a general principle is unnecessary. The anointing without theological training can lead to a narrow and unloving rejection of fellow believers who differ on peripheral doctrinal matters. More importantly, it can also lead to error in both doctrine and practice. Billy Graham drew attention to this when he remarked that many Pentecostals would agree that their movement has, at times, been subject to embarrassing excesses (Brumback 1961:42). On the other hand, the danger of education without the anointing is a sterile intellectualism with a corresponding inability to bear genuine spiritual fruit. Both extremes should be rejected.

## 6. Conclusion

While the classical Pentecostal attitude to theological training was generally hostile, it is evident that, even in the pioneer period of Pentecostalism, there were Pentecostal leaders who were both anointed and educated. As the Pentecostal movement expanded, the conviction grew stronger that theological education was both desirable and necessary. This growing realization led to the founding of Pentecostal Bible schools. The critique in the article of the classical Pentecostal attitude to theological education demonstrated the soundness of this development. It was further argued in the article that the view that the anointing of the Spirit should be seen in opposition to theological training is faulty. While the Lord in his sovereignty can and does use those who are untrained, the ideal is that his ministers should be both anointed and trained. Those who advocate a return to the earlier Pentecostal position should take cognizance of this.

This article provided a critique of the classical Pentecostal view of theological education and proposed a possible solution to the dilemma between anointing and theological training, namely, that they should be complementary rather than contradictory.

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# Employing Speech Act Theory as an Exegetical Tool on the Matthean Beatitudes

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## Abstract

The literary nature of the Beatitudes demonstrates a composition that developed orally. Speech act theory is utilized in understanding the oral features of the text as well as demonstrating what Jesus did in his utterances. The significance of the Beatitudes lies in the authoritative utterances of Jesus. Speech act theory allows for an investigation into the nature of those utterances. This paper recognizes six principles guiding speech act theory on the Beatitudes. A speech act model is presented and applied to the Beatitudes pericope (Matt 5:3-16). The formula is SP+(EE)CH=ACT: analyse the situated performativity of a text, add it to the multiplying nature of existential engagement by the interpreter with the illocutionary force found through the critical horizon of guiding worldviews, and the result is an Acquired Communal Translation for the social body.

It is understood that Matthew intended to compose a pericope in serving as a paradigmatic utterance to guide the Matthean community in its existence and mission in the world. In addition, the paradigm is to be adopted by all Christian communities in their mission to the world.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.



## 1. Background to the Study

For centuries, the beauty of the Beatitudes has amazed readers with both its literary and rhythmic quality, as well as its theological significance. It is probably one of the most familiar pericopes, besides the Lord's Prayer, in the New Testament (Matt 5:3-12). The sayings attributed to Jesus by Matthew, formed a purpose for the new community as it struggled in its infancy. This new community Matthew addressed consisted primarily of Jewish Christians at its inception, but incorporated Gentile believers over time (Davies and Allison 1988:33; 133-138; Hagner 1993:lxiv-lxxi; Stanton 1993:124-145; Betz 1995:1-4; Barnett 1999:362; Skarsaune 2002:222-223; France 2007:17-18; Luz 2007:45-55, 84-87).

### 1.1. The Matthean community in an oral environment

Identity clarification was critical at this juncture of the church's beginning. One of the major struggles within the Matthean community related to how much of their Jewish past would be involved in the expression of Christ-centered worship. With roots in their past, Matthew addressed how the Matthean community reflected those concepts as reflective of God's presence through Jesus, as metaphorically represented in 'salt' and 'light' (Matt 5:14-16). Through literary analysis, the pericope of the Beatitudes demonstrates its affinity toward Jewish themes and Semitic compositional expressions of both its past and of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It was through both the literary composition and oral context that Matthew demonstrated a paradigm that the new community had adopted in its realization of purpose and intention in the world (cf. Person 1998:601).

Hence, for the new community, a communal self-definition was implicit, and Matthew offered his model as the ultimate paradigm

(Haber 2008:157). By focusing on the oral quality of both the text and the Christian community, it was revealed how the Beatitudes served as a mirror to its existence. Pragmatically, the new community would have 'repeated, remembered, recovered, and referred' to the Matthean composition, resulting in a 'cultural text' for its members (cf. Assmann 2006:75-76). The process of word composition was a communal and social activity governed by oral performance (cf. Downing 1996:30-34). The literary pericope demonstrates an oral composition and a culture based 'in the art of recitation' (Hearon 2006:9; cf. von Dobschutz 1983:26). Performance criticism has brought attention to the 1<sup>st</sup> century culture and its fondness for storytelling, which served for entertainment, education, and celebration (Person 1998; Rhoads 2006; Hearon 2009:25-34).

## **1.2. Speech act theory and the contributions of Austin, Searle, Wolterstorff, and Briggs**

Speech act theory actually received its due attention after the early death of its founder, JL Austin. The lectures Austin gave in 1955 at Harvard University (published in 1962) catapulting speech act theory to philosophical stature. His student, John Searle, can be credited with the expansion of speech act methodology as a tool for research in communication and philosophy (cf. Searle 1969, 1979). Other disciplines soon followed in employing speech act theory, such as literary theory (cf. Skinner 1970:118-138; Pratt 1977; Petrey 1990) and theology (cf. Patte 1988:85-102; White 1988:1-24; Briggs 2001; Vanhoozer 2001:1-49; Wolterstorff 2001:73-90).

Austin introduced the three levels of understanding utterances (1975:98-103). It should be remembered that Austin's lecture simply introduced the concepts. There have been various adjustments and

modifications by speech act scholars as they have examined and dissected them. Cohen has offered a summary of the Austinian three level distinctions as 'of saying' (locution), 'in saying' (illocution), and 'by saying' (perlocution) (1973:493).

*The locutionary act.* The locutionary act is the act of saying something. With speech or words, the utterance is transmitted. As Austin elaborated, it is 'the utterance of certain noises ... the utterance of certain words ... the utterance of them with a "certain meaning"' (1975:92-93).

*The illocutionary act.* This is the 'performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something' (Austin 1975:99-100). This act involves the significance or force of the utterance (BeDuhn 2002:86). Examples would include promising, blessing, declaring, warning, and the like. These words convey the functionality of the illocutionary act (cf. Wolterstorff 1995:37).

*The perlocutionary act.* A perlocutionary act is the 'consequential effect' of an utterance (Austin 1975:101). This is the response or result of a speech act upon the speaker, hearer, or others. This characteristic of speech act theory has not been as prominent in the discussion of the methodology. However, Holdcroft has pointed to its importance as demonstrating the validity of an utterance, since the utterance would be useless if no possible purpose could result from it being said (1978:100).

Searle's clarification of performatives has advanced speech act theory from Austin's introduction. The key question posed by Searle is 'how does the saying constitute the doing' (2002:88). The central idea surrounding how declarations can be determined as performative is the social context of rules, regulations, and institutions (Searle 1996:111-

112; 2002:104-105). The rules within society operate in such a way, as to dictate if the speech act is performative between speaker and hearer.

Searle contributions to speech act theory are two-fold, and serve as helpful tools for biblical interpretation: 'direction to fit' and construction of reality paradigms. Searle emphasised that 'direction of fit' is one condition guiding every linguistic act (1979:1-29). The direction of fit is the 'world of the utterance', that is, the way propositional content is construed in reality (Searle and Vanderveken 1985:52).

- a) The word-to-world direction of fit = (assertives), the illocutionary act fits into the independent state of affairs.
- b) The world-to-word direction of fit = (commissives and directives), the world is altered to fit the illocutionary act.
- c) The double direction of fit = (declaratives), the world is altered to fit the illocutionary act by representing the world as so altered.
- d) The null or empty direction of fit = (expressives), no question of achieving a successful fit of illocutionary act to the world.

The notion of God speaking and communicating to humanity is referred to by Wolterstorff as 'divine discourse' (1995:37-57). In addition, the God who speaks is the God who acts and 'must causally bring about events generative of divine discourse' (Wolterstorff 1995:117). However, Wolterstorff readily admits that the worldviews and convictions about what God would say or not say continue to influence the interpretation of divine discourse (1995:221-222). The interpreter, then, understands the discourse as guided by belief in the intention of the discourse.

Wolterstorff builds his argument of divine discourse on the model of double-discourse appropriation, which is the speech of someone else appropriated by another (1995:52). It compares to a 'me, too' approach in speaking (cf. Gutenson 1998:142-143). In terms of the biblical text, God was the author in the sense that human discourse was appropriated by God as a medium to express the divine discourse (Wolterstorff 1995:54-56, 187-197). The result is that two hermeneutics are involved in understanding the biblical text, namely, interpreting the mediating human discourse, and interpreting the mediated divine discourse (Wolterstorff 1995:183-222).

According to Briggs, speech act theory is a hermeneutical tool for 'self-involvement' within the text (2001:5-17). He suggests that this self-involvement with the text is more a matter of function than logic, since it operates on the posture taken by the interpreter as influenced by the text (2001:8; 2008:98-106). Self-involvement is described as 'the speaking subject invests him or herself in a state of affairs by adopting a stance towards that state of affairs' (Briggs 2001:148).

Speech act theory should not be viewed as a comprehensive criticism for all scriptural texts, but, instead, as a paradigmatic theory in searching for illocutionary acts in various texts (Briggs 2008:94-98). Through speech act theory, those texts that demonstrate 'the transformative effects of illocutionary acts' can best be understood through the 'hermeneutic of self-involvement' whereby the interpreter 'can rightly construe the illocutionary act performed' (Briggs 2008:102-103). Illocutionary force is the actual performance of an act in saying something (Austin 1975:99-100). The importance, then, is not only that something has been said, but in the nature of the actual utterance itself. The 'blessing' utterance, as found in the Beatitudes, would carry the effect of a declaration in any given speech act (cf. Guelich 1976:416-417). Since oral recitation and repetition were first century practices

(Dunn 2007:185), speech act theory can facilitate greater awareness of how the community practiced its core beliefs through an oral exchange. Since interpretation is dependent upon presuppositions, contexts, and semantics, so speech act theory is a methodology that coincides with theology in aiding it by explaining the language events and their importance.

## **2. Principles That Govern Speech Act Theory in the Beatitudes**

Through the maze of speech act dialogue, certain principles should be considered as foundational in forming a speech act model. Speech act theory should not be considered as a tool for discovering the meaning or force of sentences alone (cf. Poythress 2008:344-345). What must be considered is the big picture within the speech act, or the total meaning of an utterance (Patte 1988:91). From this study, there are important principles deemed necessary for speech act theory to accommodate itself to biblical hermeneutics.

### **2.1. Intentionality must be considered when examining speech acts within text creation**

There would be no text creation without the intention of an author. The very notion of an 'intention-less' text is absurd. All discourse and literary theory has the premise that an author began with a subject he or she wanted an audience to understand (cf. Harris 1988:60). Without the understanding of intentionality on the part of the author, the linguistic unit makes no ultimate sense (cf. Patte 1988:98).

The Beatitudes demonstrate intentionality in both its structure and content. The structure exhibits a tool for mnemonic practice. The

carefully balanced strophes, combined with alliteration and assonance, conveys a text pragmatically and paradigmatically created. The speeches of Jesus were orally transmitted as they were heard and seen among his followers. The reported speech acts were 'as much shaped by agents' and reporters' intentions, perceptions and (re)-interpretations as any speeches and accounts of speech are' (Downing 2000:16). Matthew intended to design a text to be adopted as a definitive paradigm for the existence of the Matthean community.

In this study, the following terms will be used in reference to the poetic structure of a text: hemistich (half the length of a colon), colon (single line of poetry), bicolon (two lines or cola), strophe (verse-unit of cola), and stanza (one or more strophes) (cf. Watson 2005:12-13). This study has found that the Beatitude pericope consists of two stanzas (Matt 5:3-12 and 5:13-16) and five strophes (Matt 5:3-6, 7-10, 11-12, 13, 14-16).

DiLella has also pointed to the symmetrical nature of each hemistich (half colon), demonstrating how Matthew employed words totaling three, five, or seven in each hemistich (1989:237-242). The total word count was seventy-two. The extended Beatitude (5:11-12) contained thirty-five words. Could this have been a mnemonic practice of remembering sections for textual performance (cf. Person 1998:601-609)? By bridging the sections together with chain-link transitions, the flow of material would be achieved (cf. Longenecker 2005:23-50). The chain-link consisted of key words or phrases connecting paragraphs or strophes together.

In the first two strophes of the Beatitudes, the inclusio 'kingdom of heaven' was joined. The term 'righteousness', 'on account of me' and 'good works' served as chain-links joining the units of 5:3-6, 5:7-10, 5:11-12, and 5:13-16 together. The word 'persecution' joined 5:10, with

the subsequent 5:11-12, to demonstrate the relationship of all three strophes together.

## **2.2. The understanding of any speech act originates with contextual considerations**

The context of an utterance provides the basis for meaning. Austin alluded to this as 'the total speech act in the total speech situation' (1975:148). Context can be defined as 'the totality of conditions that influence the understanding and generation of linguistic behaviour' (Bunt 2000:81-82) or the 'concentric circles of influence or effect of some state of affairs' (van Dijk 2008:4). Searle referred to the rules governing speech acts as constitutive (1969:12; 1996:111-112). Bunt has clarified the five dimensions of context: linguistic, semantic, cognitive, physical / perceptual, and social (2000:100).

Within the communicative process, the reader must have the understanding that all contextual dimensions influence the speech act. Although a text may not yield suitable information of a particular dimension, one should always be mindful of the totality of dimensions in the overall speech act (cf. Harris 1988:78). What begins to emerge out of such contextual considerations is a point of view by the reader of the text. The reader's point of view is essential for text interpretation.

In the following example, three possible ways of understanding the locution are provided in reference to the particular context (cf. Table 2.1).



<b>Examples of contextual possibilities</b>
Speaker: 'Do you know how cold it is?'
<p>#1 Hearer response: S wants to know the temperature outside (assertive).</p> <p>#2 Hearer response: S is suggesting more clothing for the H (directive).</p> <p>#3 Hearer response: S is belittling H for not appropriately recognising how to dress for the cold (expressive).</p>
Speaker: 'The dog is outside'
<p>#1 Hearer response: S wants H to bring the dog into the house (directive).</p> <p>#2 Hearer response: S is expressing that the dog is in the cold and hopes H will allow the dog into the house (expressive).</p> <p>#3 Hearer response: S is answering the question of H over the whereabouts of the dog (assertive).</p>

*Table 1: Examples of contextual possibilities*

The literary context for the Beatitudes was twofold, namely, (a) a description of the repentant community, and (b) the righteousness that characterized the community of Christ followers. The first four Beatitudes depicted repentance from the literary viewpoint of a paradigm shift (cf. Matt 5:3-6). By using 'poor in spirit' as a metonym for the needy, Matthew described the change brought to them by Jesus. The last four Beatitudes described the characteristic righteousness of Jesus in those referred to as 'the persecuted', a metonym for Christ followers (cf. Matt 5:7-10). Matthew followed with a specific application to the Matthean community and its crisis of persecution (cf. Matt 5:11-16).

### 2.3. Speech acts are worldview snapshots

Although the context is vital in comprehending a speech act, the utterance is framed within a worldview. Skinner has pointed to the need of the historian to demonstrate that speaking agents of the past were 'rational as possible' within the framework of their beliefs and worldviews (1988:239-246). Speech act theory can assist the literary model from the concept of point of view (cf. Lotman 1975:339). For the reader, the question is how does the text refer to reality? It is not enough to decipher the linguistic units of discourse.

Matthew embraced a worldview characteristic of the Jewish metanarrative. Without doubt, the Gospel of Matthew was the most Jewish of the gospels (Luz 2007:45-48). By the time Matthew composed his gospel, many Jewish Christians in the new community had been forced out of the synagogues due to messianic claims concerning Jesus (Barnett 1999:362). This caused both social and emotional upheaval. Matthew addressed this situation by using notions reminiscent of their Jewish past, but framing it in a new Christian ideology, namely, temple concepts and covenant promise (Skarsaune 2002:162, 177, 274; France 2008:109). Similar comparison can be demonstrated within the Qumran literature, as the community struggled for legitimacy within Second Temple Judaism (cf. Wilson 2005:55-56).

Within the Beatitudes, conceptions found within the Jewish metanarrative were present. Examples would include the blessing motif as practiced by the Jewish patriarchs. Blessing was also pronounced upon Israel by the temple priests. Another example would be the kingdom of heaven concept that originated with Abraham and elucidated through the Davidic promise and visions of Daniel. Furthermore, the theme of righteousness was depicted as the continuous

need of Israel in its relationship to God. Finally, salt and light were metaphoric of God and sacrifice throughout the Jewish writings.

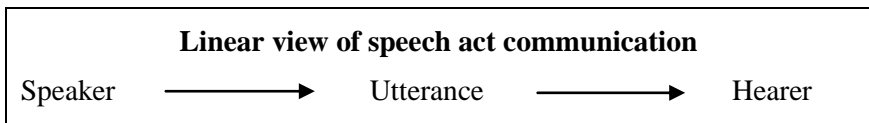
#### **2.4. Speech acts are socially constructed and complementary**

A text is written through meaning associated with its social constitution. Social conditions are like thermostats, which make speech acts possible (cf. Briggs 2001:63-67). Speech act theory demonstrates the knowledge that a community is an interpretive one, of both itself and the world in which it operates. The community is strengthened through its language (speech acts), both in addressing its existence in the world and in the world of its own existence (cf. Verhey 2007:22-23). By examining the speech acts of a particular social body, various patterns emerge demonstrating explanation, correction or confirmation among its members. What matters are the utterances a community employs in describing shared reality, not simply the reality itself (cf. Petrey 1990:40-41; Esterhammer 1993:288).

Throughout the Beatitudes, the focus was on the social body of the Matthean community. The grammatical movement, from third person to second person, demonstrates how Matthew utilized fixed tradition for practical purposes. Matthew created a literary construct from the social interaction of the community. Many times social interaction became ritualized for the maintenance of a community (cf. Patrick 1999:11). The Beatitudes functioned as ritualistic blessings for the Matthean community to remain faithful as representatives of Christ, even when persecuted for doing so. To the social body, he gives the imperatives to 'rejoice, be glad, and let your light shine' (cf. Matt 5:12, 16). The world would benefit from the salt and light present in the social body, demonstrating God's goodness.

## 2.5. The role of the hearer in the speech act cannot be diminished

The primary reason for saying something is to communicate an understandable intention (cf. Bach and Harnish 1979:3). This implies that every speech act has a speaker and a hearer. The same can be said for the literary dimension, each text has an author and an audience. Within speech act studies, the primary emphasis has been on the speaker. This is unfortunate since the role of the hearer has been diminished to a reactionary object (Masaki 2004:34-36; cf. Gorman 1999:102-103). By viewing communication from a linear position, emphasis is placed on the speaker controlling the utterance, while the hearer is an object (cf. Figure 2.2).

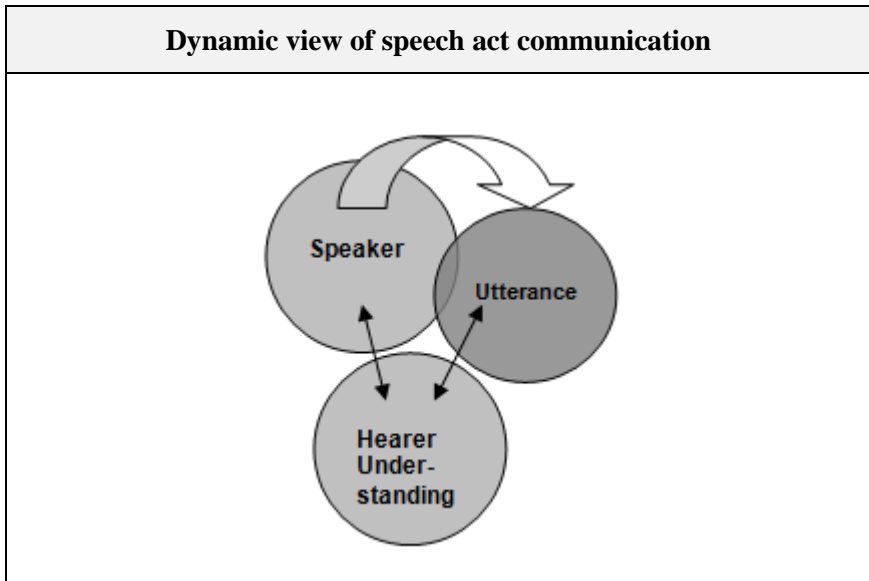


*Figure 2.2: Linear view of speech act communication*

A successful illocutionary act always involves reciprocity (cf. Hornsby 1994:198-207). However, the speech act is a portion of the total speech situation, whereby the hearer becomes actively involved because of language and contextual recognition in the network of relationships (Petrey 1990:89; cf. Vanhoozer 2001:23; Skinner 2002:109-115). One should never lose sight of the purpose of an utterance in its 'act': to be interpreted and acted upon accordingly by the hearer (Holdcroft 1978:70-71; Bach and Harnish 1979:17; Landa 1992:98-99; Gu 1993:422; Masaki 2004:35).

One cannot dispute the speaker as the source of an utterance. However, the hearer has responsibility to the utterance and to the speaker in a speech act situation. The hearer becomes the source for interpreting both the speaker and the utterance by sharing common ground if an

illocutionary force is recognized (cf. Kissine 2009:128-134). Both have a bilateral responsibility to the utterance: the speaker in creating and the hearer in understanding. Speakers and authors employ language with 'audience design', imagining to whom they speak (Clark and Carlson 1982:342). A dynamic view of a speech act involves mutual responsibilities and emphasizes the utterance as the object (cf. Figure 2.3).



*Figure 2.3: Dynamic view of speech act communication*

The dynamic view of speech act communication is vital in recognizing the context of the Beatitudes. The intention of the literary composition by Matthew was to perpetuate the divine utterance on behalf of the hearers within the Matthean community. Matthew portrayed Jesus as the authoritative voice of the blessings, a 'language which authorizes and assigns a role' to the hearer (Thiselton 1992:288). The speech act was the actual state of blessings upon the hearers. Matthew further

elaborated on the blessings with the declaratives 'you are the salt of the earth' and 'you are the light of the world' (cf. Matt 5:14-16).

The backdrop to the Beatitudes was the message of Jesus 'repent, the kingdom of heaven is near', and the calling of the disciples (4:17, 18-25). Theologically, Matthew was describing the paradigm shift of a follower of Jesus. This shift (*metanoia*) was the basis for understanding the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes were descriptive of '*metanoia*' and its implications for Jesus followers (cf. Luz 1995:42-43; 2007:160). The 'shocking effects' of the Beatitudes demonstrated the radical paradigm shift within the new community, especially among the Jewish Christians (Kodjak 1986:42). How did Matthew demonstrate this paradigm shift in the arrangement of the Beatitude pericope (cf. Table 2.4)?

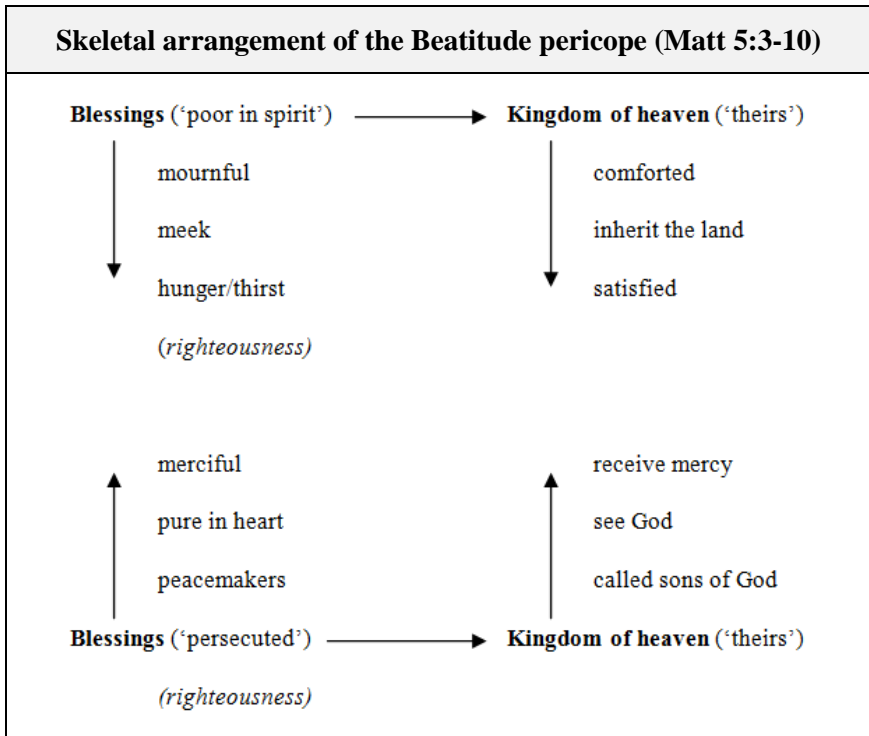


Table 2.4: Skeletal arrangement of the Beatitude pericope

## 2.6. Perlocutions are open-ended

Speech act theorists have not given as much attention to perlocutions as illocutions. Austin admitted in his 1955 lecture that perlocutions would be the hardest to distinguish from illocutions within his system of thought (1975:110). The definition Austin (1975:101) gave of a perlocution is important in understanding its distinction.

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention of purpose of producing them ... We shall

call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a perlocutionary act or perlocution.

There are four characteristics of perlocutions inferred from this definition by Austin.

1. *Speaking is a consequential act.* The understanding that speaking is consequential does not suggest the intention of the speaker predetermines the response or effect to the speech act (cf. BeDuhn 2002:103). If speaker one wants speaker two to shut the window, and states, 'It is really noisy outside', speaker two may be justified in retrieving earplugs for speaker one. The intention of speaker one was for the window to be shut, but the consequence of speaker one's speech act was earplugs. However, utterance is made with the intention of securing perlocutionary effect (cf. Bach and Harnish 1979:17).

2. *Speech acts generate change.* Perlocutions are communicative interactions between the speaker's speech act and the hearer's response. The potential for change due to a speech act is based on the level of involvement by the hearer (Marcu 2000:1726-1727). Perlocutionary effects cannot be managed or manipulated by the speaker (cf. van Dijk 1977:198). What the speaker controls is the illocutionary force which fosters the commencement of a perlocutionary act.

Although recognition by the hearer is important, it is only the beginning of the full perlocutionary effect. It is possible that perlocutionary effects could continue ad infinitum. The history of exegesis provides examples of changing interpretive communities (perlocutions), to which Maartens has referred to as 'growth rings' (1991:21). Speech act theory brings recognition to the first layer of perlocutionary action, with an understanding that subsequent layers could result (cf. Figure 2.5).



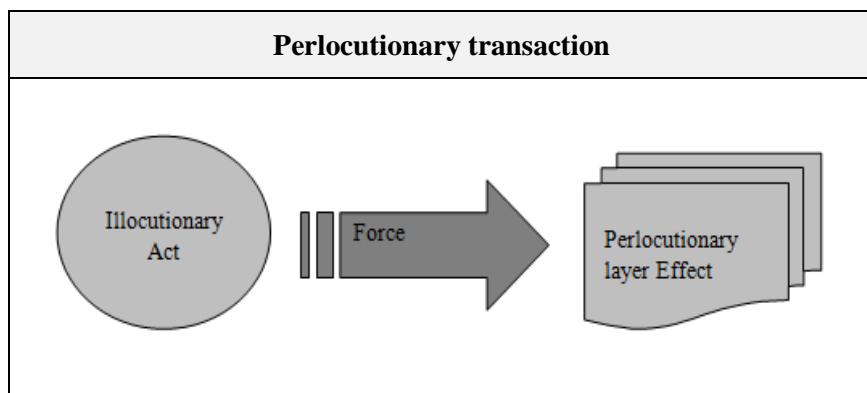


Figure 2.5: *Perlocutionary transaction*

3. *Observing speech act effects clarifies the illocutionary force.* Austin (1975:146) argued that all speech acts involve illocutionary force, also termed performatives. Vanderveken attempted to explain illocutionary force by focusing on the performative verbs in a speech act (1990:19-22). However, Leech (1983:174-175) contended that trying to decipher illocutionary force through the study of verbs is an 'error of grammaticizing'. In addition, Fish has pointed to the response of the hearer as indicator of the illocutionary force (1980:221-222; cf. Masaki 2004:40).

For instance, if a father yells to his son, 'The lake water is really cold', his son may understand it as a warning that swimming would be dangerous, or as a suggestion that he should be adjusted to the water slowly. Other contextual factors would also indicate the force of the illocution: is it summer or winter? On the other hand, is the son recovering from an illness? What must be understood is that the action in an illocutionary utterance constitutes the meaning itself, absent from the perlocutionary consequences (cf. Ray 1973:18). A significant reason for dissent over perlocutions is due to the rhetorical nature of the concept (cf. Landa 1992:99; Gu 1993:428). What can be assumed is

that speech act theory recognizes the perlocutionary act in the speech situation, whereby rhetorical criticism explains its greater significance outside the linguistic construction.

4. *Speech act effects strengthen with communal adaptation.* The perlocutionary act is usually described from the hearer's perspective. However, Austin mentioned the audience, speaker, and 'other persons' in his definition. Perlocutionary effects contribute toward the language of society as adapted and maintained by a communal consciousness. As perlocutionary effects become embedded within a linguistic community, retrieval through interpretation and ritualism merge as dominant communicative traits (cf. Schaller 1988:415-417; Landa 1992:100-102). By viewing perlocutionary effects diachronically, layers of interpretation, what Landa refers to as 'contention and accumulation', can be demonstrated to exist in those speech acts a community deems significant (1992:102). However, what should remain through the layers of perlocutionary effects is a thread of illocutionary force that provided the commencement for the original perlocutionary act. Understanding both the illocutionary and rhetorical force of an utterance provides the interpretive community the pragmatic rationale for its adaptation of the perlocutionary act (cf. Du Plessis 1991:134-135).

When approaching the Beatitudes, the open-ended nature of perlocutionary effects is significant for succeeding Christian communities. With the illocutionary force being maintained, the Beatitudes serve the Christian community as it did for the Matthean community. The ability for a text to survive outside of its original domain with its continued communicative ability is known as a 'display text' (cf. Pratt 1977:133-151; Lanser 1981:284-286). Display texts are important as speech acts with continuing perlocutionary effects. As linguistic constructions, the text is 'closed', but as performative speech,

it is 'open' (cf. White 1979:172). For the community, 'the display text is its message; to contemplate the message is to receive it' (Lanser 1981:286). In receiving the text, the community adopts not only the meaning, but also the frame itself, allowing for perlocutionary effects.

### 3. Utilizing the Speech Act Model on the Beatitudes

The present study incorporated key concepts from speech act theorists in forming a paradigmatic model of speech act theory. The model derives from principles considered foundational to speech act theory. This model serves as a pragmatic tool used in understanding the text from a speech act perspective.

Speech act theory provides a hermeneutical stance to evaluate what illocutionary forces are operating in a text (cf. Briggs 2008:97). However, speech act theory is not simply a tool for the classification of utterances (texts) by the interpreter (cf. Poythress 2008:344-347). Instead, it is a hermeneutic recognizing the strength of an utterance measured through self-involvement with that utterance (cf. Briggs 2001:294-297). Stated differently, a speech act model should ascertain how transformative effects are achieved through utterance (cf. Briggs 2008:102). In relation to the emerging Christian movement, how did the Matthean community utilize the Beatitudes as speech acts?

The model utilized in this study is represented with the four dimensional acronym: **SP-EE-CH-ACT**. The application of the model is through the formula: **SP+(EE)CH = ACT**. The four dimensions are represented and explained as follows:

- a) **SP** - **Situated Performativity** = participants, event, encoding
- b) **EE** - **Existential Engagement** = current perlocutionary effect
- c) **CH** - **Critical Horizon** = meaning utterance and worldview influence
- d) **ACT** - **Acquired Communal Translation** = utterance repetition

When approaching the Beatitudes with this speech act model, the interpreter examines the context for the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Understanding the original socio-historical and literary context is necessary, before a competent analysis can be performed. However, the biblical text is more than an object for exegetical inquiry. The true speech act is a transaction between both God and humanity. Human reciprocity seeks the transcendent communication so immanently experienced.

### **3.1. Situated performativity: the variables in the speech act context of the Beatitudes**

What cannot be dismissed are the two major principles directing speech act theory in its approach toward the Beatitudes, namely, the socio-historical and literary dimensions. The Beatitudes elevated utterance to a position of authority within a social community and for a literary purpose.

*Structure of the Beatitudes.* It is clear that Matthew composed the Beatitudes from a literary structure (repetition, parallelism, alliteration, allusion). The Beatitudes became a display-text for the Christ community, affirming its presence and importance in the world as spoken by Jesus. The structure itself communicated how Jesus' words could help a present crisis. The eight Beatitudes Matthew composed were in the third person. To bring the relevance of the Beatitudes to the

Matthean community, Matthew employed the second person beginning in Matthew 5:11.

*Illocutionary force in the Beatitudes.* Through the Beatitudes, one could conclude that Jesus took a divine illocutionary stance (cf. Ward 2002:309). The blessings of the Beatitudes were not meant to be informative, but, instead, as performative language upon the believing community (cf. Wudel 2000:277). The declarative utterances could be considered as 'double direction of fit', whereby the world altered in the illocutionary act speaks of the world as altered (cf. Searle 1979:1-29). The variables surrounding the Beatitudes demonstrated how the words of Jesus became a compelling force in the Matthean community. One must understand the influence of Isaiah on Matthew to appreciate the illocutionary force in the Beatitudes.

In the Isaianic passages to which Matthew clearly alluded (cf. Is 61 and 62), the restoration of Israel and covenant renewal was described. The theme of 'good news' had been introduced earlier by Isaiah (ch. 40) as descriptive of the realization of liberty. The year of Jubilee was significant for those oppressed in the nation of Israel due to debts and obligations to the powerful (cf. Lev 25). Three characters were introduced by Isaiah: the speaker, the mediator, and Yahweh (cf. Watts 1987:301-305). The importance of this passage to Matthew rested on what the speaker was able to accomplish with his words of blessing (cf. Watts 1987:305; Table 3.1).

**Illocutionary force of utterances in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-16  
compared to Isa 61 and 62)**

**'You are Blessed'(Declarative)**

[A time will come when there will be an acknowledgement of the people God has blessed ('state of affairs') = 61:9]

*Having possession of kingdom is a blessing* (vv. 3, 10)

[Isaiah speaks of a time when God will favor his people among the nations because of the everlasting covenant= 61:2, 8, and 11]

*Being divinely comforted is a blessing* (v. 4)

[Metaphorical description of divine comfort is expressed in the phrases, 'crown of beauty', 'oil of gladness' and garment of praise'= 61:3]

*Receiving what is promised is a blessing* (v. 5)

[God's people will experience a time of receiving double in the land for their time of shame and loss= 61:7]

*Being divinely satisfied is a blessing* (v. 6)

[Satisfaction in all God will provide= 62:8]

*Receiving divine mercy is a blessing* (v. 7)

[Experienced in the 'preaching, binding, proclaiming, releasing, and providing'= 61:1-3]

*Experiencing the presence of God is a blessing* (v. 8)

[No longer deserted or desolate but redeemed and 'married' to God= 62:4-5, and 12]

*Being recognized as God's child is a blessing* (v. 9)

[Called by a new name by the nations= 62:2]

*Being divinely rewarded is a blessing* (v. 12)

[God rewards his people with the presence of the Sent One= 61:8; 62:11]

<p><b>'You are Salt' (Rhetorical)</b></p> <p>[The emphasis was on the planting of righteousness among God's people. Could salt be a reference to the fertilizing effect? = 61:3]  <i>No restoration possible for worthless salt</i> (v. 13a)  <i>Worthless salt used for secondary purpose</i> (v. 13b)</p>
<p><b>'You are Light' (Rhetorical)</b></p> <p>[Righteousness of God's people must shine like a torch among the nations = 62:1]  <i>Light cannot be hid on a hill</i> (v. 14)  <i>People don't light lamps to hide the light</i> (v. 15)</p> <p><b>'Rejoice with Gladness' (Imperative)</b></p> <p>[The righteousness God provides stimulates rejoicing = 61:10]  <i>Because of me</i> (v. 11)</p> <p>[The Servant is sent by YHWH to announce blessing upon God's people = 61:1; 62:11]</p>
<p><b>'Let your Light Shine' (Imperative)</b></p> <p><i>Shine before humanity</i> (v. 16a)  <i>Shining demonstrated in good works</i> (v. 16b)  <i>Shining complements the source of the Christ community</i> (v. 16c)</p>

*Table 3.1: Illocutionary force of utterance in the Beatitudes*

*c) Situation Surrounding the Beatitudes.* The Matthean community was facing a crisis of identity along with social and religious legitimacy. The religious milieu was exacerbated after the events of AD 70 and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The question facing the Christ community centered on the juxtaposition of their identity to Judaism. The Beatitudes exhibit the use of authoritative utterance resulting in an identity confirmation of the social body. Judaism continually appropriated the prophetic promises as encouragement for their

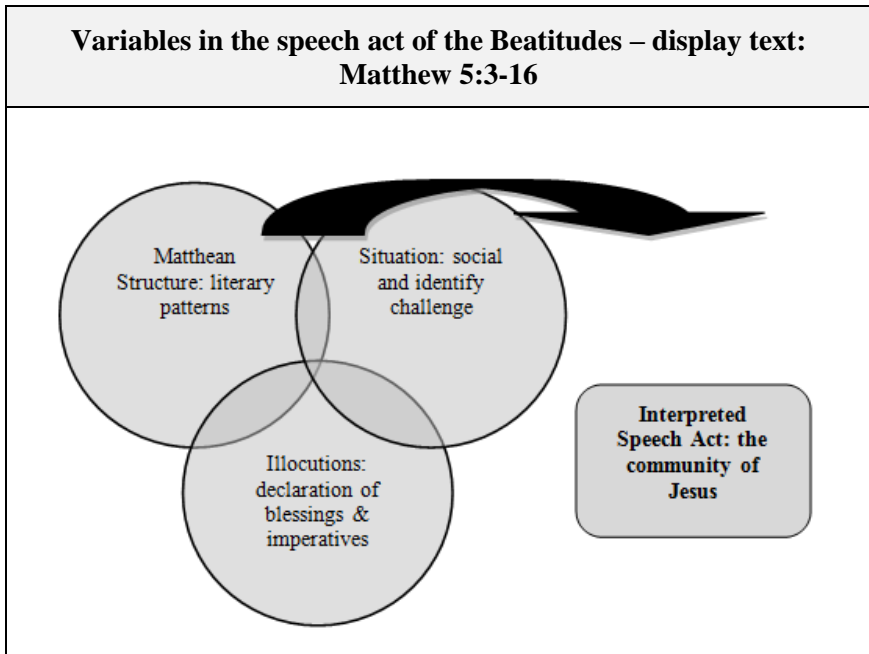
followers during crisis events (cf. Bauckham 2010:55-64). The Matthean community would have been familiar with the Isaianic promises to which Matthew alluded (cf. Table 3.2).

<b>Isaianic Themes Describing the Matthean Community (Isa 61 and 62)</b>
<i>Poor in spirit</i> : Good news will be given to poor (61:1)
<i>Mournful</i> : Broken-hearted will be comforted (61:1-2)
<i>Meek</i> : Shame and disgrace replaced with land promise (61:7)
<i>Righteousness cravings</i> : Planted like oaks of righteousness (61:3)
<i>Merciful</i> : Nations will see righteousness and seek for it (62:1-2, 12)
<i>Purity of heart</i> : Preparation to see Saviour come to his people (62:11)
<i>Peacemakers</i> : Desire for Jerusalem's prosperity means peace (62:1-9)
<i>Persecuted</i> : Rebuilding, restoring, and renewing (61:4)
<i>Rejoice</i> : God has provided the desired righteousness (61:10)
<i>Give Glory</i> : Acknowledge divine blessing on God's people (61:9)

*Table 3.2: Isaianic themes describing the Matthean community*

The legitimacy of the Matthean community began with Jesus' affirmation of blessing (speaker). Jesus blessed those who were disenfranchised within society (audience). His pronouncement was to all who would repent and follow him (implied audience). Matthew describes the Matthean community (authorial audience) with the language of marginality (cf. Duling 1995:358-387). Jesus' words created a blessed community (cf. Thiselton 1970:440-441). It is vital to understand Jesus' pronouncement as creating the state of affairs for the blessed, not a description of the psychological effect of his audience (cf. Powell 1996:469). Despite the social unrest surrounding the Christ community, Matthew assured the social body that even the conflict was proof of their identity to Jesus (cf. Figure 3.3).





*Figure 3.3: Variables in the speech act of the Beatitudes – display text: Matthew 5:3-16*

Ultimately, the experience of the Beatitudes by the Christian community throughout the centuries demonstrates the strength of its perlocutionary effects (cf. Patte 1988:98). Are there indications that the Matthean community saw the Beatitudes from a performative posture? Could the Beatitudes have been employed for ritualistic purposes by the Christian community?

### **3.2. Existential engagement: the process of experiencing the speech acts of the Beatitudes**

Within biblical hermeneutics, the theories of self-involvement by Briggs, and the transforming text by Thiselton, parallel the idea of

perlocutions as transactions (Briggs 2001:147-182; Thiselton 1992:288-298). For Thiselton, participatory language is evident throughout scripture and invites the reader to be engaged, especially through its promises and assertions (1992:31-47, 298-303). This implies that the speech acts of scripture have continual communicative consequences among its participants.

Bering (2003:101-120) has proposed a three-tier explanation for existential reality based on the assumption that humanity has a 'proto-theistic' attribute. This attribute presupposes that experiences in life happen for teleological purposes. The three tiers Bering employs are event, experience, and existence (2003:110-120). Events are interpretations of human intentions. Experience refers to the self as a participant (willing or non-willing) in finding meaning through a purposeful or unexpected event. Existence is the 'progressive product of those experiences imbued with meaning' (Bering 2003:115).

By combining the three-tiered approach of Bering to speech act theory, the text of the past becomes a medium to engage the illocutionary force of the speech act as described in the event. It has a multiplying effect throughout the social body as it bridges the situated performative text ('SP') to the present 'SP+(EE)'. The existential role advocated in this model is more pragmatic than philosophical. The strength of engagement is relative to how a social body measures or values the illocutionary force (cf. Brown 2007:234). As a process, it begins with the utterance consideration (Event), leading to an utterance adaptation (Experience), and finally, a re-illocution by the interpretive community (Existence; cf. Figure 3.4).

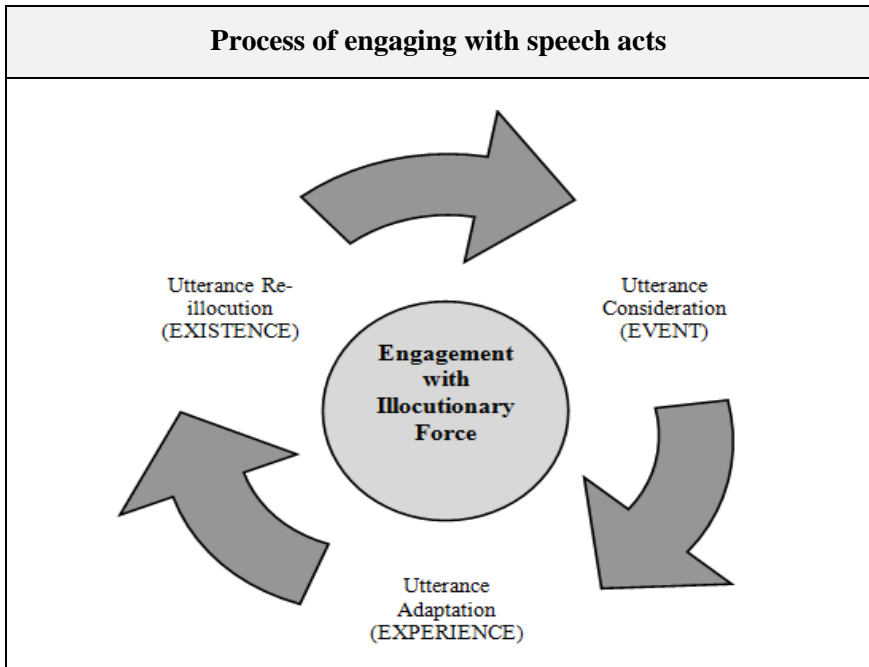
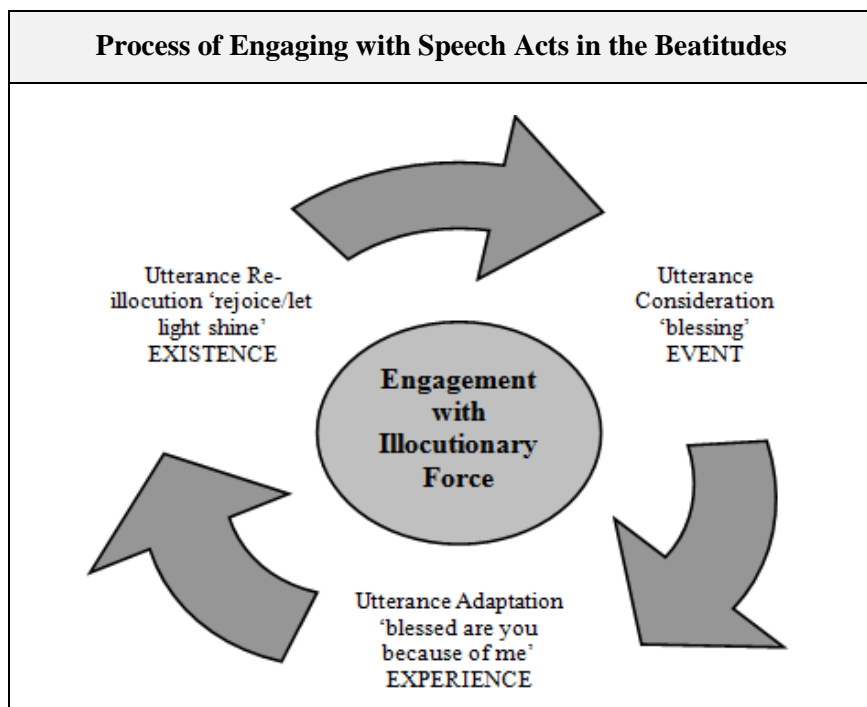


Figure 3.4: *Process of engaging with speech acts*

The act of blessing governs the interpretive engagement. The literary movement from third person (cf. Matt 5:3-10) to second person (cf. Matt 5:11-12) was an important illocutionary act by Matthew. The experience of the Matthean community was equated to the experience of Jesus. By alluding to the Isaianic promises and assimilating them into the Matthean community ('you'), a new perlocutionary effect was achieved, providing identification as those who were recipients of Jesus' pronounced blessings (cf. Matt 5:13-16). Matthew referenced the 'blessed' community as 'salt and light', strong metaphors for the constitution of the social body. It is in these capacities that Matthew could use the imperatival 'rejoice' as the proper response to the force of the previous illocutions (cf. Maartens 1991:15; Figure 3.5).



*Figure 3.5: Process of engaging with speech acts in the Beatitudes*

Ultimately, the authority and meaning of the Beatitudes exists in the recognition of the speaker (Jesus) and the situation (kingdom announcement). This recognition cannot simply be interpreted. The nature of the utterance demands a hearing that is repeatedly conveyed through a transformational experience (Evans 1980:262; cf. Beavis 2006:77). Just as looking at notes on a sheet of music does not produce the sound of an instrument; likewise, describing the illocution of an utterance does not bring the utterance to life. The essence of the blessing is in the experience of the hearer to the utterance (cf. Brawley 2003:147).

### 3.3. Critical horizon: the worldviews surrounding the Beatitudes

Speech act theory discovers the presuppositions governing linguistic usage (cf. Briggs 2001:151). It uncovers the emerging point of view found in the interactions within the text (cf. Lotman 1975:345). Speech act theory emphasizes that words do not merely describe reality; instead, words convey reality as well (Thiselton 1974:284). The 'onlook' (worldview) of an interpretive audience allows it to 'look on x as y' (cf. Evans 1980:10-12). Without understanding the worldview stance of an illocutionary act, no 'uptake' can be achieved (cf. BeDuhn 2002:96).

The Beatitudes were spoken in relation to Jesus' imperative to repent (cf. Matt 4:17). The notion of repentance was demanding of a paradigm shift. The reality Jesus described could only be realized with repentance preceding the acceptance of blessing. This paradigm shift guided Matthew in composing the gospel. The basis for repentance was the announced presence of the kingdom in Jesus.

A clash of worldviews emerged due to the kingdom message as presented by Jesus against deeply, long held religious beliefs. The kingdom announcement was not antagonistic to first century religious beliefs, as much as it was agonistic. The message of Jesus was construed as an attack on the sacred symbols rooted in Second Temple Judaism: temple, Torah, and covenants. The kingdom was not about territory or political power. The significance of the message of Jesus and the Matthean literary composition was its promotion of the new orientation to the kingdom as a transcendent experience (cf. Briggs 2001:276-278). Blessings announced by Jesus were no less than an invitation to enter into a new vista of experience with God.

Matthew used literary means to persuade the Christ community of its accurate understanding of Jesus' message and the need to continue with the kingdom message in the world. The force of the Beatitudes is derived from the repetitive 'blessing' upon the hearer. The spoken act of blessing had a rich Old Testament background. The blessing was not in the magic of the utterance, but in the institution established and practiced throughout Israel's history (cf. Thiselton 1974:294-295; Mitchell 1987). The formula, as described by Thiselton, was the appropriate person in the appropriate situation (1974:294). Ultimately, it was the status of the speaker that gave authority and meaning to the blessing.

The eight Beatitudes were placed as the introduction to the first of five discourses in the Matthean composition. The significant placement of the Beatitudes can be explained as the paradigm shift Matthew advocated for the new community. As a paradigm, the Beatitudes provided the Matthean community the point of view (cf. Lotman 1975:352) for their present identity and hope for future vindication (Maartens 1991:14). The Matthean community could rejoice and continue its mission because it was a community recognizing and responding to the blessings uttered by Jesus as 'an accomplished act' (cf. Mitchell 1987:174; Zamfir 2007:82).

### **3.4. Acquired communal translation: the reiteration of the speech acts with the Beatitudes**

In an oral culture, stories and rituals were essential in communicating what was important, becoming 'cultural texts' (cf. Assmann 2006:76-77). Through ritual, the Christian community attempted to adopt the story in relation to their situation, reflecting the values they cherished (cf. Botha 2007:287-290; White 2010:102-103). Understanding the

dynamics of ritual is imperative in studying the early Christian movement (cf. DeMaris 2008). Ritual life was so central and definitive of early Christian communities, that DeMaris insists it was 'not text, not belief, not experience, but ritual' guiding the movement (DeMaris 2008:9-11). Within speech act theory, ritual has a prominent role due to its performative nature. Within ritual observance, there is the 'act' (doing) that transcends the mundane and ordinary. Speech act and ritual studies work in conjunction to demonstrate the facilitation of language by a social body (cf. Grimes 1988:103-122), with speech act theory exploring the 'what' and ritualistic studies exploring the 'how' and, if possible, 'why'.

Smith has used the sport of bear hunting to exemplify rituals (cf. 1982:57-63). Smith identifies four elements involved in the sport of bear hunting that illustrate how ordinary events of life could be considered ritualistic (cf. Table 3.6).

<b>Bear-hunting motif as ritual</b>
<b>'Preparation'</b> = focus on area, weapons, and strategy
<b>'Leaving camp'</b> = going from social order to the woods
<b>'The kill'</b> = killing of bear, respect for corpse
<b>'Return to camp'</b> = bearing corpse, celebration, recall

*Table 3.6: Bear-hunting Motif as Ritual*

This is an important corrective to what Poythress understands as a weakness of speech act theory, a focus on the individual (2008:340). Ritual permits the illocutionary force of utterances to be understood through the existential action of the community (cf. Schaller 1988:416-417). The results of ritual performance are the descriptive voice by the

social body of its identification, and the prescriptive voice to the constituents of the social body for commitment to the utterance (cf. Hellholm 1998:297-298).

The evidence of the Beatitudes suggests they were performative as ritual, whether liturgical, catechistic or ceremonial (cf. Brooke 1989:40; Betz 1995:59-60; Viljoen 2008:214-218). Some scholars have suggested that the declarative nature of *makarios* was reminiscent of known rituals surrounding the theme (Betz 1995:93; Viljoen 2008:208-209). The gospels, as a whole, demonstrate that expressions of the Christian faith were used in liturgical and ritual contexts, such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Prayer (cf. Horrell 2002:328).

As a social body, the illocutionary force of the Beatitudes was realized in communal fashion. The religious utterances become the religious acts themselves (Patte 1988:92-93). Even a reading performance could resemble a ceremonial ritual (cf. Horsley 2008:61). The performative nature was an engaging means, whereby confirmation was provided to the Matthean community of its identity and mission in representing Jesus to the world. Literary mediums were employed, not for individual satisfaction, but for social contribution (cf. Botha 1992:210-212). Lanser (1981:293-294) has called for more exploration in how a social body utilizes hypothetical speech acts to form an alternative world with the exhibition of transformative results.

Matthew prepared the reader for the Beatitudes by emphasizing repentance, the authority of Christ, and the importance of following him. As a whole, the eight Beatitudes Matthew crafted was a literary medium to touch the imagination of the Christian community as they 'heard' Jesus pronounce his blessing upon them. For the Matthean community, the 'impact' was the ability to transcend the crisis of



persecution with their alignment to Jesus. The ramifications were a communal joy and understanding of mission in the world.

If the Beatitudes demonstrate a perlocutionary effect that could be categorized as ritual, similar comparison could be made using the motif of a bear hunting ritual supplied by Smith (cf. Figure 3.6). The four elements Smith utilized have been changed to express a more general idea of ritual as it applies to the situation the Matthean community was facing (cf. Figure 3.7).

<b>Beatitudes as ritual</b>
<b>'Preparation'</b> = repentance, follower of Christ
<b>'Sociological imagination'</b> = illocutionary force of Beatitudes
<b>'Impact'</b> = perlocutionary force of Beatitudes to situation
<b>'Sociological ramifications'</b> = imperatives to rejoice and shine

*Figure 3.7: Beatitudes as ritual*

Performative utterances provide a situation for the speaker and audience to engage in their roles of communication within the world of reality to which the language speaks. It is through the imagination and compliance of the hearer whereby the illocutionary force has successful results (cf. Patrick 1999:193).

#### **4. Summary of Findings from the Speech Act Model Employed on the Beatitudes**

There is no question that the Gospel of Matthew was the most Jewish of the gospels. The Jewish metanarrative was the foundation for Matthew's composition. He saw the ministry of Jesus through the lens

of a Jewish worldview (cf. Wright 1996:137-144; Wilson 2005:46-47). What resulted was the modification of Matthew's worldview into a paradigm considered as a 'new' perspective compared to the old paradigm guiding Judaism (cf. Matt 13:52). The new perspective was shaped by the story of Jesus in Matthew's composition. Matthew wrote to assure the Christian community that Jesus was the culmination of all the Jewish promises resulting in the true Judaism to be followed (cf. Weren 2005:62; Wilson 2005:55-56).

Matthew utilized the term *makarioi* in explaining what Jesus 'did' in his saying. The central point of the Beatitudes can only be understood in what Jesus did with the 'blessed' utterance. The priests employed *eulogeō* in expressing praise to God and divine blessing upon the people in the temple (cf. Becker 1986:216). Jesus, instead of using a term from priestly performance, adopted *makarioi* to convey the 'state of being' or condition of those in his kingdom. The term *makarioi* was prominent in both wisdom and apocalyptic literature, indicating the positive condition of those who realized divine favour existed in their lives. Kissine (2009:128-134) has argued that illocutionary force is recognized when there is common ground between speaker and audience. What did 'blessed' demonstrate as an illocutionary force?

Firstly, it was descriptive of the life of Jesus and the Christ community. The eight Beatitudes were identification markers of the Christ community and the various ways the kingdom reign was demonstrated (Hannan 2000:52; cf. Guelich 1976:433).

Secondly, it was declarative of the shared reality to which the new community experienced. Contextual change emerges with illocutionary force (Bunt 2000:81). As declarative utterances, Matthew utilized the Beatitudes to advance a rhetorical paradigm associated with Jesus. The rhetorical logic had a threefold implication, namely, (a) the words Jesus

spoke ('blessed') through the Beatitudes brought the new community (*ekklesia*) into existence, (b) the existence of the new community (*ekklesia*) was contingent on the existence of Jesus ('on my account'), and (c) the presence of Jesus continued in the world through the presence ('you are salt/light') of the new community (*ekklesia*).

Thirdly, it was definitive of the purpose and existence of the new community ('let your light shine'). The experience of divine utterance brings assurance of divine presence (cf. Esterhammer 1993:291-292). The Matthean community could continue to be joyful, as long as the presence of Jesus was experienced through the spoken words of the Beatitudes. In understanding its existence through the metaphorical images of salt and light, the Matthean community withstood the insults and rejection it faced as a social body. The ultimate benefit was the acknowledgement by those outside the community that the actions of the community were commensurate to a transcendent God, whose immanent presence was made known through those actions (Matt 5:16). What effect do the Beatitudes have within the Christ community?

#### **4.1. A commemorative event**

The Beatitudes introduced the authority and presence of Jesus to his followers. The event that Matthew portrayed was derived from a historical occurrence. However, for the new community, historical data is not enough. The event is to be commemorated through repetitious recall of the significant utterances of Jesus. Through recall, the new community uses ritual, performance, or readings to bring attention to the authority by which Jesus spoke. The event is created, not simply through exegetical findings, but through the commitment and attitude of the community to Jesus as the authoritative voice of the text (cf. Evans

1980:251; Holland 2007:335). The new community continues to tell the Jesus story in its present mission to the world.

#### **4.2. A communal experience**

Those who hear and respond to the Beatitudes have a shared experience of the presence of Jesus that can be identified as kingdom blessing (cf. Lioy 2004:120). Searle (1969:45) has argued that in the illocutionary act, the speaker intends to produce certain effects in the hearers. The Beatitudes pericope was a literary composition serving the ritualistic purpose of experiencing the words of Jesus repeatedly, with the goal of encouraging the new community in its mission to the world (cf. Viljoen 2008:209). The comprehension of the Beatitudes is ultimately experiencing reality on another transcendent plane of existence (Kodjak 1986:70, 212).

The impact of the Beatitudes can best be experienced in the same medium they were created, an oral environment (cf. Hearon 2009:21-35). With performance repetition, the new community adapts the Beatitudes to its contextual need and expectations (cf. Holland 2007:333-338). The Israelite culture of the Old Testament provides a clear example of how meaning was found through collective memory and oral repetitions of sacred stories and important events (cf. Horsley 2008:146-151). Symbols were subjectively employed for experiencing meaning (cf. Deutsch 1990:15). The kingdom announcement by Jesus demands that his followers experience the reality of the utterance (cf. Beavis 2006:77).

#### **4.3. A confirmed existence**

The purpose of ritual or repetitive performances by the new community is to declare and confirm what is considered as true (cf. Ray 1973:22-

24). Ritual serves not to prove what is true, but to articulate what is true for the social body (cf. Grimes 1988:120). Speech acts are performed for intentional purposes. For the new community, adopting the Beatitudes as paradigmatic utterances yields the result of reaffirmation of both its nature and mission in the world. The Beatitudes are to be experienced as the 'yes' of God through Jesus' utterances (Schweizer 1975:96; cf. Kodjak 1986:211). Reaffirmation is a necessity in light of the all-important existence of the Christ community as the continued presence of Jesus to the world.

It is imperative that the Christian community experience the text and sounds of the Beatitudes. Through creative performances and rituals, the expectations and beliefs of the community confirm the presence of Jesus with his kingdom assurance. The community stands on those declarations as it experiences and demonstrates both a kingdom presence and kingdom prominence in the world. As representative of Jesus, the Christian community must initiate ways to experience the paradigmatic utterance so that the voice of Jesus is always heard.

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# An Evolutionary Creationist Process for the Origin of Humanity

Dan Lioy<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This journal article considers an evolutionary creationist process for the origin of humanity. In doing so, the essay explores a number of broadly interrelated issues in an integrated and synthesized manner. The key supposition is that a fundamental congruity exists between what God has revealed in nature and in scripture. Accordingly, the endeavour involves taking seriously the scientific data, as well as engaging scripture in its historical, cultural, and sociological contexts. The resulting outcome is a theologically informed harmonization of evolutionary theory with creationist teachings found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures about the genesis of Homo sapiens.

## 1. Introduction

The intent of this journal article is to consider an evolutionary creationist process for the origin of humanity. In doing so, the essay explores a number of broadly interrelated issues in an integrated, synthesized manner. A major premise is that a fundamental congruity

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a preliminary version of material to appear in a forthcoming monograph being researched and written by the author, dealing with evolutionary creation. The views expressed herein are those of the author do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary. © 2011 all rights reserved.



exists between what God has revealed in nature and in scripture (cf. Ciobotea 2008:7; Driscoll and Breshears 2010:80, 103; Polkinghorne 2009:173). A corollary supposition is that 'faith in God as Creator can be consistent with an evolutionary understanding of the history of the universe and particularly life on Earth' (Baker and Miller 2006:169). The preceding postulates are the basis for considering an evolutionary creationist process for the origin of humanity that is in agreement with both the biblical and scientific data (cf. Day 2009:118-120; Rana and Ross 2005:43-51, 247-250). Concededly, this is being done from the perspective of a specialist in theological studies, whose treatment of the subject will tend to be exploratory and provisional in nature. That said, it is possible for even a non-scientist to make a useful and pertinent contribution to the present topic, especially since it is heatedly debated within both Christian and scientific circles (cf. Collins 2006b:4-5; Delio 2009:1-2; Falk 2004:23-26; Fisher 1997:41, 104; Lamoureux 2008:2-4; Pigliucci 2002:27-32).

Moreover, this essay affirms 'evolutionary biology' as a 'cornerstone of modern science' (Ayala 2008:xi) and a theoretical model that is 'supported by abundant evidence from many different fields of scientific investigation' (47). This paper also maintains that God sovereignly controls the 'origin of species by evolutionary processes' (Waltke and Yu 2007:173). It bears mentioning that this view is wholly compatible with Augustinian and Reformed confessional orthodoxy (cf. Duncan 2007:2302, 2313, 2361; Martin 2010:10, 12, 51, 111, 144; Spencer and Alexander 2009:25-26). Furthermore, this view is supported by conservative evangelicals who affirm the divine inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of scripture (cf. Blocher 1997:39; Driscoll and Breshears 2010:93-94; Falk and Gilberson 2009:1-7). That being the case, it is erroneous to insist that one must choose between either a 'Judeo-Christian concept of creation

by God from nothing' (Ruse 2005:4) or the theory of evolution. As the forthcoming discussion explicates, the latter contention represents a false dichotomy (cf. Edwards 1999:12-13; Finlay 2006:237; Lamoureux 2008:33-34).

These assertions having been made, it is beyond the scope of this journal article to explore, debate, and resolve the issues connected with the philosophy and social movement known as Intelligent Design (ID). For a critique and analysis of ID and other like-minded creationist views, cf. Alexander 2001:289-310; Alexander 2008:293-331; Ayala 2008:37-45; Baker and Miller 2006:153-172; Lamoureux 2008:21-52; Lett and Vardy 2007:7-15; Moreland and Reynolds 1999; Pennock 2001; Pigliucci 2002; Ruse 2005:147-167, 242-261; Scott 2009:53-164; Snow 1990:166-202; and Youngblood 1999.

The preceding disclaimer notwithstanding, one objective of this position paper is to take seriously the scientific data (including evidence from fields as varied as molecular biology, genetics, anthropology, palaeontology, comparative anatomy, and astronomy). A second objective is to engage scripture in its historical, cultural, and sociological contexts (cf. Dickson 2008:2; Hill 2007:129; Thompson 2005:4). The underlying approach is one of 'discerning openness' in which the canon of scripture functions as a 'filter'. Numerous scientific 'concepts' are accepted, while others are set aside; also, as the situation necessitates, 'alternatives' are proposed (Trader 2010:27). The intended outcome is to 'constructively relate' (Baker and Miller 2006:154) the biblical data about human origins with the 'science of evolution'. Put another way, it is a preliminary attempt to 'accommodate or integrate' evolutionary theory with creationist teachings found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures about the genesis of humanity (15). Doing so affirms (rather than denies) the literal, historic, and theological value of God's Word (cf. Bishop 2011:9; Van Till 1999:172-173).

## 2. The Interplay between Science and Religion

At the outset, some key definitions are in order. Theology may be defined as the study of the metaphysical—including the nature of God, the content of religious belief, and the character / conduct of religious practice—done through an examination of revelation, scripture, personal experience, and culture (cf. Drees 2008:2-3; Erickson 1998:22-23; Grudem 1995:21). Philosophy refers to the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, done primarily through speculative means (rather than empirical methods; cf. Boersema 2005; Leslie 1998; Preston 2006). Science may be defined as the investigation of physical reality, done through a complex interplay of theory, observation, and experimentation (cf. Ayala 2008:10; Baker and Miller 2006:98-99, 163; Day 2009:62-63). Evolutionary creation refers to the triune God bringing the 'universe and life' into existence by using an 'ordained, sustained, and design-reflecting evolutionary process' (Lamoureux 2008:29). Furthermore, theistic evolution is the 'scripturally derived belief that God normally acts' via 'processes' that can be studied 'scientifically' (Berry 2001:4; cf. Alexander 2008:33, 181; Collins 2003:496-497; Collins 2006b:200; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:21, 172-173, 252; Newman 2003:119-120; Russell 2003:339; Van Till 1995).

In a manner of speaking, science 'moves along a horizontal plane', is concerned with 'immediate causes', and searches for 'naturalistic explanations for phenomena'. In contrast, religion travels 'along a vertical plane', criss-crosses the 'horizontal plane from beginning to end', and adds a 'supernatural dimension' to its outlook (Hyers 1984:33). Stenmark (2004:267-268) advances the discussion by offering a helpful four-tiered prototype to link the disciplines of science and religion. The following are the levels he advocates taking into

account. The first is the 'social dimension'. This calls attention to 'science and religion as social practices', in which specialists work together 'within a particular historical and cultural setting'. The second level is the 'teleological dimension', which concerns the 'goals of scientific and religious practice'. The third level is the 'epistemological or methodological dimension'. This refers to the 'means developed and used to achieve the goals of science and religion'. The fourth level is the 'theoretical dimension'. Of concern here are the 'beliefs, stories, theories, and the like that the practice of science and religion generates'.

While the issues at the centre of science and religion are intricate, each discipline informs the other in mutually meaningful and constructive ways. Ward (2008:4-5) considers the 'beginning and end of the universe', the 'origins and nature of consciousness', and the 'human religious experience' to be just a few of the relevant 'contact points for discussion between scientific and religious perspectives'. Moreover, Russell (2000) favours using 'critical realism' as a 'bridge between theology and science, making possible real dialogue and growing interaction'. This 'philosophical view of science and/or theology' maintains that what is known about the world corresponds to the 'way things really are'. Concededly, this understanding is 'partial' and open to revision, especially as new 'knowledge develops' (cf. Alexander 2001:242; Finlay 2008:108; Louis 2010:3).

### **3. The Biblical Account of Creation**

Concerning the two-fold objective mentioned in the introduction, the starting point is the creation account recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis (specifically, 1:1–2:3). This theocentric, cosmological manifesto uses an 'exalted prose narrative' (Collins 2006a:44) to describe six acts of creation, with each one occurring on separate days,

followed by God's rest on the seventh day. What Moses set forth is God's 'systematic differentiation of the cosmos' so that carbon-based life could begin and flourish on earth (Brown 2010:38). God has 'equipped' the universe with 'all the necessary capabilities' to be transformed over time from 'elementary forms of matter into the full array of physical structures and life-forms that have existed' (Van Till 1999:185-186). This 'physical reality'—by some estimates consisting of 300 billion stars and 50 billion planets in the Milky Way galaxy (out of an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the entire universe)—is characterized by 'dynamism, openness, contingency, self-organization, and freedom', in which the 'whole is greater than the sum of the parts' (Peters and Hewlett 2006:78-79).

The biblical narrative should be seen as a highly stylized literary depiction that is figurative and symbolic in content (cf. Blocher 1984:37; Keller 2009:4; Lucas 2004:12; Waltke and Fredricks 2001:56). Above all, the rendition is theological and 'nonscientific' (Hyers 2003:32). It arises from an 'ancient phenomenological perspective of the physical world' (Lamoureux 2008:151) that would have been familiar to Moses (cf. Moberly 2009b:47-48). Walton (2009:12-13) explains that when Moses lived, people visualized the earth as being a 'flat, disk-shaped' landmass that was completely surrounded by water. The ground was 'upheld by pillars', while the sky was 'supported by mountains' located on the distant horizon. The sky itself was thought to be a 'solid' dome or tent-like structure on which the 'celestial bodies' (namely, the sun, moon, and stars) were 'engraved' and 'moved in tracks'. In this ancient three-tiered 'view of the cosmos', rain, hail, and snow from an immense body of water located above the overarching sky 'fell to earth through openings'. God's temple was located in the upper heavens, which in turn rested atop the sky (or lower heavens). The shrine in Jerusalem was the

earthbound counterpart to the divine abode. A series of 'graves led to the netherworld' (Sheol), which was located beneath the earth, while 'mighty Leviathan' skulked in the 'depths' of the seas (cf. Gen 7:11; 8:2; Deut 10:14; 2 Sam 22:8; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Kings 19:15; 2 Chron 2:6; Neh 9:6; Job 26:11; 38:4-6; Pss 24:1-2; 75:3; 78:23; 104:2-13, 22; 148:4; Prov 30:4; Isa 11:12; 40:22; Jer 10:12; 31:37; 2 Cor 12:2-4; Eph 4:9-10; Phil 2:10; Rev 5:3, 13).

With respect to Genesis 1:1-2:3, a literary analysis of the biblical text indicates that the material can be divided into three separate, interconnected portions (cf. Lioy 2005:25-28):

- I. The primordial earth (1:1-2)
- II. The ordering of creation (1:3-31)
- III. The perfect result (2:1-3)

Genesis 1:1 reveals that it was a direct act of God that brought about the absolute beginning of the cosmos (cf. Ps 19:1; Wis of Sol 13:1-9; John 1:1-3; Rom 1:20; Col 1:16; Heb 1:3). Genesis 1:2 indicates that before God began issuing his royal creation decrees, the primordial earth was 'formless and empty'. The implication is that God simply chose to create by beginning with formless matter and then giving it form. From a structural perspective, Day 1 seems to correspond to Day 4, Day 2 to Day 5, and Day 3 to Day 6. As the following chart shows, the first triad of days was devoted to God's forming the earth. In contrast, the second triad of days was given over to God's filling what he had formed (cf. Alexander 2008:155; Cassuto 1961:16-17; Brown 2010:39; Hyers 2003:30-31; Kidner 1967:46; Lamoureux 2008:193; Lucas 1989:90; Ross 1988:103-104).

<b>Forming the Creation</b>	<b>Filling the Creation</b>
Day 1 – Light (1:3-5)	Day 4 – Luminaries (1:14-19)
Day 2 – Sky (1:6-8)	Day 5 – Fish and Birds (1:20-23)
Day 3 – Land, Sea, and Vegetation (1:9-13)	Day 6 – Land Animals and Humans (1:24-31)

Moreover, in each triad of days, the creation narrative moves from the sky to the earth. During the first triad, God demarcated three sets of earthly realms: day and night, sky and sea, and land and plants. Then, during the second triad, God populated these realms with stars and planets, birds and sea creatures, and land animals and humans. Thus, in the first three sets of days, the various domains of the cosmos are demarcated, while in the second set of three days, the rulers of these domains are delineated. Additionally, in both triads, a single creative decree (Day 1 and Day 4, respectively) is followed by one creative act with two aspects (Day 2 and Day 5, respectively). In turn, this gives way to two separate creative acts that result in the earth being characterized by yielding, producing, or bringing forth (Day 3 and Day 6, respectively). Day 3 serves as the climax for the first triad, while Day 6 serves as the climax for the second triad.

Further observations can be made about the passage's highly symmetrical, densely structured, and fixed (perhaps liturgical) arrangement. By way of example, each day of creation follows a recurring pattern. There is an announcement: 'God said'. This is followed by a command: 'Let there be'; a report: 'And it was so'; an evaluation: 'good'; the exercise of sovereignty: 'God called'; and a chronological marker: e.g. 'first day', and so on. In this arrangement, only the seventh day has no counterpart. God, while reposed in imperial

splendour in his heavenly temple, blessed and set apart the seventh day as holy. Throughout biblical literature, the number seven symbolizes fullness and completeness. Accordingly, God's hallowing the seventh day suggests that it was at this moment that his creation activity came to a fitting and satisfying conclusion. Be that as it may, there is a sense in which the seventh day is 'suspended above temporal regularities' (Brown 2010:39). This gives it a 'timeless character', in which the final day anticipates the ever-present, creative potential found throughout the cosmos.

In short, God created everything—spiritual beings, physical beings, matter, energy, time, and space (cf. Eccles 11:5; Prov 3:19-20; 8:22-31; Isa 44:24; 45:18; Jer 10:16; John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb 1:2; Kline 1996; Waltke and Fredricks 2001:59; Woloschak 1996:91). On the one hand, the main focus of the biblical text is pre-history (or protohistory; cf. Brueggemann 1982:11), which means that what scripture reveals 'lies beyond the reach of either written records or eyewitness' (Thompson 2005:18). On the other hand, God's Word points to historical and theological truths. More specifically, Genesis uses a temple-creation motif to describe the formation of the universe (cf. Brown 2010:40-41; Lioy 2010:14-15). In this regard, the 'seven days' of creation are 'comparable to seven-day temple dedications at the end of which' almighty God 'takes up his rest in the temple' (Walton 2009:23; cf. Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15). Furthermore, the original universe that God brought into existence serves as the prototype that looks ahead to future venues in which the Lord and the covenant community would enjoy fellowship together. These include the garden in Eden, the Israelite tabernacle in the wilderness, the temple in Jerusalem, and the new heavens and the new earth. Excluding the last-named item, perhaps the rest could be understood as smaller representations of what the



original universe signified and prefigured (cf. Lam 2010:3; Lioy 2010:6).

Admittedly, there are differing views regarding how literally or figuratively the creation days should be understood (cf. Hamilton 1990:53; Lewis 1989:455; Waltke and Fredricks 2001:61). From a literary perspective, the 'seven days are seven components' of the 'single, unified, complex event of God's creation' (Samuelson 1994:159-160). The broader theological point is that of 'God's sovereignty over time' (Saebø 1990:27), as well as 'day and night' being 'totally subordinated' to the Creator (Verhoef 1997:420; cf. Ps 74:16). On a more specific, semantic level, some think the individual creation days should be taken as literal, sequential, 24-hour time periods. Allegedly, when God issued his royal decrees, he instantaneously brought complex physical entities into existence. This gives rise to the notion that the earth is relatively young (for example, around 10,000 years or less). Support is claimed by the appearance of the recurring phrase 'there was evening, and there was morning' and by the ordering of the week in Exodus 20:8-11 (cf. Kaiser 2008:39; Lioy 2005:40; McGrath 2010b:39-40).

Despite the popularity of the preceding view among some evangelicals, the overwhelming evidence from a wide range of scientific disciplines points to the cosmos and earth being billions of years old. In this regard, the usage of the Hebrew term *yôm* (typically rendered 'day') in the opening chapters of Genesis is somewhat varied. For instance, the word can refer to the light portion of a 24-hour period (cf. Gen 1:5, 14; Exod 20:9-11; Deut 5:13-14) and also to an unspecified period of time (cf. Gen 2:4; Ps 20:1; Prov 11:4; 21:31; 24:10; 25:13; Eccl 7:4; Isa 61:2; Jenni 1997:529, 537; Moberly 2009a:5). Based on the latter observation, the 'day-age' theory has been proposed, namely, that the 'days' of creation refer to prolonged epochs or ages of time.

Admittedly, while the universe gives the appearance of considerable antiquity, the presence of the phrase 'morning and evening' in the opening chapters of Genesis seems in conflict with the 'day-age' theory. Also, the idea of intervening ages between isolated 24-hour days is not evident from the biblical text (cf. Berry 2007:3; Fisher 1997:44-45; Futato 1998:16-17; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:91-93; Kline 1958:155-156; Lioy 2005:40).

In light of the deficiencies associated with the above two (concordist) views, the framework hypothesis (a non-concordist interpretation) has considerable exegetical merit. Based on the preceding literary analysis of the biblical text, the creation 'days' form a rhythmical structure around which the prose-narrative is topically (or non-sequentially) arranged (in contrast to a strict chronological order; cf. Blocher 1984:50; Duncan 2007:2342-2347; Keller 2009:5; Kline 1996; Lamoureux 2008:196-197; Waltke 2009:6). Thus, the so-called 'days' of creation are seen as literary constructs to make known enduring historical and theological truths. Ultimately, of course, what the infinite creator did at the dawn of time remains shrouded in mystery and exceeds the ability of human language to convey (cf. Job 38). Thus, God graciously accommodated his finite and frail human creatures by presenting the primeval account in literary terms and constructs they could understand. In a manner of speaking, the phenomena associated with the creation 'week' are supra-historical, taking place above and beyond normal temporal and spatial constructs. Moses neither described all that happened nor explained how it happened. Instead, he unambiguously stated what happened, and he did so with a consideration for its broader theological implications (cf. Driscoll and Breshears 2010:81; Lioy 2004:41; McGrath 2010b:84; Spanner 1987:35; Woloschak 1996:107).

The point, then, of the Genesis narrative is not to delineate a precise chronology, especially since primordial events did not occur on the plane of ordinary human history. Instead, the creation account is an introductory part of Genesis in which the historical narrative reports a series of past events for the purpose of instructing the covenant community (cf. Duncan 2007:2342; Lucas 2007:3; Ross 1988:59; Sailhamer 1990:13-14; Spanner 1987:29; Stek 1990:230, 237, 249; Waltke and Yu 2007:98). Here, one finds that God is the focal point of the account, with man and woman serving as his vice-regents over the world. Such things as the luminaries of the cosmos, the material objects of the earth and the planet's creaturely inhabitants (namely, fish, birds, and land animals) do not occupy a central spot in the narrative, even though they are discussed. Their place in the ancient story helps set the stage for God's creation of humankind. In this case, man and woman exist as stewards over the planet that God created and prepared for them (Gen 1:26-30); and because God is the sovereign of the universe, he has the right to give the world to whomever he desires (Jer 27:5). Furthermore, Moses depicted the creation of the heavens and earth as occurring in six literary (not literal) 'days'. This, in turn, served as a primary reason for the people of the covenant to imitate their Creator in their weekly pattern of work and rest (Exod 20:11; 31:13, 17; cf. Hyers 2003:25-26; Lioy 2005:41).

On one level, the biblical narrative bears similarities to other ancient Near Eastern creation stories (or cosmogonies, especially Egyptian, Canaanite, and Babylonian ones; cf. Enns 2010:6; Fretheim 1994:323; Godawa 2010:1; Lam 2010:1; Parker 1994:234-235). On another level, the Genesis account is sufficiently distinctive to set itself apart from these violent and polytheistic myths (cf. Brueggemann 1982:24; Cassuto 1961:7; Collins 2006a:240-241; Ross 1988:52-53; Sailhamer 1990:20). Accordingly, one historical truth arising from the creation

account would be that the universe had a specific starting point in space-time history. In the aftermath of an inaugural event occurring around 13.7 billion years ago (that is popularly referred to as the 'Big Bang'; cf. Brown 2010:56; Colling 2004:31; Collins 2006b:64; McGrath 2009:114; McGrath 2010b:15, 152), a 'rich diversity of ordered structures', such as 'galaxies and stars', has gradually emerged throughout the cosmos (Van Till 1990:111). A corresponding theological truth would be that almighty God brought all things into existence, with the result that what he created is 'intrinsically good' (Lam 2010:2; cf. Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Sir 39:16; 1 Tim 4:4). This does not mean, as Spanner has noted (1987:53), that the primal creation was an 'idyllic paradise' characterized by static perfection and quintessential 'bliss'. Instead, the implication is that what the Lord brought into existence was superbly suited for its God-ordained function and purpose (cf. Walton 2009:11), as seen in 'creation's beauty' and 'appropriateness' (Southgate 2008:15). Furthermore, through the unfolding drama of the sacred text, one learns that the cosmos is God's magnificent 'work of art' (Dickson 2008:8).

The latter set of theological observations intentionally allows the revelation of scripture to take precedence over what some in the scientific community might otherwise declare about the origin of the cosmos (e.g. that it is self-generating and self-explanatory). From the standpoint of scripture, this faith-based stance can be understood as having four recognizable elements (cf. Heb 11:1). First is cognition, an awareness of the facts; second is comprehension, an understanding of the facts; third is conviction, an acceptance of the facts; and fourth is commitment, trust in a trustworthy object. Popular opinion sees faith as irrational. It is supposedly believing in something even when one's mind tells one not to. In contrast, the biblical concept of faith includes both reason and experience. Such faith, however, is not limited to what

can be seen. It makes unseen spiritual realities perceivable, not by willing them into existence, but by a settled conviction that what God has said in scripture about them is true (cf. Alexander 2008:15; Colling 2004:106; Collins 2003:36; Fisher 1997:108-109, 112-113; Lioy 2007:44-45; Lioy 2008:43-44; Lucas 1989:36-37; Ysteboc 2009:88, 99).

Additional inferences can be drawn from the highly stylized exposition of the Genesis creation account. One implication is that this material either contradicts or contrasts sharply with other ancient Near Eastern creation stories. For instance, while the latter end with the building of a sanctuary for the creation deity, these are counterfeit parodies of the truth, as represented in the opening chapters of Genesis. Furthermore, pagan notions of how the world began are characterized by the presence of antagonists and protagonists, evocative descriptions, and high drama. The Genesis creation account replaces this abundance of sensory detail with language that is reserved, measured, and reverential. One is left with the impression that God, in bringing everything into existence out of nothing (cf. Gen 1:1; 2:3; Ps 102:25; 2 Macc 7:28; John 1:2; Acts 4:24; 17:24; Rom 4:17; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2; 11:3; Rev 4:11), is all-powerful. Also, by imposing his design on the shapeless and empty planet, he demonstrates the inviolability of his will. God alone, as the sovereign Lord of the cosmos, is regal in splendour and wise in his decisions, for only he can bring longed-for order and restraint to an otherwise chaotic universe. As the one and only true God, the Lord alone deserves to be worshiped by humankind (cf. Alexander 2001:323-324; Alexander 2008:161; Blocher 1984:60; Brown 2010:46-47; Godawa 2010:5, 7; Lam 2010:2; Lioy 2005:27-28; Lucas 2004:15; Stek 1990:222-223; Waltke and Yu 2007:200-201).

Numerous critical scholars allege that it is implausible to view as historical the creation account recorded in Genesis 1:1–2:3. Instead, it is

maintained that Genesis is filled with mythic (i.e. fictional) narratives (cf. Brueggemann 1982:4, 16; Delio 2009:20; Fretheim 1994:324, 327; von Rad 1972:31-32, 40-41). So, in terms of the creation account, it would be a cosmogenic myth, namely, a philosophical and theological reworking of an earlier ancient Near Eastern tale of creation. In contrast, the view of this essay is that, to a large degree, the opening chapters of Genesis point to events that actually happened (cf. Blocher 1984:155-156; Collins 2003:65; Collins 2006a:13; Fischer 2008:xi; Hill 2007:130; Spanner 1987:28, 61). This remains the case, even though the literary form of the narrative is highly stylized, the presentation is selective, the sequencing of information is topical, and the data is filtered through a theocentric grid. In contrast to the pagan myths written throughout the ancient Near East about how the world began, the simplicity and monotheism of the Genesis description are unmatched. Also, there is no conclusive evidence to show that the account recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis is actually a later plagiarized story, instead of being the original account from which these others (though possibly recorded earlier) may have come (cf. Lioy 2005:28-29, 39-40; Rüst 2007:185; Spanner 1987:30-31).

This perspective is borne out by the ordering of creation. It is disclosed that competing forces or gods did not engage in a primordial struggle of titanic proportions. Instead, each time God effortlessly dispatched his royal decree, he summoned all things into existence and conformed them to his plan (cf. Pss 33:6, 9; 148:5). By highlighting these truths, Moses emphasized the sharp difference between the biblical account of creation and concurrent pagan myths. In sum, the Genesis narrative is a 'theological polemic', that is, a 'resolutely monotheistic' repudiation of rival 'ancient Near Eastern polytheistic culture' (Spencer and Alexander 2009:49). The power and effectiveness of the divine word resonates throughout the Genesis account as well as the rest of the Pentateuch.

Ultimately, it is by faith that people believe both in the existence of God (Heb 11:6) and his setting in order by his command the temporal ages as well as all that exists within them (vs. 3; cf. Alexander 2001:321-322; Brown 2010:32-33; Cassuto 1961:8; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:115-116; Hamilton 1990:55; Hyers 1984:53; Lioy 2005:40; Lucas 2007:3-4; Moberly 2009b:52).

As noted earlier, the Genesis rendition of how the primordial earth began is not portrayed as occurring within the normal course of human events. Because of this, some have tended to misunderstand the original intent Moses had in writing the creation account. He did not spell out with scientific precision the process by which the cosmos came into existence, but rather, crafted an aesthetically pleasing, literary mosaic of God's creation of the universe. Furthermore, instead of recording every event that transpired over billions of years, the human author chose incidents that effectively recounted what occurred, along with conveying the theological implications of those events. Moses' intent was to spotlight the divine agent behind the natural and supernatural processes at work in the evolutionary formation of the cosmos and development of carbon-based life on earth (cf. Brown 2010:60; Godawa 2010:4; Lioy 2005:31-32).

#### **4. The View of Materialistic Naturalism**

In contrast to the theocentric outlook of scripture, a view prevalent in the West is that 'matter is the foundation of everything that exists', and science provides the 'best window onto the world' (Smith 2001:64; cf. Alexander 2001:273; Hyers 1984:13). This mind-set is the backbone of evolutionism, which refers to an atheistic dogma that affirms an entirely naturalistic process for cosmological and biological change (cf. Falk 2004:9, 40; Fisher 1997:67-68, 92, 94-95; Haarsma and Haarsma

2007:149; Hewlett and Peters 2006:178-179; Lamoureux 2008:5-6, 38; Van Till 1990:120-121). Moreover, it is claimed that a unified theory (i.e. a postulate using one set of ideas and principles) can be found using only empirical methods to describe all of the forces of nature (cf. Haught 2010:18, 43; McGrath 2009:52). In turn, this mathematical 'formula for the world' will be able to 'solve the deepest riddles of our cosmos' (Küng 2007:1). When this happens, the notion of a transcendent Creator-God becomes irrelevant, and the claim of theistic metaphysics to possess distinctive ontological truths is invalidated (16).

Despite the efforts of specialists and experts to fathom the created world's puzzling questions, they continue to fail. This even includes the quest for a 'single grand theory' (Küng 2007:16) that can combine the laws of physics at the micro and macro levels, and thereby, reveal nature's perfect unity, orderliness, and harmony (cf. Day 2009:95). According to Polkinghorne (2005), 'science describes only one dimension of the many-layered reality' of the cosmos. Also, it confines itself to the 'impersonal and general' and fences off the 'personal and unique' (ix). Consequently, science is only able to observe a 'fragmented picture.' At best, it is a 'patchwork of areas of insight only loosely, if at all, connected to each other' (7).

Even in the face of the preceding limitations, some (though not all) scientists still regard the material universe as a purposeless entity in which life and mind (the faculty of thought, volition, and self-awareness) spontaneously arose over billions of years by a remarkable combination of seemingly improbable circumstances and arbitrarily juxtaposed events. Likewise, they assert that a completely different universe could have arisen, one that is absolutely sterile, inhospitable, and lifeless. Moreover, they claim that the human race evolved by the bloody, directionless, and unguided processes of chance. As well, people exist all alone in an immense, unfeeling cosmos. It is alleged



that in the absence of empirical evidence, one must resort to sentimental wishful thinking to arrive at a different conclusion (e.g. the existence of an intelligent and purposeful supreme being who created a universe fine-tuned for biological complexity; cf. Alexander 2008:321; Haught 2010:57-58; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:153; Lioy 2008:31; Spencer and Alexander 2009:38; Van Till 1999:190).

For a discussion of the overall failure of science, as a discipline, to recognize God as the primary agent or cause behind the ordering and coherence of the universe, cf. Pretorius 2007. The author notes that science is able to 'argue what reality is from as many realms and ideas' as it chooses; yet this hypothesising is based on a 'limited understanding of how the cosmos was formed'. In contrast, the Judeo-Christian scripture 'widens the picture'. Specifically, the Bible 'gives deeper meaning to the purpose for creation and causes one to search for answers to greater truths than science can produce' (41). In the final analysis, the 'theistic world-view' is the 'most biblically viable' paradigm 'within which reality can be understood' (10). More generally, even the 'most major alternate world-views are self-defeating and inadequate' in making sense of existence (both physical and metaphysical). None of these constructs (whether philosophical or empirical in character) are able to 'answer questions surrounding humanity's journey of life and their final destination, life after death' (26).

Despite the sombre nature of the preceding observations, Pretorius rightly affirms that 'both science and theology involve themselves in a journey of discovery, both seek answers, and both concern themselves with truth' (12). Furthermore, he maintains that it is possible for 'science and theology' to 'comfortably work to further each ones' understanding of reality' (23). Based on the preceding supposition, it seems reasonable to consider 'science and religion' as separate and

complementary disciplines that 'address aspects of human understanding in different ways'. Moreover, 'attempts to pit science and religion against each other create controversy where none needs to exist' (Ayala 2008:12; cf. Day 2009:83-83, 130; Gould 1997).

## **5. The Origin of Human Life on Earth**

The point of concern at this juncture is the origin and actualization of carbon-based life on earth, including *Homo sapiens* (modern humans). As stated in the introduction, the best persuasive scientific explanation is offered by biological evolution (based on an analysis of the fossil record, genome evidence, morphological data, and so forth; cf. Ayala 2008:17-35; Baker and Miller 2006:52-70; Day 2009:115-116; Hewlett and Peters 2006:173-176). The focus here is on mutations that are caused by genetic differences appearing in the offspring of mating organisms. This phenomenon (also known as descent with modification) is the basis for simpler life forms being incrementally transformed into more complex ones over vast eons of time (by some estimates, spanning nearly 4 billion years). A case in point would be the earliest hominid predecessors to anatomically modern humans evolving from a common ancestral species of bipedal (upright walking) primates that are now extinct. This outcome resulted from a process of natural selection extending over millions of years (cf. Berry 2007:4; Colling 2004:103-104; Finlay 2007:1-2; Kidner 1967:26; Miller 2003:152).

Just as God presided over the creation of the entire cosmos, so too he superintended the biological evolutionary process of all forms of carbon-based life on earth, so that they developed according to his perfect will and for his everlasting glory (cf. McGrath 2010a:10). This includes his providential involvement in the planet's history (through both natural and supernatural means) to foster the emergent complexity

of life found across the globe (cf. Brown 2010:62; Jackelén 2006:623; O'Connor and Wong 2006; van Huyssteen 2006:662-663). To permit the advent of *Homo sapiens* at a precise moment in time, God brought about an optimal set of conditions on earth, in the solar system and Milky Way galaxy, and throughout the entire universe (a phenomenon known as the anthropic principle; cf. Collins 2006b:74; Edwards 1999:48; McGrath 2009:xii, 85, 180; McGrath 2010b:154-155). This has led to 'creation's functional integrity'. This means that while the universe is completely dependent on God for its existence, he has 'endowed' it with the 'ability to accomplish' its purpose without necessitating supernatural 'corrections' or 'interventions' (Murphy 2001). Furthermore, God presided over earth's climatic and geologic formation to make it ideally suited for human habitation, including the ability of people to survive and thrive (cf. Isa 45:18; Holder 2007:2-3; Polkinghorne 2007a:4; Sharpe and Walgate 2002:938; Waltke and Yu 2007:175, 203).

Concerning *Homo sapiens*, they had a relatively recent origin (by some estimates, between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago) from a single location (most likely, east-central Africa; cf. Fischer 1993; Korsmeyer 1998:118-119; Wilcox 2003:236-237, 242). Beginning around 40,000 years ago, during the Upper Paleolithic period (or Late Stone Age), a 'dramatic behavioural shift' among humanlike hominids is observed in the archaeological record (Kline 1992:5). A gradualist, evolutionary scenario claims that the 'image of God and human sinfulness' progressively developed in some mysterious way through 'many generations' of 'pre-human ancestors' (Lamoureux 2008:29-30, 290-291; cf. Brown 2010:111; Enns 2010:2; Falk 2004:225). In contrast, Genesis 2:7 and 21-22 reveal that at one precise moment, the original human pair were the direct product of divine activity from a distinct *Homo* species of ancient, pre-Adamite creatures. Put another way, it

was from an initially small population (possibly numbering no more than several thousand; cf. Alexander 2008:224; Collins 2006b:207; Wilcox 2003:240, 245) that God brought the first humans into existence by special, instantaneous, and separate creation (cf. Gen 1:27; Deut 4:32; Isa 45:12; Acts 17:26; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:222-223, 228).

The above incident is called evolutionary monogenism (a term that literally means 'one beginning') and necessitated God interrupting the normal course of biological development (including its apparent ontological indeterminacy). It involved him freshly creating Adam and Eve with apparent age (that is, as adults rather than as children) and giving them a genetic history that reflected their common ancestry with all other life forms (cf. Bonnette 2007:147, 150, 153, 172). Additionally, the 'original state' of the primeval pair was characterized by 'moral perfection in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness' (Strimple 2005). The episode also included God supernaturally forming the material (i.e. physical) and immaterial (i.e. spiritual) aspects of their being. The latter refers to God's infusion of a soul in the primeval pair, as well as in the embryos of all subsequent humans (cf. Job 10:8-12; 31:15; 33:4; Pss 119:73; 139:13; Prov 22:2; Isa 43:7; Mal 2:10; Wis of Sol 15:11; Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 4:19; Bonnette 2007:110, 169; Brown 2003:502; Gray 2003:287; Held and Rüst 1999:232, 236; Korsmeyer 1998:20-21).

The soul has been traditionally understood as the 'immaterial essence' (Lake 2009:585) or 'animating principle' (Robeck 1988:587) of *Homo sapiens*. Be that as it may, in 'Hebrew thought, a person is a body-soul' (Wilson 1989:175). Expressed differently, everyone is 'viewed as a unity, a single entity, an indivisible whole'. This implies that a 'person is not a soul or spirit' who 'now inhabits and will at death' abandon his or her 'body'. Instead, 'soul' or 'spirit' denotes the 'whole person or individual as a living being'. The implication is that people are

'physical beings' (Brown 2003:503) who have 'mental functions and spiritual capacities' (a view known as ontological holism; cf. Anderson 1998:182-183; Collins 2003:122; Driscoll and Breshears 2010:129; Green 1998:173).

In short, Adam and Eve were the sole historic, genetic primogenitors of all humanity (cf. Kaiser 2008:40; Keller 2009:10-11; Kidner 1967:28, 30). It seems that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses artistically reframed the opening chapters of Genesis to reflect the 'ecological and cultural environment' (Hurd 2003:228) of the ancient Near East during the Neolithic period (or New Stone Age, which began about 9,500 B.C.). If this supposition is true, Moses was accommodating God's truth to the pre-existing worldview of the covenant community (cf. Blocher 1997:40; Fischer 2008:6; Moberly 2009a:9-10; Turnbaugh 2002:317-319; Young 1995). Expressed differently, Moses was describing an 'event in terms familiar to [his] audience' (Collins 2006a:253).

To be sure, there is still the matter of accounting for Cain's wife, as well as the individuals whom Cain feared would murder him (cf. Gen 4:13-17; Fischer 2008:51). One possibility (albeit somewhat speculative) is that the immediate offspring of Adam and Eve interbred for a relatively brief period and to a minor 'extent with the local archaic populations' (Wilcox 2003:246). This would lead to some absorption, or assimilation, of other humanlike hominids into the gene pool of *Homo sapiens* (cf. Gen 6:1-4; Fischer 1994; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:219; Harrison 1979:1; Kidner 1967:28-29; Spanner 1987:79, 109, 11-112). The subsequent migration of the first couple's descendants (known as the 'Out of Africa' theory), and the concurrent rise of civilizations across the globe, were due to God's intervention. Previously existing hominid species were either displaced, or became extinct as a result of a pronounced increase in human population and

expansion of human activity (cf. Edwards 1999:59-60; Fischer 1993; Kidner 1967:29; Klein 1992:5).

As with statements made earlier, some might regard aspects of the preceding theological observations to be merely faith-based assertions or ad hoc explanations that are 'outdated in the light of the findings of modern science' (Day 2005:4). Admittedly, this is a situation in which the genesis of the first human couple can be explained without reference to the supernatural intervention of God (cf. Wilcox 2003:253). Be that as it may, the infallible, overruling authority of scripture is given precedence (cf. Keller 2009:9). Moreover, when it comes to the virginal conception of the Son of God, one could also say that such a notion has no real scientific support (cf. Matt 1:20-21; Luke 1:35). For that matter, the same holds true for the literal, bodily resurrection of the Messiah from the dead (cf. Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-49; John 20-21; Acts 1:3; 2:24, 31-32; 4:2, 33; 17:18, 31-32; 5:30-32; 26:23; Rom 1:4; 6:5; 1 Cor 15:3-7; Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 1:3; 3:21; Bonnette 2007:18, 176; Collins 2003:293; Falk 2004:210; Fisher 1997:31-32; Forysth 2006:10, 13; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:118; Holder 2007:4; Hill 2007:130; Sloane 2005:3, 6). In both cases, the biblical depiction is that almighty God directly intervened to bring about a set of time-bound, historical circumstances and outcomes that are beyond scientific verification.

The same observation could be made about the miracles recorded in the four Gospels that Jesus performed during his earthly ministry. His miracles were extraordinary expressions of God's power. When the Son performed a miracle, the Father directly altered, superseded, or counteracted some established pattern in the natural order (cf. Collins 2006b:48; Driscoll and Breshears 2010:88; Haarsma 2003:74, 83; Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:41; Humphreys 2004:2-3; Louis 2010:8; Newman 2003:123; Polkinghorne 2007b:4; Worthing 2009:2, 5). The

miracles of Jesus served several purposes. First, they confirmed his claim to be the Messiah. Second, they validated the Son's assertion that he was sent by the Father and represented him. Third, they substantiated the credibility of the truths Jesus declared to the people of Israel. Fourth, they encouraged the doubtful to put their trust in the Son. Fifth, they demonstrated that the one who is love was willing to reach out to people with compassion and grace (cf. Matt 11:2-5; Luke 7:20-22; John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22; 4:30; Heb 2:4; Alexander 2001:451-452; Alexander 2008:38-39; Falk 2004:206-207; Fisher 1997:77-78; Lamoureux 2008:55; Van Till 1999:187-188).

In a similar vein, God's special, instantaneous, and separate creation of a first pair of *Homo sapiens* was a supernatural manifestation of his power. Furthermore, the literary context and thrust of the Genesis account is universal in scope, and deals with absolute human origins. The implication is that, despite assertions to the contrary (cf. Collins 2003:481-482, 486; Enns 2010:2; Lamoureux 2008:165, 178, 201, 274, 319-320; Polkinghorne 2009:166-167), Adam and Eve are not fictional, generic characters appearing in an ancient Hebrew myth. Rather, they are a literal, historical couple who initially existed in a genetically pristine state as persons having moral integrity (that is, before original sin and the ensuing Fall; cf. Kidner 1967:27; Thompson 2005:23), and with whom God entered into a covenant relationship (cf. Blocher 1984:111-112, 160; Kline 1996; Lioy 2006b:85-87). These observations are reinforced by the specific, matter-of-fact reference to Adam in the following Old Testament passages: Genesis 4:25; 5:1, 3-5; 1 Chronicles 1:1; Job 15:7; 31:33; and Hosea 6:7 (cf. Bouteneff 2008:12-13; Waltke and Fredricks 2001:80; Waltke and Yu 2007:249-250).

The above inference remains true, even though Adam and Eve are paradigmatic of every human being who has ever lived. Also, the aforementioned deduction continues to be valid even though Adam

functions as the representative (or federal) head for the entire human race. In point of fact, everyone is organically connected, or ontologically united, to him (that is, biologically, spiritually, morally, and legally; cf. Gen 2:24; 3:16-19; Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12-14; 1 Cor 15:21-22; Ramm 1985:72, 116; Westermann 1997:33-34, 42). Furthermore, affirming Adam's historical existence does not invalidate the fact that he was a primeval archetype of national Israel and its people. Expressed in a different way, circumstances and events in the life of Adam foreshadowed and paralleled what later occurred among God's covenant people. For instance, both proto-Israel (Adam) and national Israel were created by God, placed in a fertile environment, given clear stipulations, disobeyed God, and were exiled (cf. Blocher 1997:55-56; Bouteneff 2008:10, 38-39; Waltke and Yu 2007:150).

Moreover, the New Testament regards Adam and Eve as the literal, historical first pair of *Homo sapiens* (cf. Blocher 1984:163-164; Blocher 1997:46-48; Duncan 2007:2380-2382; Lucas 1989:107; Ross 1988:54; Rüst 2007:185; Spanner 1987:74). For instance, in Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-7, Jesus quoted from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to emphasize the sanctity and inviolability of marriage. His argument is premised on the fact that Adam and Eve was a real couple who lived at a distinct point in space-time history. In Luke's version of the Messiah's genealogy, it is revealed that Jesus ultimately traced his physical lineage back to a real, personal Adam, who as the 'son of God' (3:37), was directly formed by the hand of the creator (cf. Job 10:8-12; Pss 119:73; 139:14). Paul concurred with this viewpoint when, at Athens, he declared that God 'from one man made all the nations' (Acts 17:26). Here the apostle was referring specifically to Adam as the progenitor of the human race (cf. Gen 3:20; Sir 40:1; Wis of Sol 7:1; 10:1-2; Tobit 8:6).



In Romans 5:12-21 (especially verses 12 and 14), the comparison and contrast that Paul made between Adam and Jesus has the most theological potency when both individuals are understood to be actual human beings. Oppositely, the persuasiveness of the apostle's argument is substantially weakened when it is maintained that Adam was just a make-believe, generic character, who has no tangible, historical connection with the saviour. Moreover, it is impossible for the Fall to be real if Paul had in mind a non-existent person named Adam who committed an imaginary sin in a mythical locale. Otherwise, his transgression becomes nothing more than a phenomenological notion or experiential axiom. In truth, the apostle did not present the dire consequences of the first man's act of disobedience (e.g. the presence of guilt, condemnation, and alienation from God; enslavement to sin; and being condemned to die) as mere metaphors, but as objective, historical facts of human existence. Therefore, just because the biblical account of Adam and Eve's creation and fall is extraordinary, does not mean it should be outrightly dismissed as a folk tale.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22 and 45, Paul's reference to Adam presupposes that he actually existed in space-time history. Also, in verse 45 (which quotes Gen 2:7), the apostle made a distinction between the 'first Adam' becoming a 'living being' and the 'last Adam' becoming a 'life-giving spirit'. If the first male *Homo sapien* was just a microcosm story for ancient Israel, or a metaphorical prototype for all humanity, the forcefulness of Paul's contrast is enormously diminished. Also, his contention in 1 Corinthians 15 for the reality of the future resurrection of all believers is undermined. Succinctly put, the efficacy of the apostle juxtaposing the first Adam with the last Adam hinges on Genesis 2 being an account that reflects an underlying historical reality (the 'parabolic dress of the literary' form, notwithstanding; Blocher 1997:50).

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul referred to Eve as a literal, historical person whom the serpent deceived in the Garden of Eden. To regard her as a literary fiction subverts the apostle's case against the false teachers who were plaguing the believers at Corinth. In 1 Timothy 2:13-14, Paul's line of reasoning is premised on the historicity of Adam and Eve. The apostle was quite specific in noting that God first formed Adam and then Eve. Likewise, Paul explained that Eve, not Adam, was first completely deceived by the serpent and transgressed God's command. These distinctions and the apostle's purpose in making them are far less compelling if Adam and Eve were not the literal, historical first pair of *Homo sapiens*. Finally, Jude 1:14 treats Adam as an actual individual who existed in space-time history. In particular, the writer included a brief genealogy in which he counted Adam as the progenitor of other descendants extending to Enoch and beyond.

It is scientifically accurate to maintain that Adam and Eve shared physical characteristics with other creatures (including common anatomical, physiological, biochemical, and genetic traits; cf. Finlay 2003:2-4). That said, it also remains true that the first human couple (along with all their physical descendants) differed radically from animals (including primates) both in degree and kind as self-aware, sophisticated individuals. A corollary is that people, far from being an accident of nature or quirk of fate, have intrinsic value and purpose. Put another way, because humans are made in the image of God (both ontologically and functionally), they are the pinnacle of his creation, having innate worth and significance (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). The latter is seen in humanity's unique mental powers, intellectual capabilities, moral sensibilities, religious inclinations, cultural attainments, artistic productions, and technological achievements. In all these ways, God's image-bearers serve as his vice-regents over the earth and its creatures (cf. Lam 2010:5; Collins

2006a:66-67; Collins 2006b:23, 200; Lamoureux 2008:283, 286; Lioy 2010:14; Maass 1974:84; Sailhamer 1992:94-95; Smith 1993:184, 238; Waltke and Fredricks 2001:46, 71).

While it seems valid to assert that God created the universe primarily for humankind, scripture indicates there is more to it than that (cf. Collins 2003:499; Korsmeyer 1998:85-86; Munday 2003:465-466; Southgate 2008:37-38). Succinctly put, God's purposes in creation, while including humankind, are not limited to the latter (cf. Rom 8:18ff). For instance, one meta-objective includes the creator-king bringing glory to himself in and through his creation. As a result, believers should avoid adopting a compartmentalized, either-or mentality when it comes to the temporal and eternal, the material and the immaterial, the physical and spiritual aspects of reality. In God's sovereignty, every aspect of his creation has value, meaning, and purpose, at least from a theological point of view. Still, from the limited horizon of human existence, reality can, at times, seem to be filled with paradox, enigma, randomness, and so on. A candid study of Ecclesiastes, the Psalms, Job, and so on, bears this point out. The latter observation notwithstanding, Hebrews 1:3 states that the Son is 'sustaining all things by his powerful word', including every aspect of the material universe in which we live. Moreover, Colossians 1:17 notes that in the Son 'all things hold together'.

## **6. The Reality of Physical Death Predating God's Creation of Adam and Eve**

The findings of science indicate that physical death (including the mass extinction of countless, previously-thriving species) predated God's special creation of Adam and Eve (cf. Alexander 2008:104-106, 244-245; Falk 2004:130, 199; Forysth 2006:17-18; Lamoureux 2008:34,

225, 276, 305; McGrath 2009:90). Additionally, this evolutionary mechanism of creative destruction (along with nonhuman natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, hurricanes, and so on) has existed since God brought about the first forms of life on earth (cf. Braaten 2003:433; Day 2009:103, 113; Greenberg 2003:403; Polkinghorne 2009:165-166; Snoke 2004:119-120). Alexander (2001:352-353) explains that with the inception of 'multicellular carbon-based life forms' on earth, the 'inevitable consequence' was a 'dynamic natural order in which life and death' were 'integral parts'. In fact, all living organisms on the planet survive by 'feeding on carbon-based molecules derived from other plants and animals'.

God providentially uses this activity to bring about the 'sort of beauty, diversity, sentience, and sophistication of creatures' found throughout the globe (Southgate 2008:16). Because the termination of life is an inherent component of the biological evolutionary process, it is 'not intrinsically immoral' (Munday 2003:459; cf. Brown 2010:106-107). Beyond any doubt, humanity lives in a universe brimming with 'potentiality' (Polkinghorne 2007b:3), which includes the 'cosmic evolution of stars and galaxies' and the 'developing complexity of terrestrial life'; but the 'shadow side of evolving fruitfulness' is the presence of 'evil and suffering'. (This complex existential issue is a branch of philosophical theology known as theodicy.) From a theological perspective, the existence of 'darkness and chaos' (Waltke and Fredricks 2001:68-69) in the 'precreated earth' implies that 'everything hostile to life is not the result of sin'. In truth, even the 'malevolent forces of creation operate only within [God's] constraints' (cf. Job 38:39, 41; 39:3, 16-17, 20, 25, 30; 41:14; Pss 104:19-21; 147:9; Isa 45:6-7).

Just the same, the primeval account in Genesis points to a deplorable incident that occurred sometime after God created the first pair of

Homo sapiens to be autonomous (or free) and responsible moral agents (cf. Ramm 1985:8-9, 76, 91). Specifically, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden (by disobeying a direct command from God), the form of death they experienced was first of all spiritual (cf. Rom 5:21; 6:23; 7:10-11; 8:6). By that is meant their relationship with their creator-king was immediately estranged (cf. Collins 2003:142-143; Collins 2006a:180-181) (in scripture, death is presented as a complex, multi-layered concept). Whereas before, the couple had been 'God-oriented', now, they were 'self-oriented' (Paul 1997:360). More specifically, the research done by Peacock (1995:2-3) indicates that the Eden narrative of Genesis 2:4-3:24 depicts 'three realms of relationship' that were 'broken as a direct consequence of sin': 1) between God and humanity; 2) between individuals; and 3) between humanity and the creation (cf. Alexander 2008:250-251, 255, 261; Berry 2007:4; Bouteneff 2008:42-43; Fretheim 1994:352, 369; Keller 2009:11-12; Lucas 2007:4; Merrill 1991:18; von Rad 1972:101; Walke and Yu 2007:263).

The gradual and long-term effect of Adam and Eve's plight is seen in their physical demise (cf. Driscoll and Breshears 2010:154; Lioy 2006a:86-87). Prior to the Fall, they were 'naturally mortal', but as a result of their sin, they lost their 'potential for immortality' (Haarsma and Haarsma 2007:217). Furthermore, Adam and Eve languished in a metaphysically 'wretched existence' (Spanner 1987:142) due to the 'guilt' (Strimple 2005) associated with their transgression and the 'corrupted, depraved nature' it spawned. Tragically, this dire circumstance became the fate of all their descendants, each of whom share their spiritual and genetic fingerprint (cf. Gen 3:19, 22-24). The implication is that, except for the Son of God (cf. Isa 53:9; Luke 23:41; John 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet1:19; 2:22-24; 1 John 3:5), everyone is born in a state of sin and guilt, has an inner tendency or

disposition toward sinning, and are powerless to rescue themselves from their predicament (cf. Eccles 7:29; Jer 17:9; 2 Bar 4:3; 17:2-4; 23:4; 43:2; 48:46; 54:15, 19; 56:5-6; 2 Esdras 3:7, 21-22, 26-27; 4:30; 7:118; Sir 14:17; 15:14; 25:24; Wis 2:23-24; Rom 3:23; 6:23; 7:5, 13; Eph 2:1-3).

Moreover, the Fall has ecological ramifications (cf. Rom 8:20-22; Berry 2008:122-123; Edwards 1999:67; Greenberg 2003:398-399; Southgate 2008:15; Spanner 1987:73). For instance, God has linked the on-going fertility of creation to the fate of *Homo sapiens*. To be explicit, it was due to the Fall that the Lord held back nature's full potential to flourish and achieve its divinely intended goal. This constriction of earth's fecundity is seen in the curse that God placed on the ground (cf. Gen 3:17-18; 2 Esdras 7:11, 116-126; 4 Ezra 7:11-12). In a personified sense, all nonhuman creation presently groans under the burden of its intensified affliction. Furthermore, nature's liberation from the menace of its vexing situation is linked to the destiny of redeemed humanity. Specifically, it is only when the Father resurrects his spiritual children at the second advent of his Son, that the cosmos will be renewed and ushered into the glorious freedom of eternal perfection (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22; Jer 31:12-14; 33; 2 Apoc Bar 15:8; 1 Enoch 51:4-5; Matt 19:28; 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21:1).

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

evident in the cross of the Messiah. Despite the tragedy of his suffering at Calvary, his atoning sacrifice resulted in a greater good (i.e. the salvation of the lost) and the defeat of evil (e.g. sin and death; cf. Braaten 2003:433; Falk 2004:53; Macdonald 2009:818-182; Spencer and Alexander 2009:68-69; Southgate 2008:16). When all is said and done, it is only at the consummation of the age that the inherent 'good' of God's creation will be 'fully realized' (Russell 2003:368).

## 7. Conclusion

This journal article has considered an evolutionary creationist process for the origin of humanity. Throughout the analysis, a number of broadly interrelated issues are explored in an integrated, synthesized manner. The key supposition is that a fundamental congruity exists between what God has revealed in nature and in scripture. Accordingly, the endeavour involved taking seriously the scientific data, as well as engaging scripture in its historical, cultural, and sociological contexts. The resulting outcome is a theologically informed harmonization of evolutionary theory with creationist teachings found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures about the genesis of *Homo sapiens*.

In order to accomplish this task, the interplay between science and religion was considered. Some (but not all) relevant contact points between these two distinct disciplines include the origin of the cosmos, the inception and development of carbon-based life on earth, and the shared quest for greater understanding about the world in which people live. It was proposed that critical realism be the theoretical bridge linking the dialogue between specialists in science, and those in religious studies. This irenic mind-set stands in sharp contrast to the view of materialistic naturalism, in which the physical substance of the universe is said to be all there is, and atheistic scientists, who are

depicted as the grand interpreters and gatekeepers of the hidden mysteries of the cosmos.

The essay next took up the biblical account of creation, specifically, Genesis 1:1–2:3. This passage is seen as a highly stylized, literary depiction that uses a temple-creation motif to describe the formation of the universe. Moreover, the content is figurative and symbolic in form and set against the backdrop of pre-history (or protohistory). This means that the Genesis rendition of how the primordial earth began is not portrayed as occurring within the normal course of human events. Furthermore, the creation 'days' are best understood, not as literal, sequential, 24-hour time periods, but rather as atemporal markers within an overall literary framework.

In short, the creation 'days' form a rhythmical structure around which the narrative is arranged. Given the latter, it would be misguided to insist upon the Genesis narrative delineating a precise chronology, especially since primordial events did not occur on the plane of ordinary human history. A number of important theological truths arise from this literary and exegetical analysis of the biblical text. The most crucial point is that almighty God, through a series of natural (i.e. evolutionary) and supernatural processes, created everything, including spiritual beings, physical beings, matter, energy, time, and space. This theocentric view contrasts sharply with the claims of materialistic naturalism, which entirely rejects the need for a supernatural agency (such as God) to explain the origin of the cosmos.

In light of the metaphorical nature of the creation account, it is possible for those who hold to the infallibility and inerrancy of scripture to affirm the findings of science for the age of the universe (about 14 billion years old) and earth (around 4.5 billion years old). Moreover, when a framework approach is used to interpret the literary structure of



Genesis 1:1–2:3, those who are committed to the inspiration and authority of scripture can support the postulate that God worked through a biological evolutionary process to bring about carbon-based life on earth. Just as God presided over the creation of the entire cosmos, so too he superintended the incremental transformation of simpler life forms into more complex ones over vast eons of time (nearly 4 billion years).

With respect to the origin of humanity, the findings of science indicate that *Homo sapiens* had a relatively recent origin (by some estimates, between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago) from a single location (most likely, east-central Africa) and arose from an initially small population of humanlike hominids (possibly numbering no more than several thousand). Furthermore, Genesis 2:7 and 21-22 reveals that God brought Adam and Eve into existence by special, instantaneous, and separate creation. This included God's formation of the material (i.e. physical) and immaterial (i.e. spiritual) aspects of their being. Admittedly, science offers an explanation for the genesis of the first human couple without reference to the supernatural intervention of God. This is a case in which the overruling authority of scripture is given precedence.

The implication is that Adam and Eve are not fictional, generic characters appearing in an ancient Hebrew myth. Instead, they are a literal, historical couple, who initially existed in a genetically pristine state as persons having moral integrity. Moreover, because humans are made in the image of God (Latin, *imago dei*), they are the pinnacle of his creation, having innate worth and significance. Tragically, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they experienced spiritual separation from God. Also, as a consequence, all their physical descendants are born into this world as mortal creatures that are separated in their relationship with their creator-king as well as one

another. Thankfully, through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, all who put their faith in him can have eternal life and enjoy eternal fellowship with God in heaven.

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# Deconstructing ‘Transformational’ in Christian Transformational Leadership

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## Abstract

Christian Transformational Leadership is a major Christian leadership theory. This article, on the basis of a definition of Christian transformational leadership, applies a semantic (or deconstructionist) critique to three core features of the theory, namely influence, persuasiveness, and the ability to strategize. It does so by seeking to identify conflict or difference which attaches to these terms in twenty-two Christian transformational leadership texts. It reveals that the theory may make extraordinary demands on the leader, and exact a heavy emotional toll.

## 1. Introduction

Christian transformational leadership is a major Christian leadership theory, whereby the Christian leader, most simply, seeks to influence (or transform) followers to achieve shared goals. In an earlier article, the following concise definition of Christian transformational leadership was proposed:

Christian Transformational Leadership is leadership which specifically declares a Biblical or Christian foundation, or is

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

specifically directed to the Church. It holds that a leader will be influential (or transformational) to achieve shared goals, through his or her vision, character, persuasiveness, and ability to strategize (Scarborough 2011:15).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, I referred *inter alia* to the possibility of a semantic critique of Christian transformational leadership, on the basis of such a definition. With this in mind, this study seeks to apply a semantic (specifically, a deconstructionist) critique to Christian transformational leadership.

Three features of Christian transformational leadership seem to present a particularly fruitful opportunity for such critique. These appear in the above definition as (a) influence, (b) persuasiveness, and (c) the ability to strategize. According to Christian transformational leadership theory, a leader brings his or her influence to bear on a situation, *inter alia* through persuasiveness and the ability to strategize. In other words, the ability to influence others is contingent on the three abovementioned characteristics in the leader.

Two qualifications are necessary. Firstly, the purpose of this article is a modest one, namely, to observe and record several difficulties attributed to the notion of influence and general aspects of influence in Christian transformational leadership. It is not the purpose of this article to provide biblical or theological insights into the problems which it reveals. Secondly, since the focus is on features of the theory which are closely related, it is beyond the scope of this article to propose rigorous categorizations of these features. Rather, the categorizations are somewhat general, and will assist in presenting a weight of evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'transformational' is merely used for context here. The term 'influence' is preferred, because it is far more common in the literature.

The details of the method of critique are not of great importance here. Most simply, this article seeks to identify signs in the texts that the core features, namely, influence, persuasiveness, and the ability to strategize, may be self-defeating or counter-productive. In terms of a deconstructionist critique, it is important to identify signs which indicate that the text is 'at variance with itself' (Poole 1999:203) or 'works against itself' (Mautner 2000:122). This is referred to as *conflict* or *difference* in a text.<sup>3</sup>

A survey critiquing the three features of Christian transformational leadership initiates this study.

## 2. The Importance of Influence

The definition of Christian transformational leadership states that the Christian leader will be influential. In keeping with this, the concept of 'influence' is of core importance to the theory.

Maxwell (1998:17) states it confidently: Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less.' In terms of the theory, if one's intended influence should fail to bring about change, the Christian transformational leader cannot lead. Engstrom (1976:127) states simply that 'since the function of leadership is to lead, getting people to follow is of primary importance'. Stanley (2006:34) also reflects, 'Accepting the status quo is the equivalent of accepting a death sentence'.

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<sup>3</sup> As before (Scarborough 2011:5), the bases of the critique are the following works on Christian transformational leadership: Banks and Ledbetter (2004); Barna (1997); Blackaby and Blackaby (2001); Clinton (1988); Engstrom (1976); Everist and Nesson (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); Thomas (1999); Thrall, McNicol and McElrath (1999); Wofford (1999); and Wright (2000).

In general, authors writing on Christian transformational leadership acknowledge influence to be of central importance (Barna 1997:24; Clinton 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). Some, however, employ 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).

## 2.1. Persuasiveness

Christian transformational leadership routinely highlights that, in order for influence to work, a leader needs to have character trait of 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 persuasiveness usually has four aspects.<sup>4</sup> 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). However, this

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<sup>4</sup> In the secular transformational leadership literature, these aspects 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).

need not connote personal magnetism and charm, and therefore, the term 'persuasiveness' is seen to be more appropriate.

Generally, Christian transformational leadership experts, 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; Clinton 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; Wright 2000:18).

## 2.2. Strategy

Influence further needs the support of sound strategy. Such strategy explores the best possible ways to implement a particular course of action.

Maxwell (1998:203) considers that a leader needs the right action, at the right time, to guarantee success. Banks and Ledbetter (2004:133) state that leadership requires 'a strategic plan [which] is a long-term commitment to something we intend to do'. And Stanley (2003:79) states that every good coach (that is, leader) goes into the game with a strategy.

All of the Christian transformational leadership authors in this study emphasize the necessity for strategy (Barna 1997:25; Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:70; Clinton 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; Sanders 1994:113; Thomas 1999:31; Thrall, McNicol and McElrath 1999:181; Wofford 1999:89; Wright 2000:71).



This, then, describes three core characteristics of Christian transformational leadership; or rather, it describes three core characteristics as *presented* by its proponents. It is on this basis that one may now explore whether or not the text is at variance with itself, or working against itself.

### 3. The Burden of Influence

It is here that the semantic (or deconstructionist) critique begins. Attention therefore shifts to the key term, 'influence', which appears in the Christian transformational leadership definition.

In terms of a deconstructionist critique, one seeks to identify conflict or difference in a text. A methodical way of pursuing this, is to identify recognised oppositions of a key word in a definition (an 'opposition' has a similar meaning to an 'opposite').<sup>5</sup> For example, one would take a key term in a definition, identify its opposition, or oppositions, then seek to establish whether these are reflected in the text.

A contrasting phrase to the word influence is absence of change (Lloyd 1988). Thus, where it is intended that a leader should influence others, the requisite change may not happen. Another opposition of influence is weakness (Longman Mobile Dictionary 2007). That is, where a leader seeks to prevail over others, he or she may be defeated through inability in whatever shape or form. If such oppositions are found in the text, then the text might work against itself, so invalidating much of what it represents on the surface.

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<sup>5</sup> The meaning of an 'opposition' is, however, broader than an 'opposite'. Some important types of opposition are antonyms, directional opposites, and heteronyms (Jöbner 2002:87).

### 3.1. Deconstructing influence

This sub-section seeks to search for signs that an absence of change may present a challenge to the Christian transformational leader.

London (1997:118) notes that 'congregations are determined to resist change', and that 'it is the congregation's job not to want to change'. Everist and Nessian (2008:173) observe that numerous *ghosts* in the church contribute to homeostasis. Wofford (1999:82) notes that the 'choice to change ... is not always an option', and that 'among the greatest threats to the church' is those persons who 'hold tenaciously to old ways' (Wofford 1999:143). Roxburgh and Romanuk (1006:81) state that 'the history of ... change is cluttered with an endless series of plans, programs, and visions that died in birth.' Stanley (2003:34) considers that 'any system will unconsciously conspire to ... prevent change'. Wofford (1999:143) adds that 'Christian organizations may be more inclined to resist change than secular ones', and that 'lack of change' may be a common cause of ministers moving on (Wofford 1999:90).

There is also indirect evidence that Christian transformational leaders may need to contend with an absence of change. This is seen particularly in admonitions to persevere with change. The leader will pursue a vision 'no matter what' (Hybels 2002:40). Nothing should interrupt the direction of ministry (Phillips 1997:221), and the leader will refuse to admit defeat (Engstrom 1976:85; Maxwell 1998:153; Munroe 2005:263; Phillips 1997:231). The test of spiritual leadership is the achievement of its objective (Sanders 1994:166).

The next step is to search for indicators that Christian leaders may, through weakness, find themselves unable to bring their influence to bear on a situation.

Christian leaders, where they intend to influence a local community of faith, 'too often ... underestimate the power of homeostasis' (Everist and Nesson 2008:172). 'All over North America', Christian leaders are frustrated over their inability to 'get things moving' (Engstrom 1976:14). And through their inability to 'induce people to do happily some legitimate thing', they become 'unfit for leadership' (Engstrom 1976:92).

Again, there is indirect evidence that leaders are susceptible to weakness. This is seen particularly in demands for extraordinary strength. The Christian transformational leader is required to demonstrate patience, fortitude, and long-term stamina in the face of followers' resistance (Gibbs 2005:155). He or she should possess 'a great deal of courage' (Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:137). The leader will 'determinedly hold on to the vision' (Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:185). Christian transformational leaders may need to use 'forceful ... power to endure stress or pain' (Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:46). And followers must 'not be allowed' to hinder a leader's visions and purposes (Wofford 1999:155). Sanders (1994:53) suggests the following prayer: 'God harden me against myself'.

Not only do absence of change and weakness represent external hazards for the leader. It is to be expected that such tensions would elicit an inner emotional response. This will be the focus of the next segment.

### **3.2. The emotional cost of influence**

The texts have revealed that the influence, which is central to Christian transformational leadership, may not always be workable. Progress may be impossible, and there are those who may lack the stamina to persist. This raises the following question: how should Christian

transformational leaders respond to such constraints emotionally? In this regard, the literature reveals considerable distress.

Wofford (1999:85-86) considers that the greatest trial for the Christian leader lies in driving values and visions against the *status quo*. Thomas notes that for many Christian leaders, 'their area of greatest frustration' is 'getting people to do what you want them to do' (Thomas 1999:43). Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:81) likewise explain that there is 'a history of deep pain' in the lives of those who have sought to bring about change, and if anything defeats the leader, it is transition issues. Murren (1997:205) observes that instituting change is 'a draining process, even under the best of circumstances'. Finally, Everist and Nesson (2008:165) notice that many pastors are 'very frustrated by their inability to motivate members'.

Related to this, casting vision is a daunting challenge, and opposition is hard to deal with (Hybels 2002:41). Selling the vision is an onerous task (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:65), and putting it into practice is punishing (Gangel 1997:54). Various Christian transformational leadership authors similarly reveal emotional strain over resistance to change or innovation (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:194; Clinton 1997:169; Ford 1991:91; Gibbs 2005:163; Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:181; London 1997:115, 184; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:16,104; Stanley 2006:34).

All in all, while it is to be expected that the requirement to influence others may not be easy, the texts reveal a counter-dynamic, which may at times seem to be total, and would appear to reveal abnormal strain in the context of Christian transformational leadership.

## 4. The Burden of Persuasiveness

Continuing with the semantic (or deconstructionist) critique, it is important to focus on the key concept of *persuasiveness*, which appears in the Christian transformational leadership definition.

An antonym of the term persuasiveness is *resistance* (Lloyd 1988). That is, where it is intended that a leader should be persuasive, one may find instead signs of resistance from so-called followers. Another is *dissuasion* (Lloyd 1988; Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus 2007). If the leader is dissuaded from his or her intended course, then persuasiveness is defeated. If such oppositions are found in the text, then the text might be at variance with itself, so invalidating much of what it represents on the surface.

### 4.1. Deconstructing persuasiveness

This sub-segment commences with a search for signs that resistance may present a challenge to the Christian transformational leader.

London (1997:116) observes that followers may resist 'with almost supernatural power the very notion of changing the way things used to be'. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:81) observe that valiant attempts to bring about change are resisted and cut down. Gibbs (2005:169) notes that Christian leadership may involve 'spiritual opposition, sometimes on a daily basis', and Wofford (1999:81) observes: 'As old ways of doing things are laid aside, conflicts often occur' (Wofford 1999:81). Jinkins (2002:45) states that 'sabotage is part of the process of change, while Hunter (2004:75) states that about 10 per cent of followers predictably seek to sabotage a leader. Munroe (2005:209) notes that the leader may face incredible odds, while Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:5) state that the leader is under enormous pressure. Clinton (1988:106)

considers: 'When people influence other people, conflict often arises.' In keeping with this, several leadership authors consider conflict to be the norm (Barna 1997:239; Ford 1991:252; Hunter 2004:208; Jinkins 2002:22; London 1997:119; Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006:12; Van Yperen 1997:241).

There is also indirect evidence that Christian transformational leaders may need to contend with resistance. This is seen particularly where authors state the need for great effort to make one's influence felt. Christian transformational leadership requires 'enormous efforts' Hunter (2004:157). In fact, it requires a herculean effort (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:7). The Church 'often requires strength of leadership that is uncommon in the secular world' (London 1997:118). The Christian transformational leader may need to be 'as fierce as a pit bull' to preserve the mission (Hunter 2004:95), and 'must relentlessly develop a bulldog's mentality' (Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:185). 'When leaders know they are doing exactly what God is asking, no amount of animosity will move them to do anything else' (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001:250). In the face of resistance, he or she will face and seize! (Ford 1991:261).

Next, focus must shift to searching for signs that Christian leaders, rather than persuading others, may be *dissuaded* from their intended course.

Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath (1999:3, 13, 109) note that frustration, anxiety, and despair are common, and fear tugs at the heart. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:18) observe that many church leaders function 'out of low expectation and hope'. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:3) note that there are countless discouraged leaders who would probably quit today. Clinton (1988:109) notes that 'leadership backlash [a strong backward reaction] tests a leader's perseverance'. Engstrom (1976:100)

states that deep depression is not uncommon. Several Christian transformational leadership authors describe the loneliness of leadership (Engstrom 1976:85; Gangel 1997:53; Gibbs 2005:165; Sanders 1994:118), while Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:31,171) record that many have a sense of desperation.

There is indirect evidence that leaders are susceptible to dissuasion. This is seen particularly in continual admonitions to endure. 'The ability to endure is crucial' (Gangel 1997:43), and the Christian leader requires 'a ribbon of steel' running through him or her (Jinkins 2002:30). Christian transformational leadership demands superior spiritual power (Sanders 1994:28), and 'courage of the highest order' (59). Similarly, several Christian transformational leadership authors suggest the need for high motivation or endurance (Engstrom 1976:98; Gibbs 2005:173; Guder 1998:183; Sanders 1994:19; Thrall, McNicol and McElrath 1999:115).

Again, not only do resistance and dissuasion represent *external* hazards for the leader. It is to be expected that the considerable pressures described would elicit an inner, *emotional* response.

#### **4.2. The emotional cost of persuasiveness**

The texts have revealed that the persuasiveness, which is central to Christian transformational leadership, may place heavy demands on the leader. Followers may resist with almost supernatural power, and leaders may find themselves under enormous pressure. This raises the question as to how Christian transformational leaders respond *emotionally* to such pressures. In this regard, the literature reveals considerable strain.

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:81) note that resistance to change causes hurt and struggle. Ford (1991:264) observes that such resistance is painful, shameful, and even fatal. Jinkins (2002:44) states that there is the desire to flee resistance and sabotage, and the leader faces grief and abandonment (Jinkins 2002:45). Hybels (2002:231) writes: 'The single most pressing issue [is] enduring'. Engstrom (1976:83) similarly considers that there is 'the need for endurance ', and he pleads: 'It's too soon to quit!' (206). Thomas (1999:135) responds to the challenges with the mantra: "Lord have mercy", while Jinkins (2002:32), quoting Eugene Peterson, calls for ministers to be lashed to the ministry mast. Ford (1991:252), in the context of resistance to Christian transformational leadership, refers to several leaders who preferred to die. Lastly, Engstrom (1976:14) notes that Christian transformational leadership involves heavy struggles, and always exacts a toll (Engstrom 1976:95).

Altogether, while it is to be expected that *persuasiveness* will require perseverance and stamina, the texts reveal the need for a level of motivation which is extremely high, and would again appear to reveal an *abnormal* burden in the context of Christian transformational leadership.

## 5. The Burden of Strategy

Continuing with the semantic (or deconstructionist) critique, attention must shift to the key concept, namely, ability to strategize, which appears in the Christian transformational leadership definition.

A key antonym of the term strategy is *unpreparedness* (Lloyd 1988). That is, the unpreparedness of the leader may, through his or her errors or inadequate preparation, undermine a strategic plan. Another is *cessation* (Lloyd 1988). That is, where it is intended that a leader should



gain a strategic advantage, one may find instead cessation of the plan. Again, if such oppositions are found in the text, then the text might work against itself, so invalidating much of what it represents on the surface.

### 5.1. Deconstructing strategy

This section commences with the search for signs indicating that unpreparedness may present a challenge to the Christian transformational leader.

Maxwell (1998:196) states simply: 'The wrong action at the wrong time leads to disaster', and that anything less than the right action at the right time 'exact a high price' (Maxwell 1998:203). Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt (2000:110) state that a lack of *thoroughness* in a plan can be disastrous. Gibbs (2005:80) notes that wrong decision-making may carry destructive force. Wright (2000:202) observes that 'the crisis of leadership' lies in unforgiven errors of decision, and therefore leaders occupy a risky position (Wright 2000:187). Stanley (2006:119) states that leaders are only 'one decision, one word, one reaction away' from damaging years of progress. Thomas (1999:125) notes that many strategies have failed, and Engstrom (1976:24) considers: 'Most [leaders] fail because they do not possess the inherent capacity to take the necessary and right actions'.

There is indirect evidence, too, that Christian transformational leaders should place a premium on strategic preparedness. This is seen particularly where authors emphasize the crucial importance of effective strategy. 'Timing, creativity, and discipline are crucial skills' (Thomas 1999:31). 'The leader must ... employ tactics that lead to success' (Sanders 1994:113). And 'the leader must perform activities designed to insure' that results conform to plans (Engstrom 1976:179).

Next, consideration is given in the search for signs that Christian leaders, rather than sustaining their strategic advances, may *cease* in their strategic designs.

Stanley (2003:33) observes that Christian leaders may enter situations where they can't move things forward. London (1997:117) states that, 'instead of moving people forward', a leader's time may be 'devoted to handling conflict situations'. And Jinkins (2002:42) notes that there are those leaders who do not have 'the stamina to persist', and should therefore avoid pastoral ministry.

There is indirect evidence that leaders may become strategically inactive. This is seen particularly in the emphasis on the critical need to have a strategy, and to make it work. Stanley (2006:34) considers: 'Accepting the status quo is the equivalent of accepting a death sentence', while Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt (2000:85) state: 'A failure to plan is a plan to fail...' Ministers need 'the character necessary to get *to* and *through* the "No" of the people' (Jinkins 2002:45). Various Christian transformational leadership authors emphasize the importance of 'obedience' to the plan (Guder 1998:186; Van Yperen 1997:257), while Halcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt (2000:217) state that the leader must demonstrate 'total obedience to the God-inspired vision.'<sup>6</sup>

As before, it is not only unpreparedness and cessation represent external hazards. It is to be expected that such pressures as have been described would elicit an inner, emotional response in leaders. This is the focus of the following sub-section.

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<sup>6</sup> Only on rare occasions does Christian transformational leadership recommend retreat where there is resistance (Maxwell 1998:153; Munroe 2005:247; Stanley 2006:79).

## 5.2. The emotional cost of strategy

The texts have revealed that the ability to strategize, which is central to Christian transformational leadership, places the leader under significant pressure not to fail. Strategy, if it is not pursued correctly, implies disaster (Gibbs 2005:80), and if it is not pursued at all, a death sentence. This again raises the question as to how Christian transformational leaders respond to such demands *emotionally*. In this regard, the literature yet again reveals considerable distress.

Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:65) state that the need to 'develop a plan to achieve the results ... can put enormous pressure on leaders'. Thomas (1999:133) notes that strategic issues ('the interplay and balance between ... systems') cause considerable difficulty and require considerable attention by the leader. Sanders (1994:121) likewise reflects, maintaining that the need for correct discernment leads to pressure and perplexity. Gangel (1997:40) notes that there is 'fear of making a wrong decision, fear of the consequences that might ensue'. Ford (1991:92) notes that leaders are 'fearful that ... plans—or even God's cause—will fail.' Stanley (2006:36) states: 'Even when armed with all the reasons why we should not be afraid [about being wrong], the fear remains'. Banks and Ledbetter (2004:97) quote Patricia La Barre: 'How do we act when the risks seem overwhelming?' Wofford (1999:136) explains that 'the dangers of failure or discouragement haunt us in our work and personal life', while Ford (1991:280) refers to the need for leaders to overcome the fear of failure which is attached to decision-making.

All in all, heavy demands attach to the ability to strategize. Again, while one would expect that Christian leadership involves some strain,

the above would appear to reveal *abnormal* strain in the context of Christian transformational leadership.<sup>7</sup>

## 6. Summary

The purpose of this survey has been to examine the nature of influence in Christian transformational leadership, along with two of its most important aspects, namely, persuasiveness and the ability to strategize. By employing a semantic, or deconstructionist critique, difficulties have been suggested which might ordinarily remain submerged in the texts.

While it has not been the intention of this article to provide an interpretation of the findings, an obvious suggestion is that the heavy demands inherent in Christian transformational leadership, and the heavy emotional toll described, may be connected with statistics which show up to 95 per cent dropout from Christian ministry in the U.S.A.<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind, and in light of the fact that various alternative models of Christian leadership exist (Scarborough 2011:17), this article may provide an impetus to examine the theory of Christian transformational leadership more closely.

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<sup>7</sup> While there has been little if any emphasis on the *positive* in this article, there is in fact not much to report. While Christian transformational leadership is not exclusively portrayed as being a burden in the literature, it is rarely portrayed as being sustainable (Hybels 2002:195) or joyful (Clinton 1988:77; Holcomb, Hamilton and Malmstadt 2000:253).

<sup>8</sup> According to Chun (2007:2), dropout in the U.S.A. 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 U.S.A. during the first ten years. If dropout should remain constant over the duration of ministry, Gibbs' figure comes to within two percent of Chun.

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# A New Kind of Liberalism: Review of Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*

Christopher C. Pepler

McLaren BD 2010. *A new kind of Christianity: ten questions that are transforming the faith*. London: Hodde and Stoughton.

## 1. Introduction

Brian McLaren has recently published his most definitive work to date, in which he comes closer than ever before to clearly stating what he believes. The book is subtitled, *Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith*, and the book is structured around two sets of five of these questions. He doesn't state that the design is intended to contrast with the Ten Commandments, but the connection seems obvious—Ten Commandments on two tablets, versus ten questions in two 'books'. McLaren states that the first book contains the 'profound and critical questions that are being raised by followers of Christ around the world' (xi). The second set of five are, according to McLaren, 'less profound or theologically radical' (xi) and are more practical in nature. Each of the ten questions will be dealt with individually, but first, a couple of general comments.

Firstly, most of the questions are valid topics of interest. Today's generation might well be asking them in their own way, yet, they are questions every generation has posed in some form or other. However, there is presumption in the subtitle—I don't think that the answers given, or the way the quest is being conducted, are in fact transforming



the church. The vast majority of church theologians and leaders today have asked these questions, but their answers have yielded, in the main, what we refer to as Evangelical Orthodoxy, and not a new kind of Christianity.

Secondly, McLaren contends that most people view the Bible, and God's overarching plan, through one particular pair of theological spectacles. This does not seem to be true on the scale he proposes. In any event, we all, including McLaren, look through one or other set of 'spectacles'. He also claims that most people read backwards—from the church theologians back to the scriptures. Again, this is an incorrect assumption. His contention is that we are seeing the Bible through the eyes of others, and not through the illumination given by the Spirit. This underlying dichotomy sets up an unhelpful tension. As a critic, I am automatically positioned as one who is reading through out-dated and distorting spectacles. This makes it hard to interact with McLaren's observations without being written off as theologically myopic. Notwithstanding, I will attempt as fair a response as possible, to McLaren's ten contentions.

## 2. Summary and Evaluation

### Question 1: what is the overarching storyline of the Bible?

McLaren's answer to this question influences his responses to all the other questions. He contends that the majority of today's Christians have bought into a story-line that has been imposed upon the scripture, and that is in fact alien to it. He calls this aberration the Greco-Roman narrative, a product, so he says, of Plato's and the Roman Empire's philosophy. He makes no real attempt to support his contentions from either history or the writings of the early Greek philosopher. Briefly,

this narrative reads as follows: God created man, man sinned and fell, God saves a few, and the rest are doomed to an eternity of conscious torment. Understandably, he writes, 'How in the world, how in God's name, could anyone ever think this is the narrative of the Bible?' (48). Well, I, and all the theologians I know, don't think that this is the meta-narrative of the Bible, and so any attempt by McLaren to invalidate this narrative is, for me, simply a straw-man argument.

McLaren answers his lamenting question by proposing that we have bought into this false narrative because we read it backwards from modern theologians, through reformation theologians, then church Fathers, and finally, back to Jesus. By the time we get back to source, we are already wearing distorting spectacles. But this is simply not true. Countless modern theologians have sought, as best they can, to look at the scriptures with fresh eyes, and only then, to validate their observations against historic church formulations. However, McLaren believes that the Greco-Roman mind-set we bring to the reading of scripture is so strong and invasive, that we fail to encounter the *Elohim* God of Abraham or Jesus, but instead, find a Zeus-like projection that McLaren calls *Theos*. He is essentially saying that most readers have a Gnostic understanding of the Bible. He writes, 'Every time we use terms like *the fall* and *original sin*, I believe, many of us are unknowingly importing more or less of this package of Greco-Roman, non-Jewish and therefore non-biblical concepts, like smugglers bringing foreign currency into the biblical economy, or tourists introducing invasive species into the biblical ecosystem' (57-58).

Actually, McLaren does not believe in the fall or original sin. According to him, instead of documenting the rebellious fall of man, the early chapters of Genesis present 'a kind of compassionate coming-of-age story' (64). McLaren reinterprets the Garden of Eden narrative. According to him, God simply states that if they eat of the forbidden

fruit then, on that same day, they will die—'not spiritually die, not relationally die, not ontologically die, but simply die' (65). Adam and Eve did not drop down dead on that day. So in what sense did they die? Well, according to McLaren, God changed his mind and instead of killing them, he made clothes for them. Thus starts what McLaren describes as 'the first stage of *ascent* as human beings progress from the life of hunter-gatherers to the life of agriculturalists and beyond' (66). He then completes the process of making a silk purse from a cow's ear by observing that man's disobedience to God's primal injunction 'results in obedience to a former command which never could have been obeyed from within the garden (be fruitful, multiply, fill and subdue the earth)' (67).

All of this seems farfetched to anyone with an orthodox theological training, but, according to the thesis McLaren presents, this would be due to the alien Greco-Roman narrative mind-set. Of course, I have many questions that spring to mind. Was God lying when he told Adam and Eve that they would die the day they ate the forbidden fruit? Was the serpent a saviour figure when it encouraged Eve to disobey God? What sort of a game was God playing anyway, when he told them not to eat the fruit while really wanting them to eat it, so that he could expel them and thus allow them to ascend?

Another essential question is this: what, then, do we do with the contradictory scriptural evidence in places such as Romans 5:12-19? What did Paul mean when he wrote, 'Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned'? And what did he have in mind when he penned,

For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one

man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

McLaren, of course, has a reinterpretation of the whole book of Romans, an interpretation that I will discuss later in this review.

What this convoluted tale of ascent through disobedience reveals most clearly, is the liberal hermeneutical system McLaren employs. Orthodox evangelical hermeneutics allows for different literary forms within the biblical revelation, yet respects the text enough to refrain from bending it to fit a human philosophy, or reading into it what it does not say. The Genesis account does not suggest, even by inference, that God was lying to Adam and Eve (that would cause a whole lot of theological problems of its own), and nor does it infer that God changed his mind about the death penalty. Liberalism denies the supernatural, and so, if Adam did not drop down dead when he and Eve ate the fruit, then it can only mean that either God was bluffing, or he changed his mind. Real and actual spiritual death just doesn't fit into the liberal paradigm. McLaren gives some support to my suspicion when he later attributes the Egyptian plagues as natural phenomena. He writes, 'The so-called supernatural, in this way, seems remarkably natural' (77).

Even in these early chapters of the book, it starts to become clear that whilst McLaren contends that most others read through Greco-Roman spectacles, he himself is reading the biblical narrative through Liberal spectacles. And with that in mind, we need to progress to the second of the ten responses that are distorting the faith.

## **Question 2: how should the Bible be understood?**

McLaren starts his discussion with a prolonged critique of how his predecessors supported the practice of slavery by quoting the Bible. He also slips in the matter of South African Apartheid for good measure. He claims that these ungodly interpretations of scripture came about because of the 'habitual, conventional way of reading and interpreting the Bible' (100). All of this is to prepare the ground for the major contention that 'our quest for a new kind of Christianity requires a new, more mature and responsible approach to the Bible' (101). Obviously, we will need this sort of perspective if we are to accept his strange reformulation of the Genesis account of sin and separation from God. What then is this 'more mature' way of reading and understanding the scriptures?

McLaren contends that most evangelicals read the Bible as though it were a constitution. By this, he means that we tend to read the Bible as though it were merely a set of rules and laws and inflexible propositions. He writes, 'We seek to distinguish "spirit" from "letter" and argue the "framers' intent", seldom questioning whether the passage under review was actually intended by the original authors and editors to be a universal eternally binding law' (103). This, of course, is patently incorrect. One of the basic principles of evangelical biblical interpretation is to seek to answer the question, 'what did the original hearers or readers understand by this?' In seeking to answer this

question, we take into consideration the biblical, historical, and cultural contexts. We also seek to make critical determinations between specific history-bound incidents and universal principles. But having set up this straw man argument, McLaren proceeds to claim that 'read as a constitution, the Bible has passages that can and have been used to justify, if not just about anything, an awful lot of wildly different things' (103). This last part is true, but not because of a so-called constitutional approach to scripture, but because of bad hermeneutics!

But, if the 'constitutional' view is immature and harmful, then what is the mature and productive view of the Bible? McLaren's answer is that we need to understand the Bible as a portable library. Of course, the Bible is a library of sixty-six books. But whose library is it? 'It's the library of a culture and community' (105). Which culture and community is this? It is the Jewish culture, then the early church community, then, in a sense, the current Christian community. This is an important point. What he is essentially suggesting is that the Bible is the product of a particular people, within a historic period, who sought to document their understanding of God, mankind, history, and so on. We, as the current believing community, should reframe its observations in terms of our current culture and times. It is not that McLaren regards the Bible as uninspired, for he writes, 'I certainly believe that in a unique and powerful way God breathes life into the Bible' (108). He also accepts that the biblical library is uniquely important to us as modern followers of Christ Jesus, but as a community resource, and not as an authoritative 'constitution'.

It is hard to pin down exactly what he means at this point, but it seems that McLaren has a distinctly non-orthodox understanding of biblical inspiration and authority. He appears to suggest that biblical authority rests in a community's understanding of the progressive, evolutionary understanding of God and His ways. To illustrate his view of this, he

evaluates the book of Job. He claims that at the end of the book, God appears to be contradicting the truth of everything that Job's comforters have said. He then asks how we can then claim that the bulk of the book of Job is inspired in the traditional sense. He also suggests that 'God' in Job is a character, and that the book does not set out to record what God actually did say to Job. Its value to us lies in the drama it presents, which enables us to enter into dialogue with the real God, as we read and ponder on the contents of the book. To use his words, 'to say that the text is inspired is to say that people can encounter God—the real God—in a story full of characters named Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Satan, and even one called *God*' (123).

McLaren claims that his approach to the Bible is neither conservative nor liberal, but a third way that puts us neither under nor above the text, but 'in the text—in the conversation, in the story' (125). However, I am hard-pressed to see how his approach is anything other than liberal.

McLaren's responses to these two first questions are foundational to his entire theology. Actually, the second question conditions the first. If we understand the Bible to be a cultural collection of stories that we receive, not as statements of truth, but as invitations to enter into community discourse within the people of faith, then, we can reinterpret the overarching narrative of scripture any way we want.

### **Question 3: Is God violent?**

The main point that McLaren makes here, is that the Bible reflects an evolving human understanding of God's nature and character. He contends that the many violent stories in the Old Testament are descriptions of how the people of that day saw God as a violent tribal deity. However, he claims that none of the violent accounts in the Old Testament comes close to our modern Greco-Roman concept of a God

who punishes people in hell for eternity. He contrasts the violent exploits of 'a character named God' with the orthodox depiction of 'a deity who tortures the greater part of humanity for ever in infinite *eternal conscious torment*' (130).

McLaren holds that the biblical revelation of God moves from a violent tribal God to a Christ-like God. As a result, he writes that 'we cannot simply say that the highest revelation of God is given through the Bible. Rather, we can say that, for Christians, the Bible's highest value is in revealing Jesus, who gives us the highest, deepest and most mature view of the character of the living God' (150-151). Of course, Jesus is the purest and most direct revelation of the Godhead, but we cannot lift our understanding of Jesus out of the full biblical context. Where, other than in the Bible, do we find an account of who Jesus is and what he said and did? Equally, how can we adequately understand what he said and did, without appreciating the Old Testament background? And, how can we fully comprehend what he said, and how to apply it, without the writings contained in the balance of the New Testament? The Gospels give us what Jesus said and did, the Old Testament gives us why he did and said what he did, and the New Testament writings teach us how to understand and apply what Jesus said and did.

#### **Question 4: who is Jesus and why is he important?**

The problem with what McLaren says about Jesus Christ is not what he says, but what he does not say. He doesn't say that Jesus is divine, and he doesn't say that Jesus is Lord, and is thus to be obeyed. My other problem comes with his statement, right at the end of this section of his book, that Jesus 'did not come merely to "save souls from hell". No he came to launch a new Genesis, to lead a new exodus, and to announce, embody and inaugurate a new kingdom, as Prince of Peace' (180). His



use of the word 'merely' could indicate that McLaren believes that Jesus came both to save souls from hell and to initiate and model a social agenda. However, as becomes clear in his responses to the next few questions, McLaren does not believe in 'the gospel of salvation' in its orthodox sense, nor in hell. So, according to McLaren, Jesus came as a social, not a spiritual, saviour. This is a typically liberal view. Orthodox theology does not discount social transformation, but it makes it subordinate and subsequent to spiritual regeneration.

Having read and reread the chapters giving McLaren's response to question four, the actual answers to the question, 'who is Jesus and why is He important?' was missing. The only hint was in the following statement: 'Jesus matters precisely because he provides us with a living alternative to the confining Greco-Roman narrative in which our world and our religions live, move and have their being too much of the time' (168).

### **Question 5: what is the gospel?**

Given McLaren's understanding of the overarching biblical narrative, how we should understand the Bible, the nature of God, and the mission of Jesus. His response to this question should not come as a surprise. He writes (186) that the gospel

wasn't simply about a new way to solve the religious problems of ontological fall and original sin. ... It wasn't simply information about how individual souls could leave earth, avoid hell and ascend to heaven after death. No: it was about God's will being done on earth as in heaven for all people. It was about God's faithful solidarity with all humanity in our suffering, oppression and evil. It was about God's compassion and call to be reconciled with God and with one another—before death, on earth. It was a summons to

rethink everything and enter a life of retraining as disciples or learners of a new way of life, citizens of a new kingdom.

Here, again, McLaren presents only half a truth. In his discussion on the nature of the Bible, he states that it is essentially only a medium for community and individual encounter with God. It isn't 'only' this; it is also a written revelation of God's will for humanity, the church, and us as individuals—it is both existential and propositional. In this section, McLaren declares the temporal aspect of the gospel, while ignoring the eternal aspect. He ignores scriptures such as the discourse in John 3, which culminates with probably the most well-known words in all of scripture, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (v. 16). The orthodox understanding of the gospel is that it is the Good News of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Yes, of course that new life starts here on earth, and must express itself in goodness, kindness, compassion, and service, but it doesn't end at that.

Of course, Paul's letter to the Roman's presents particular problems for McLaren's earth-bound gospel, but he gets around this by redefining the purpose and content of the epistle. 'Paul never intended his epistle to be an exposition on the gospel' (191), he writes.

### **Question 6: what do we do about the church?**

If Jesus's mission was social transformation (kingdom of God), and the gospel is the Good News of God's agenda of social transformation, then it makes sense that churches are 'communities that form Christ-like people who embody and communicate, in word and deed, the good news of the kingdom of God' (220). This is a very one-dimensional description of the church's reason for existing. Prominent biblical

analogies for the church include the body of Christ, the household (family) of God, and pillar and foundation of truth.

### **Question 7: can we find a way to address sexuality without fighting about it?**

The bottom line we would expect from McLaren here is that because most civilised cultures accept homosexuality, so should Christians. Biblical prohibitions were set within a less tolerant culture and should not stand in our way. Actually, McLaren does not clearly say this. Instead, deviating somewhat from the actual question, he asks whether 'humans were made to fit into an absolute, unchanging institution called marriage, or whether marriage was created to help humans—perhaps including gay humans?—to live wisely and well in this world' (237). Then, he likens the current gay debate to the church's reaction to Copernicus and Galileo, and its more recent response to fossil evidence of an ancient earth and Darwin's theory of evolution. He then restates the gospel as the Good News of God as liberator, creator, and reconciler. Finally, he presents insights into how the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 must have compared Hebrew rejection with Phillip's acceptance. His climax to this story reads, 'As Philip and the Ethiopian disciple climb the stream bank, they represent a new humanity emerging from the water, dripping wet and full of joy, marked by a new and radical reconciliation in the kingdom of God' (246). This is where he leaves the reader to deduce a suitable stance on homosexuality.

### **Question 8: can we find a better way of viewing the future?**

'There is no single fixed end point towards which we move, but rather a widening space, opening into an infinitely expanding goodness' (261-262). This, of course, leaves no room for a hell of any kind, or for a

Second Coming of Jesus. McLaren explains New Testament references to the *parousia* as 'the full arrival, presence and manifestation of a new age in human history. It would mean the presence or appearance on earth of a new generation of humanity, Christ again present, embodied in a community of people who truly possess and express his Spirit, continuing his work' (266). He claims that this new age started in AD 70, and his advice to us is 'not to wait passively for something that is not present (*apousia*), but rather to participate passionately in something that is present (*parousia*)' (267).

So, in McLaren's grand narrative, there is no hell, and no Second Coming of Christ, but rather, on-going eternal life for all.

### **Question 9: how should followers of Jesus relate to people of other religions?**

'Evangelism would cease to be a matter of saving souls ... No, instead, a reborn, post-imperial evangelism would mean proclaiming the same good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed' (290). Then he writes, 'This kind of evangelism would celebrate the good in the Christian religion and lament the bad, just as it would in every other religion, calling people to a way of life in a kingdom (or beautiful whole) that transcends and includes all religions' (291). But, to be able to justify this pluralistic approach biblically, McLaren has to deal with what he calls the 'reflex verses' that contradict his position. So, concerning John 14:6, which quotes Jesus as saying that he is the only way to the Father, McLaren writes that it 'has nothing—absolutely nothing—to say to the questions it is commonly quoted to answer' (291). He claims that Jesus is simply answering the question, 'Jesus, where are you going?' and that if we don't see his answer in terms of this question, then we are 'not interpreting his words: you're

misappropriating them, twisting them, abusing them' (292). To support his contention, McLaren has to reinterpret verses 1-3 where Jesus spoke about going to his Father's house. He writes, 'Many assume that "my Father's house" means "heaven", which sets up John 14:6 to explain how to go to heaven' (294). Then he points out that in John 2:15-17 the words 'my Father's house' refer to the Jerusalem temple. Next, he extends the argument by pointing out that Jesus referred to his own body as the temple. A little further down the page he equates Jesus's body with the church. So Fathers House = Temple = Jesus = Church. He then concludes his case with the claim that in John 14:6, Jesus was 'telling them that there will be a place for them in the new people-of-God-as-temple that Jesus is preparing the way for' (295). McLaren then writes, 'In this way, then, it appears clear that the term *my Father's house*—like the terms *life*, *abundant life* and *life of the ages*—is, like Jesus's core message of the *kingdom of God*, not about the afterlife but about this life' (295-296). Of course all of this ignores verses 1-4 with its analogy of a groom who prepares an additional wing onto his father's home, marries his bride, and then takes her to the now extended family home. It also ignores Jesus's statement that 'I will come back and take you to be with me'. And it also ignores Jesus's comparison of himself with the Father (vv. 7-9). Instead, we are expected to buy into a convoluted daisy chain that reinterprets the passage!

### **Question 10: how can we translate our quest into action?**

It really isn't necessary to comment on this last question, for we shouldn't translate McLaren's quest into action of the type he envisions. Quite the contrary, we should be taking stock of just how the orthodox faith can be diluted and humanised into a liberal faith, and walk away from this as fast as possible.

### 3. Conclusion

It is good to ask questions and to seek deep and satisfying answers. It is reasonable to agonise over a Christianity that has so often presented itself as harsh, loveless, and power mad. It is evidence of a tender heart to wonder how a loving God could consign the bulk of humanity to eternal conscious torment. But, it is neither good nor reasonable to attempt to recast the biblical narrative, redefine the nature of the Bible, and reformulate the principles of interpretation, in order to create answers that the seeker finds acceptable. This is what I think McLaren has attempted to do.

The 'new' meta-narrative according to McLaren reads as follows. God created man good and eternal. Man has made mistakes, but God has used these to evolve human potential and wholeness. There never was a fall into sin and death and so there was no need, in that sense, for Christ's atonement on the cross of Calvary. Man never died spiritually, so there is no need for a 'new birth' of anything other than a philosophical kind. Because there was no 'fall', there can be no hell, no judgement as we understand it, and therefore, no need for Jesus to come again. Our mandate is not to save souls, but to reform society, uplift individual lives, and accommodate God-seekers of all religions. The church exists for this purpose. The end.



# Review of Roger E Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*

Kevin G. Smith

Olson RE 2006. *Arminian theology: myths and realities*. Downers Grove: IVP. (The review is based on the Kindle edition of the book, which has section numbers instead of page numbers.)

## 1. Introduction

From the perspective of an Arminian, the publication of Roger Olson's *Arminian Theology* is most welcome. It is welcome because of two trends that are powerfully evident in churches across South Africa, and no doubt, in other countries too.

Firstly, Semi-Pelagianism exerts a pervasive influence amongst traditionally Arminian churches. Many churches that would consider themselves Arminian, as opposed to Calvinist, actually preach and practice their Christianity in a way that shows their core beliefs are not consistent with classical Arminian doctrine. Olson highlights the critical distinctions between classical Arminianism and semi-Pelagianism throughout his book. If semi-Pelagianism is a serious deviation from evangelical doctrine—as it certainly is—then a comprehensive corrective is much needed.

Secondly, there is a strong move towards Calvinism in churches which have historically held Arminian views. Under the influence of popular



writers and teachers like John Piper, Mark Dever, Mark Driscoll, and Don Carson, many independent Pentecostal-Charismatic congregations have embraced a kind of Reformed-Charismatic belief and practice. Their turn is partly due to their inadequate understanding of their Arminian heritage. I am not an anti-Calvinist crusader about to denounce this trend as heretical. However, I am sad that many of the pastors making this shift do not fully understand the issues addressed in Olson's book.

I shall now give a fairly detailed summary of *Arminian Theology*, before offering a personal evaluation of the book.

## 2. Summary

Olson's purpose is simple: *to provide a clear description of the major tenets of classical Arminian theology*. Olson is deeply troubled by two things. First, the lack of a benevolent spirit or fair representation of alternative views which characterises much of the debate between Calvinists and Arminians, on both popular internet forums and in scholarly circles, bothers him. Second, he realises that friend and foe alike propagate various myths about Arminian beliefs. Both Calvinist critics and self-proclaimed Arminians have a tendency to confuse true Arminianism with semi-Pelagianism. This confusion has given classical Arminianism a bad reputation, and Olson hopes to set the record straight regarding Arminian theology.

Olson's book is arranged around 10 common myths about Arminian theology. He uses the myths as an organising scheme to provide a comprehensive and systematic synopsis of Arminian theology. One chapter is devoted to each myth. In the early part of each chapter, he summarises certain misconceptions about Arminianism and offers a clear, lucid synopsis of what classic Arminians really believe about the

topic at hand, being careful to distinguish classical Arminians, who are faithful to Arminius's teachings, from aberrant schools that have arisen within Arminian circles, but which represent deviations from classical Arminianism. Next, Olson provides a chronological survey of selected Arminian theologians' views on the topic of the chapter, beginning with Arminius himself, and moving century by century.

I shall now summarise the book's ten main chapters, before proceeding with some reflections on the book as a whole.

### **Myth 1: Arminian theology is the opposite of Calvinist or Reformed theology**

Arminius himself, and classical Arminians in general, fall within the broad spectrum of Reformed theology. If high Calvinism, with a strict adherence to monergism, were understood as the only expression of Reformed theology, then Arminians would not be considered 'Reformed'. However, Olson takes pains to show that strict monergism is not the only form of soteriology which can lay claim to belonging within the Reformed tradition.

Olson deplores the way that the differences between Calvinists and Arminians have been magnified to the point that the two are considered opposite belief systems. Classical Arminians share many core beliefs with Calvinists, including belief in the total depravity of human beings and its corollary, the bondage of the unregenerate will. Both believe in the Trinity, the inspiration of the scriptures, the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, and 'justification through Christ's death on the cross alone by grace alone through faith alone' (§659). With some differences, both hold a high view of divine providence and sovereignty, and both believe in 'humanity's absolute dependence on grace for any spiritual good'

(§657). The differences are smaller, and the points of common ground greater than is often acknowledged.

### **Myth 2: a hybrid of Calvinism and Arminianism is possible**

Many well-intentioned believers strive for some kind of hybrid between Calvinism and Arminianism; Olson calls it 'Calminianism'. No such hybrid is possible. The two belief systems are incompatible alternatives. They diverge on three key points: (a) whether election is unconditional or conditional; (b) whether the atonement is limited or unlimited; and (c) whether grace is irresistible or resistible. Those who claim to hold a hybrid position are usually Arminians. 'Some are simply inconsistent, and willing to embrace contradictory positions' (§753). Every Christian must choose between two legitimate forms of Christianity. Neither dialogue nor appeals to scripture will resolve the tension. Both systems can muster impressive scriptural support, and 'both systems contain difficult if not insurmountable problems' (§800). Our perspective as we study the scriptures shapes whether we lean towards the Calvinist or the Arminian way of seeing the big picture.

### **Myth 3: Arminianism is not an orthodox evangelical option**

Although some Calvinist writers acknowledge Arminians as brothers in Christ and regard Arminianism as an evangelical theology (e.g. Peterson and Williams 2004), many label Arminians as heretics, and identify Arminianism with 'Arianism, Socinianism, Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, humanism or liberal theology' (§895). None of these identifications are just treatments of classical Arminianism. Both Arianism and Socinianism deny the Trinity; Arminians affirm it. Pelagians claim that natural man can do God's will without the help of God's grace; Arminians flatly deny it. Semi-Pelagians acknowledge

that sin affects natural man, but hold that man is still able to initiate reconciliation with God; Arminians believe in total depravity, as a result of which only the operation of God's grace can initiate a person's salvation. Finally, the allegation that Arminianism is a human-centred philosophy that inevitably leads to liberal theology is patently false.

With the exception of the doctrines that are central to the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism, 'Arminians affirm [all of the] fundamental tenets of classical Christian orthodoxy, such as the authority of Scripture, the transcendence of God, the deity of Jesus Christ and the Trinity' (§934). 'Classical Arminianism is a theology of grace that affirms salvation by grace alone through faith alone' (§1104). Only an excessively narrow definition of Protestant orthodoxy—'God as the all-determining reality and salvation as monergistically decreed and determined by God' (§1074)—can exclude Arminianism.

#### **Myth 4: the heart of Arminianism is belief in free will**

A common caricature holds that Calvinists believe in predestination, while Arminians believe in free will. Many Calvinists believe in compatibilist free will, and all Arminians believe in conditional predestination. Critics often allege that the starting point and controlling principle of Arminian theology is its belief in human freedom; this 'is simply wrong' (§1111). The point of departure for Arminian theology is not free will, but its view of the goodness of God. Arminians cannot escape the conclusion that if God determines all human actions, then God is the author of evil; indeed, God would then be the first and only 'sinner'. Arminians believe in free will because of their understanding of God's goodness. 'Arminianism begins with God's goodness and ends by affirming free will. The latter follows from the former, and the former is based on divine revelation' (§1137). It is because they believe

that the Calvinist doctrine of election contradicts the character of God as revealed in scripture, not because they are obsessed with fairness or freedom *per se*, that Arminians believe in free will. Arminians' doctrine of free will is rooted in their theodicy, not in their anthropology or soteriology.

### **Myth 5: Arminian theology denies the sovereignty of God**

Again, this is simply not true. Arminians emphatically affirm the sovereignty of God. When Calvinist theologians claim that Arminians do not believe in God's sovereignty, they are working with a narrow definition of sovereignty—that God determines everything. But why should sovereignty require God to determine every event?

Neither is it true to say that Arminians believe only in general providence. Classical Arminianism goes far beyond belief in general providence to include affirmation of God's intimate and direct involvement in every event of nature and history. The only thing the Arminian view of God's sovereignty necessarily excludes is God's authorship of sin and evil. ... God governs the entire universe and all of history. Nothing at all can happen without God's permission, and many things are specifically and directly controlled and caused by God (§§1340-41).

If the definition of sovereignty requires us to understand that God absolutely, meticulously, and deterministically controls everything, then how are we to avoid making him the author of sin? Arminians believe God has absolute power over all creation, but that he also has the power to give his creatures (human beings) freedom to make some real choices, without threatening his overall plan and purpose for the world.

## **Myth 6: Arminianism is a human-centred theology**

Calvinist critics often accuse Arminians of downplaying the devastating effect of the fall and believing that the human will is free to initiate good will towards God. Classical Arminians, however, believe in inherited corruption, total depravity, and the bondage of the will in essentially the same way that Calvinists do. Human beings are born with a corrupt, sinful nature, and are unable, in themselves, to turn towards God.

Because Arminians are synergists who believe humans cooperate with a free response to God's grace, many Calvinists allege that they believe in the freedom of the will, and do not believe salvation is by grace alone. However, Arminians hold that the will is bound by sin and completely unable to respond to the gospel, unless it is empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. It is only the prevenient grace of God which frees the will to respond to the gospel. For this reason, Arminius spoke of *the freed will*. Prevenient grace frees the will to respond by way of non-resistance; it is not man seeking out God, but man being empowered by God's grace not to resist his grace. Thus Arminians 'believe in the absolute necessity of grace for even the first exercise of a good will toward God' (§§1636-37).

## **Myth 7: Arminianism is not a theology of grace**

All true Arminians believe that salvation is *sola gratia*. Since man has no inherent good and the will is in bondage to sin, no good can originate with man; it is all by grace. Arminians have two distinctive doctrines with respect to grace. First, they believe in *prevenient grace*. Essentially, this is the operation of God's grace upon sinners before they are converted by which he, through the work of Christ and the

Holy Spirit, frees their wills to believe and receive the gospel.<sup>1</sup> Even man's ability to receive God's grace is an act of God's grace. Second, Arminians hold that *God's grace is resistible*. Although they are synergists, they limit man's cooperation to non-resistance of God's grace. There is nothing meritorious in man's cooperation, and all glory belongs solely to God.

### **Myth 8: Arminians do not believe in predestination**

Although no scholar would accuse Arminians of not believing in predestination, many Christians believe this myth. The truth is that Arminians believe in several types of predestination. First, they believe in *predestination to service*; this may be irresistible and unconditional. Second, they believe in *corporate election*; unconditional election to salvation is corporate, that is, God has unconditionally elected a people for his glory—all those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Third, they believe in *conditional predestination of individuals*. 'God foreknows every person's ultimate and final decision regarding Jesus Christ, and on that basis predestines people to salvation or damnation' (§§2125-26). What Arminians deny is that God unconditionally and irresistibly elects some people for salvation and others for damnation. Olson concludes: 'the idea that Arminianism preaches free will against predestination is simply false; it preaches predestination and free will as an instrument for inclusion in either election or reprobation, which are corporate and conditional' (§2299).

Classical Arminianism believes in simple foreknowledge—God simply knows the future because he foresees what will actually happen. This

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<sup>1</sup> Some Arminian theologians associate the coming of prevenient grace with the proclamation of the Word of God, while others believe the death of Christ bestowed it universally to all human beings (Rom 5:12-21).

leads to a paradox in Arminian theology, namely, in what sense can foreseen actions be truly free? Olson concludes this chapter with a brief examination of two attempts to get around the problem, namely, Middle Knowledge (Molinism) and Open Theism. He rejects Molinism as incompatible with libertarian free will, and therefore incompatible with Arminianism. He seems cautiously amenable to the Open Theist approach, although not persuaded by it.

### **Myth 9: Arminian theology denies justification by grace alone through faith alone.**

Deeming the Arminian understanding of the role of free will in receiving the gospel by faith as a meritorious work, some claim that Arminianism falls outside of Protestant evangelicalism, because it does not fit the Reformation belief in salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Some Calvinist critics accuse Arminians of believing that faith itself is imputed as righteousness, and that such faith is meritorious. Once again, this is a myth. Arminians do believe that salvation is *by grace alone through faith alone*. There is nothing meritorious about faith; indeed, it is the prevenient grace of God which empowers a person to exercise faith in Christ. This is pure grace, not merit. Furthermore, Arminians believe it is the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to believers, not faith itself. Although Arminius occasionally spoke of 'faith imputed for righteousness', the expression was shorthand for saying that the active and passive obedience of Christ is imputed to the believer on the basis of his faith in Christ. Therefore, the scathing accusation that Arminians are clandestine Catholics with respect to their doctrine of salvation is patently false. Arminians are evangelical Protestants who believe in *sola gratia* and *sola fidei* just as strongly as Calvin did.



## **Myth 10: all Arminians believe in the governmental theory of the atonement.**

This chapter deals with two issues related to the atonement: (a) limited versus universal atonement and (b) the governmental theory versus the penal-substitution theory.

*Limited versus universal atonement.* Calvinists believe in limited atonement (also called particular or definite atonement), namely, that Christ died only for the elect. Arminians believe the scope of the atonement is universal; Christ paid the penalty to atone for all human sins. Some Calvinists claim the Arminian view leads to universalism—if Christ died for everyone's sins, everyone will be saved. Others, conceding that Arminians do not believe everyone is automatically saved by Christ's death, argue that the implication is that his death does not really save anyone. It merely makes them savable; what actually saves them is their choice to appropriate its benefits for themselves. Arminians find both arguments strange, since they clearly teach that the elect are saved by the merits of Christ's atoning death.

*Governmental versus penal-substitution views.* Penal-substitution has become 'the orthodox view' of the atonement amongst evangelicals. It holds that Christ died as our substitute, bearing the penalty for our individual sins. The governmental theory was developed by Hugo Grotius, a Remonstrant leader. 'The governmental theory includes an element of substitution! The only significant difference between it and the penal substitution theory ... is that the governmental theory does not say that in their place Christ bore the actual punishment of sinners; it says that he bore suffering as an alternative to punishment in their place. ... God inflicted pain on Christ for the sins of the world in order to uphold his justice' (§§2667-70). Thus the governmental theory holds that Christ's death was a substitution for sins, but not a penal

substitution. Its purpose was to uphold God's moral governance of the world. Olson points out that many leading Arminians, including Arminius and Wesley, held to the penal-substitution view, so it is patently untrue to brand the governmental theory as 'the Arminian theory'. Several others embraced the governmental theory, or attempted to combine the two theories. Although Olson believes the penal view is best, he does not consider adherence to the governmental view as heretical.

### 3. Evaluation and Recommendation

As an unashamed believer in classical Arminian doctrine, I am extremely grateful for the publication of *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. There was a pressing need for a clear, definitive statement of classical Arminian beliefs. Olson has met that need admirably, and in the process has clarified several key points (at least in my personal understanding). Even though I hold Arminian convictions, I learned much about Arminianism from his book.

#### 3.1 Strengths

In addition to its obvious value—providing a comprehensive, well-researched presentation of evangelical Arminian beliefs, the book has three strengths that I wish to highlight.

1. It is written in an irenic spirit, rather than a combative one (similarly, Peterson and Williams 2004; Walls and Dongell 2004). As such, it serves as a good model for theological dialogue on divisive doctrines where tensions and emotions often run high.

2. The opening section of each chapter briefly and succinctly outlines the myths and realities. In so doing, it offers an alternative way of reading the book. A student or pastor wishing to get the bottom line on each issue could simply read the opening pages of each chapter, and not bother with the detailed discussion of various theologians. The detailed discussions do bring out some of the nuances and variations within Arminian thinking, but the short-cut of bypassing them would give the reader 90 percent of the facts about Arminian doctrine in summary form.
3. Conversely, for those who are interested in historical theology, Olson's synopses of representative Arminian thinkers from each century are thorough, informed, and enlightening.

### 3.2 Weaknesses

Olson's somewhat favourable treatment of Open Theism is disappointing. I am hard-pressed to accept that Open Theism falls within the boundaries of orthodox evangelical options, whether Arminian or otherwise. Open Theism seems incompatible with many foundational tenets of Christian theism (see Piper, Taylor, and Helseth 2003).

The lengthy synopsis of what various Arminian theologians taught became onerous and repetitive. It would be unfair to say that this is a 'weakness', since Olson's purpose is to show definitively what leading Arminian theologians through the centuries have actually believed about points on which there is widespread confusion. Therefore, the detailed surveys are necessary and helpful to his purposes. They are, however, rather repetitive as in many instances theologian after theologian says essentially the same thing. From the vantage point of a less technically-minded reader, the presentation of this information

could have been more condensed and user-friendly. What is needed is a more popular synopsis of the same content.

### 3.3 Recommendation

I am a Bible student (not a systematic theologian) who holds to classical Arminian views on almost all points of doctrine, yet, in my formative years of theological studies, I worked out most of my core beliefs by reading the scriptures in consultation with moderate Calvinist authors such as Wayne Grudem (1994) and Millard Erickson (1998). Why? Because I did not have access to an exposition of Arminian theology as lucid and coherent as the one Olson has now provided.

I strongly recommend this as required reading for every seminarian, teacher, and pastor, whether Calvinist or Arminian in persuasion. For the Arminians, it will assist with clearly understanding the distinctions between Arminianism and semi-Pelagianism, which is a critical distinction. For the Calvinists, it will ensure that they have a fair-minded concept of actual Arminian beliefs rather than one drawn from critics of Arminianism, many of whom either do not understand or do not represent Arminian teachings correctly.

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# Review of George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*

Noel B. Woodbridge

Barna G 2003. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*.  
Ventura: Regal Books.

## 1. Introduction to the Author and the Book

George Barna is the directing leader of *The Barna Group*, a company in Ventura, California, that provides research and resources to Christian ministries. He is the best-selling author of more than thirty five books, several of which have received national awards. His other books include *Think Like Jesus*, *The Power of Vision*, and *The Frog in the Kettle*. Barna also publishes *The Barna Update*, a free bi-weekly research report available online at [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org). He and his family live in Southern California.

No one can deny that modern culture is opposed to Christian values. The adverse influences that bombard the moral development of children today can be deadly. However, few parents and church leaders fully realise just how critical it is to initiate the development the child's biblical worldview, from an early age. The problem is complex, especially in light of the common circumstance of parents themselves not having received adequate (early) spiritual training. As a result, they often seem to leave their children's training and development solely to the church. Yet, the church generally focuses on older children, not realising that a child's moral development is set by the age of nine.

## 2. Summary of the Book

This book deals with one of the major problems faced by today's church: how can the church (and parents) help children cultivate a biblical worldview? In the simplest terms, cultivating a biblical worldview means learning to think and act like Jesus. But how can the church, that is, its members (including parents), teach children something their own parents didn't know how to teach them?

According to Barna (back cover), the answer is the following:

Churches must begin now to come alongside parents and equip them to provide their children – at the earliest age possible – with biblical precepts that will protect them from a barrage of worldly ideas and teaching that is hostile to the biblical worldview. Churches must also think in terms of providing parents with information and counseling that will equip parents to help their children become the spiritually mature Church of tomorrow.

Barna emphasizes that the time has come to wage a spiritual war—time to equip parents to help their children become the spiritually mature Church of tomorrow, literally transforming them into spiritual champions!

The book is divided into eight chapters.

*1. The state of American children.* In this first chapter, Barna uses four dimensions to describe the state and well-being of the American children, namely, intellectual, health / physical, economic, and emotional / behavioural.

*2. The spiritual health of our children.* This chapter deals with the following questions: Are all our decisions spiritually based? Do our

children really understand spiritual truths? What has the church have to do with it? Are we missing the mark?

3. *Why kids matter.* Here, Barna motivates why children matter. They matter, because: Children matter to God; Children matter to you and me; Children matter on the battlefield.

4. *What kids need.* Human development is a complex mixture of growth in five core areas: the moral, spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of life. The basis of each of these is one's spiritual foundation. For example, a person's moral foundation is either based on Christian spirituality and God's Word, or, it is based on worldly perspectives. Our lives are played out on a battlefield. There are a variety of agents of influence that try to persuade us to adopt one particular approach to life over another. In this regard, children need our help with four p's: purpose, perspective, provision and performance.

5. *Taking on appropriate responsibility.* After dealing with the problem of the compliant church—the unbiblical and unhealthy dependence of families on the church for spiritually nurturing children—Barna clarifies the biblical responsibility of the family. The chapter describes the correct ways for a family to raise spiritual champions, and specifies the support that is available from the church.

6. *How churches help to raise spiritual champions.* This chapter examines how the church can be most effective in aiding parents in fulfilling their God-given responsibility to raise spiritual champions. It covers various perspectives on children's ministry, methods, and techniques that facilitate impact, curriculum content, and the people that help to make it happen.



7. *Better performance through evaluation.* In this chapter, Barna describes how parents can raise spiritual champions through the judicious use of continual evaluations relating to how well each child is developing spiritually. He answers the following questions: how do I measure progress? How do I know for sure that my child is a Christian?

8. *It's time to produce some spiritual champions.* This chapter serves as a motivation for timely action in children's ministry. Barna ends this final chapter with the advisory: 'May your household provide a nurturing environment of faith, love and spiritual growth so that the emerging generation of America's children will be all that their creator intends them to be' (137).

### 3. Strengths of the Book

#### 3.1. It calls upon the Church to make children's ministry a priority

This is an excellent book that challenges and encourages parents and churches to partner together to mentor children from the earliest years of their lives. Barna admits that, for years, his own focus (and the focus of churches in general) has been on adults, despite the fact that eighty percent of those accepting Jesus as their Saviour, are below the age of thirteen years. In light of this, he appeals to churches to rethink their ministry priorities.

Many people who trust Jesus as their Saviour do so before the age of 15. Driven by this reality, George Barna invites us to the greatest harvest filed of all time – children. In *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, he boldly and faithfully calls on churches to seize the opportunity to impact their communities – starting with the children (Jack D. Eggar<sup>29</sup>).

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<sup>29</sup> President and CEO, Awana Clubs International.

In *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, George Barna reveals how we can be a vital part of the single most strategic ministry in God's kingdom, and in the process revolutionize life and faith in America. Without question every pastor must read this book (Steve Russo<sup>30</sup>).

### **3.2. It helps the Church to fulfil its role in mentoring parents**

Jim Burns<sup>31</sup> articulates this point well:

The role of the church is to spiritually mentor parents; the role of the parent is to spiritually mentor the children; the legacy of faith continues from generation to generation. The theme of *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* is as old as the philosophy in the book of Deuteronomy and as fresh as today's newspaper. George Barna blends his incredible ability to research modern culture with his own passion to energize the spiritual life of children. It is a great book.

### **3.3. It is research-based and provides practical specifics on how to reach children more effectively**

Barna is known for writing books based on superb research, and this book is no exception. Drawing from several national studies conducted among children, as well as others conducted among families and church pastors, this book challenges Christians to re-think their own assumptions and behaviour regarding the importance of ministry to children. Not only does the book give useful insights into the question, why focusing on substantive ministry to children is so critical, but it also offers some eye-opening information in the same, and provides

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<sup>30</sup> Evangelist; author, *The seduction of our children*.

<sup>31</sup> President, Youthbuilders.

guidance on reaching children more effectively. The last few chapters outline what churches can do to facilitate parents being more effective in transforming children, and how churches can assist parents, rather than replace them.

America's expert number cruncher [George Barna] has analysed the data and translated it into the most relevant work yet. Barna makes a compelling case that our hope for the future lies in our ability to help young people experience spiritual transformation (Tommy Barnett<sup>32</sup>).

## 4. Weaknesses of the Book

### 4.1. The statistical data is rather sparse and it makes debatable conclusions

Although many applaud Barna for writing a book based on superb research, it may be argued that the statistical data is actually rather sparse. It may be argued further that the book serves largely as a forum for Barna to sermonize about ministering to children. Although Barna provides many valuable principles on children's ministry, his background suggests that he usually specialises in objective analytical research. However, this book does not appear to be a statistical analysis of the state of contemporary church ministries to children. In fact, only a few statistics are mentioned (and even repeated) throughout the book.

Barna has a reputation as a researcher, yet, he bases many of his conclusions on his thoughts and feelings as a father of young children, and not necessarily on solid research. And when he does reference the research, he makes ambitious logical leaps, by reaching debatable and

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<sup>32</sup> Pastor, Phoenix First Assembly of God.

sweeping conclusions. In addition, the charts presented in the book are not always adequately explained, leaving one longing for more thorough elucidation of them.

#### **4.2. The claim that children's ministry should be the primary focus of the Church**

The sub-title of the book is what the book is essentially about, namely, why children should be your church's # 1 priority. Although the sentiment that the churches should make ministry to children *one of the* primary focal points is something worth articulating, it is rather over emphasised by Barna. To suggest that children's ministries should be elevated above all others seems rather dramatic, a suggestion that is simply not well vindicated in the book.

#### **4.3. Lacks details on what specific churches have done**

Although Barna's general description of what effective churches are doing is compelling, possibly causing pastors who read the book to consider the various strategies presented, it non-the-less lacks useful detail. The accounts of successful implementations of children's ministry strategies by churches are unfortunately presented in general platitudes. It may be difficult to disagree with such generalities, but conversely, it is also less instructive to the reader.

### **5. Conclusion**

Despite its shortcomings, Barna's book presents a timely challenge and welcome corrective to church leaders to embrace the importance of children's ministry. His insightful commentary, statistical analysis, and

vision for success, are inspiring, providing great direction for children's ministry in churches.

In some ways, it is a disturbing book - the spiritual state of children, as described, is frightening. However, it is a very helpful, practical, and necessary book. Every parent and pastor should read it.

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