

Conspectus

The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary

Volume 14

September 2012

ISSN 1996-8167

Table of Contents

Annang, The Role of the Doctrine of Trinitarian Worship in Paul's Dispute with the Judaizers: Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3 as Test Cases.....	1
Brodie, Stage Development Theory and the Use of Elementary Exegesis in Bible Teaching to Children: A Child-Focused and Bible-Orientated Pedagogical Approach.....	57
Jabini, Sons of God Marrying Daughters of Man: An Exercise in Integrated Theology.....	81
O'Connell, John Versus the Synoptic Gospels on Mary Magdalene's Visit to the Tomb.....	123
Pohlmann, The Victory Song of Moses in Christological Perspective within the Apocalypse of John	133
Tucker and Woodbridge, A Strategy for Developing a Sustainable Sports Ministry through Soccer Evangelism in the Local Churches in Tshwane Using Browning's Multidisciplinary Model	153
Asumang, Review of Hawkins and Parkinson, <i>Move: What 1000 Churches REVEAL about Spiritual Growth</i>	173
Lioy, Review article: Two Contrasting Views on the Historical Authenticity of the Adam Character in the Genesis Creation Narratives	191

Panel of Referees

Vincent Atterbury	DTh	University of Johannesburg
Robert Brodie	PhD	St Augustine's College
Bill Domeris	PhD	University of Durham
Zoltan Erdey	PhD	South African Theological Seminary
Frank Jabini	DTh	University of Zululand
Sam Kunhiyop	PhD	Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Pelham Lessing	MPhil	University of Port Elizabeth
Dan Lioy	PhD	University of the North-West
Elijah Mahlangu	PhD	University of Pretoria
Leonard Marè	PhD	University of Johannesburg
Christopher Pepler	DTh	University of Zululand
Mark Pretorius	PhD	University of Pretoria
Kevin Smith	DLitt	University of Stellenbosch
Arthur Song	PhD	University of Natal
Noel Woodbridge	DTh	University of Zululand
Peter Wyngaard	PhD	University of the Witwatersrand

Senior editor: Zoltan Erdey

Assistant editor: Kevin Smith

The Role of the Doctrine of Trinitarian Worship in Paul's Dispute with the Judaizers: Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3 as Test Cases

Annang Asumang¹

Abstract

Paul's dispute with the Judaizers primarily centred on the soteriological implications of the 'works of the law', specifically, whether the circumcision of males, participation in Jewish festivals, and eating of *kosher* food were *a priori* preconditions for salvation. However, several aspects of Paul's arguments indicate that there were secondary areas of divergence from these Jewish opponents, which, when taken together with the primary issue, have important implications for understanding the theological bases of the 'parting of the ways' between Christianity and Judaism. One such secondary issue is reflected in Paul's appeal to Trinitarian worship as part of his denunciation of the Judaizers. After a brief summary of the dimensions of Paul's dispute with the Judaizers, this article sets out definitional criteria for identifying references to Trinitarian worship as Paul conceptualized it in his letters. It then demonstrates that Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3 are test cases describing the role of the doctrine of Trinitarian worship in the dispute. It

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

concludes by enumerating the implications of the findings to the Trinitarian distinctiveness of Christian worship.

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the thesis

In this essay, I argue that Paul's doctrine on Trinitarian worship, as he conceptualised it in Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3, was one of the components of the issues involved in his dispute with the Judaizers. Also, I posit that it was this element of the dispute which led Paul to characterize compliance to the teachings of the Judaizers as equivalent to apostatizing to paganism (Gal 4:9) and idolatry (Phil 3:19). If these proposals are correct, they have some historical, theological, and contemporary pastoral implications.

1.2. Background and rationale

Paul's dispute with the Judaizers was one of the key defining features of early Christianity. It affected some of the historical events which were pivotal in the formation of Christian congregations in the first-century. It influenced Paul's pastoral relationships with the founding churches of Christianity. It shaped many of the theological themes on which Paul elaborates in his letters, letters which constitute almost half of the foundational documents of Christianity. It laid the foundation for the subsequent fissure and the 'parting of the ways' between Christianity and Judaism (Elmer 2009; Lea 1994:23–29; Nanos 2000:146–159; Russell 1990:329–350; Tyson 1968:241–254). Accordingly, delineating the exact issues which lay at the centre of this dispute has important historical significance.

Recent trends in Pauline studies have also made such an analysis imperative. The influential scholarly construct, known as ‘the New Perspective on Paul’, has opened up some fruitful avenues of enquiries for clarifying the socio-historical circumstances behind the dispute (Bird 2005:57–69; Kim 2002; Stuhlmacher 2001; Thompson 2002; Westerholm 2003). Specifically, it has shed useful light on Second Temple Judaism and how, in its variegated form, it understood key theological concepts such as the law, grace, election, justification, and the covenant (Barclay 1996; Dunn 1983:95–122; Sanders 1977; Wright 2005). Better understanding of the Judaism of Paul’s day has also led to better understanding of Paul’s arguments against the Judaizers in his letters.²

On the negative side however, and building on the insights of ‘the New Perspective on Paul’, some interpreters have attempted to rehabilitate the Judaizers, and so, raised important questions regarding the dispute itself and its theological foundations. So, Gager (2000) and Räisänen (1986), to cite two examples, have argued that Paul misunderstood and so, misrepresented the Judaizers. Räisänen is, in particular, so convinced of his stance that he, rather provocatively, prefers to describe the Judaizers as ‘Jewish Christian restorers’ (1986:264), and Paul, as the one with ‘personal theological problems’ who thus had a distorted understanding of the Judaists (1986:12).

Nanos, though more measured in his assessment, has nevertheless also cast doubts on the traditional view that the Judaizers aimed to get Paul’s converts to bind themselves in a rigid manner to Torah observance. In

² Other positive benefits of the ‘New Perspective’ have been its contribution to improvements in Catholic-Protestant, and Jewish-Christian relationships. For a full bibliography on the ‘New Perspective on Paul’, see www.thepaulpage.com/the-new-perspective-on-paul-a-bibliographical-essay/.

fact, he objects to the use of the term 'Judaizers' for this group, due to the term's 'negative connotations', and queries: 'is it really likely that the ones whose influence Paul opposed stood against values such as freedom and Torah-oriented norms such as love of one's neighbour?' (2010:459).

Other interpreters have opted to argue that it was the later Protestant reformers, not Paul, who misunderstood the exact nature of the bones of contention between Paul and the Judaizers. The Reformers, it is thus put forward, posited a difference between Paul and the Judaizers that did not exactly exist (Boyarin 1994; Dunn 1990:183–206; Esler 1998; Fredriksen 2010:232–252).

Whether it is Paul or the Protestant reformers who are judged to have misunderstood the Judaizers, the potential effects of these revisions are the same. They redraw the balance on the nature of the issues at the centre of the dispute, and call into question a number of historically conservative accounts of Christian doctrine. Certainly, if these revisions were correct, centuries of traditional scholarship on the theological issues which led to the 'parting of the ways' between Christianity and Judaism will need to be rethought (Campbell 2006; Ratke 2012; Thompson 2002; Watson 2007). Furthermore, these revisions are raising contemporary pastoral questions regarding the definition of fundamental concepts such as the distinctiveness of Christian worship (Luter Jr. 1988:335–344).

It is therefore fitting that many critics of 'the New Perspective on Paul' have mounted cogent refutations of some of its excesses (Bird 2005:57–69; Carson, O'Brien and Seifrid 2004; Kim, 2002; Laato 1995; Seifrid, 1994:73–95; Stuhlmacher 2001; Watson 2007). These refutations have, however, focused on the central issue in the dispute, namely, the soteriological function of the 'works of the law'. Secondary matters,

which appear to have played roles in shaping the dispute, have not been as keenly addressed.

The present essay approaches the debate from a different angle, by arguing that Paul's forceful assertion of the Trinitarian nature of valid worship of God in Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3, constitutes one of the secondary dimensions in his dispute with the Judaizers. It further proposes that it was this secondary dimension which lies behind Paul's statements that yielding to the teachings of the Judaizers amounted to apostatizing to idolatry.

I am not aware of any specific examination of the Trinitarian aspects of Paul's dispute with the Judaizers in the secondary literature. The reasons for the paucity of studies on this subject are not hard to find. Two basic methodological hurdles³ have served as barriers to addressing the problem, and these may be stated in the form of two questions. Firstly, what are the safest methodological procedures for identifying the dimensions of the apostle's dispute with the Judaizers? And secondly, to what extent can one speak of a Trinitarian element of a dispute in the first half of the first century AD, given the lack of explicit mention of the doctrine, as it is presently formulated, in Paul's letters? I shall briefly address these methodological questions before proceeding to examine the two passages concerned.

³ One of the objectives of the present essay is to address these methodological difficulties transparently and so, hopefully, contribute to the wider methodological discussion on the conduct of biblical research on the Judaizers and the doctrine of the Trinity. This accounts for the extensive attention devoted to addressing these hurdles.

2. The Dimensions of Paul's Dispute with the Judaizers

2.1. Method for establishing the dimensions of the dispute

Because the Judaizers did not bequeath to us with extant accounts of their side of the dispute, interpreters have no option but to rely solely on Paul's characterizations of these opponents. To put the problem more sharply, we have no means of knowing how the Judaizers themselves perceived the conflict; we only have access to the witness of one of the interested parties involved in this ancient disagreement. This obviously 'one-sided' nature of the extant historical evidence inevitably creates a methodological challenge for interpreters. Ultimately, like all historical enquiries, the hermeneutical presuppositions of the interpreter significantly affect how they evaluate this 'one-sided' account of the dispute.

Conservative interpreters with a high view of scripture take Paul's analyses of the issues at stake as the Spirit-inspired divine perspective. So, based on this high view of the historical source at hand, that is, Paul's letters, conservatives are confident that the data gleaned from them accurately reflect what happened in the dispute. In the words of Schreiner (2010:32), 'it is certainly the case that no one has a "God's-eye" view of any situation. But if we accept the scriptures as the Word of God, Paul's words in the letter represent the divine perspective of the opponents and cannot be restricted merely to his human judgement.' I share this hermeneutical presupposition, and so, approach the text with this in mind.

Even when this hermeneutical challenge is overcome however, an exegetical difficulty nevertheless presents itself. Since the Judaizers were one of several opponents of Paul (cf. Lea 1994:23–29), studies aimed at identifying the dimensions of the dispute must be restricted to

those letters in which discussions of the dispute are most prominent and explicitly stated, namely, Galatians 1–6⁴ and Philippians 3.⁵

Other Pauline epistles, possibly Romans (cf. Campbell 2006:112; Canales 1985:237–245), 1 and 2 Corinthians (cf. Barnett 1984:3–17; Martin 1987:279–289; Murphy-O'Connor 1986:42–58), and perhaps Colossians (cf. Sumney 1993:366–388), may or may not provide further data for characterising the dispute. However, since the ‘opponents’ in these letters are quite diverse and, in any case, difficult to identify categorically, the data these letters provide can only be employed for validating conclusions made from the study of Galatians and Philippians 3. For methodological purity therefore, other Pauline letters cannot be taken as the foundational sources on the dispute with the Judaizers.⁶

Yet, even in Galatians and Philippians 3, Paul does not present the issues in the dispute in a systematic manner. He quite rightly assumes

⁴ A few scholars take it that Galatians 5–6 address a separate group of opponents from Galatians 1–4, whether libertines (Lutgers 1919; Ropes 1929), Pneumatics (Crownfield 1945:492) or Gnostics (Schmithals 1972:13–64). These variations of the ‘two-front theory’ of Paul’s opponents in Galatia have, however, failed to convince the majority of interpreters. For a recent evaluation of theories on the opponents in Galatians, see Witherington III (2004:21–25).

⁵ While it is evident that the opponents alluded to in Philippians 3:2–3 were the Judaizers, questions have been raised as to whether the opponents in Philippians 3:18–19 were Judaizers. This will be discussed in a later chapter of this essay.

⁶ It is true that Acts 15 describes the dispute and quotes one of the theological maxims of the Judaizers as: ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’ (Acts 15:1). However, in Acts, the exact tenets behind this maxim are not stated, neither are there further descriptions of the dimensions of the dispute. Thus, Galatians and Philippians 3 are the two sources for investigating the dispute. For more on the role of Acts in characterizing the dispute, see Morgado (1994:55–68). Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the NRSV.

that the first readers were familiar with the causes of disagreement, and so, proceeds to argue his case based on that assumption. Accordingly, to establish the dimensions of the dispute, interpreters employ 'mirror reading', an exegetical procedure in which some of Paul's statements are regarded as polemical retorts against his opponents, and so, employed to construct the most probable positions of these opponents.

Manifestly, there are inherent difficulties with the 'mirror reading' method. It largely depends on whether the judgment that a statement by Paul is polemical, is correct. In some cases, even when correct, a mere reversal of Paul's statement may not, in itself, automatically lead to an understanding of the points of view of his opponents. Accordingly, several interpreters (e.g. Barclay 2002:367–382; Gupta 2012:361–381; Lyons 1985; Thurson and Ryan 2009:115–118) have rightly cautioned against over-exuberant and uncontrolled application of the 'mirror reading' method for exegesis.

All the same, within the limits of the sources that are available, a controlled 'mirror reading' of Paul's letters is unavoidable if the letters are to be interpreted correctly in their context. In the particular case at hand, I shall follow the criteria laid out by Barclay (2002:367–382) to ensure as balanced an exegesis as possible. Moreover, since almost all interpreters are in agreement that the specific opponents at the centre of Paul's discussions in Galatians and Philippians 3 were the Judaizers, the study's delimitation to these two passages appears prudent.

2.2. The primary and secondary dimensions of Paul's dispute with the Judaizers

The word Ἰουδαϊκῶς (literally, 'live Judaically') occurs once in the LXX (Est 8:17) and once in the New Testament (Gal 2:14). In its strictest sense, Gentiles used it to describe the adoption of the Jewish

manner of life by Gentiles. Since the second-century AD however, the term has been used to describe Jews associated with the earliest Christian movement who insisted that Gentile converts to the Christian gospel ought to adopt also the Jewish manner of life (Bird 2006:126).

It is likely that the Judaizers were not a homogenous group, some adapting their demands depending on local circumstances. All the same, it is universally accepted by scholars that the central theological bone of contention between Paul and the Judaizers, the ‘primary issue’ on which Paul’s refutations of the Judaizers dwelt, was the soteriological implications of ‘the works of the law’ (Rom 3:20; 3:28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10; cf. Bird 2006:113; Seifrid 1994:78–79).

This primary bone of contention focused on whether the Torah’s requirement for the circumcision of males (Rom 2:25–29; Gal 5:1–11; Phil 3:2–3), participation in Jewish festivals and Sabbath laws (Rom 14:5; Gal 4:10; Col 2:16), and observance of Jewish dietary rules (Rom 14; Gal 2:11–17; Phil 3:19; Col 2:16) must be fulfilled as pre-conditions for salvation. In all these, Paul vehemently insisted that obedience to the ‘works of the law’ was not a precondition for salvation. The Judaizers radically differed from Paul on this primary issue.

A number of proponents of ‘the New Perspective on Paul’ (e.g. Dunn 2008; Wright 1997) have argued that this primary matter was not really a soteriological issue, but an ecclesiological one. In other words, they argue that these practices were regarded as the boundary markers of what defined the people of God, and not necessarily how people became part of that community.

However, as several critics have rightly pointed out (e.g. Bird 2006:109–130; Schreiner 2009:140–155), this more recent reconfiguration of the nature of Paul's dispute with the Judaizers does not fully explain the various turns of the apostle's argument. What is more, this reconfiguration posits a theological distinction which did not exist in Paul's mind. As astutely put by Bird (2006:127), 'Any bifurcation between justification as "entrance" or "membership" is based on a false dichotomy'. It is right to affirm then, that the primary bone of contention centred on the soteriological implications of 'works of the law', no doubt a contention which inevitably had ecclesiological ramifications.

In addition to this primary issue however, certain secondary matters also featured in the dispute. These secondary issues were theological and exegetical ideas, which Paul often introduced in the service of arguing on the primary issue, but which on their own, are also substantive theological concerns that generate wider understanding of Paul's viewpoint. So, for example, in both Romans (ch. 4) and Galatians (chs. 3–4), Paul extensively discusses the place of the Abrahamic covenant in supporting his point of view (Fee 2010:126–137; Perkins, 2001; Rhoads 2004:282–297; Schreiner 2010:34).

Similarly, the soteriological implications of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Rom 5:6–15; 7:4–9; Gal 2:20–22; 3:1; 5:11; 6:14; Phil 3:7–11; cf. Jervis 1999:18; Kern 2011:135–154; Kirk 2006:133–154) and the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to justification (Rom 2:29; 7:6; 8:1–27; Gal 3:1–14; 4:29; 5:1–25; 6:8; cf. Cosgrove 1988; Williams 1987:91–100; Wilson 2006:157–160) constitute extensive elements in Paul's argument in support of his position.

It is evident by the consistency with which these secondary issues occur in his disputations with the Judaizers that, in Paul's mind, these secondary issues cannot be divorced from the primary cause of the disagreement. Moreover, by their nature, these secondary issues inevitably led to different conclusions and approaches in other aspects of the beliefs and practices of the Christian community. Thus, their likely effects on how the earliest Christian congregations conducted themselves cannot be dismissed.

It must be admitted that, methodologically, while it is certain that Paul radically differed from the Judaizers on the primary issue of the soteriological implications of the works of the law, it is on the other hand not possible to establish fully the extent to which he differed from his opponents on these secondary issues. As stated previously, many of these secondary issues are introduced in the service of arguing in favour of the primary issue. And so, it is remotely conceivable that Paul may well have used arguments on some of these secondary issues because he reckoned that his opponents would have agreed with their premises.

Though remotely conceivable, this scenario is however, most unlikely. The letters were addressed, not to his opponents, but to readers who had been adversely influenced by the opponents. So the notion that Paul agreed with his opponents on the substantive elements of the secondary issues which he employs in his argument is really incompatible with the fact that Paul's aim was to restore his readers. Paul was not seeking to convert the Judaizers to his side. His aim was to retain the Galatians.

Accordingly, it is much more likely that there were more elements of disagreement in the secondary issues than areas of agreement. On the whole, however, and given these limitations, it is advisable not to take

routinely every comment by Paul on these secondary issues as necessarily indicating a disputed point of difference from his opponents.

Be that as it may, there are reasons to believe that by virtue of the fact that, Paul consistently introduces these secondary matters, and in some cases, devotes extensive parts of his argument to establish his point of view on them, these indicate that they constituted additional points of divergence from his opponents. In other cases, the apparent 'intrusion' of references to these matters into Paul's train of argument and other rhetorical features of the statements, would also appear to suggest the necessity for Paul to draw out a distinction from the Judaizers.

Certainly, the important roles that the secondary issues play in supporting Paul's argument suggest that they cannot be extricated from characterising the nature of the dispute. This essay proposes that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship, to the discussion of which I now turn, was one of the secondary issues in the dispute.

3. Trinitarian Worship in Paul's Letters

3.1. Criteria for identifying trinitarian references in Paul's letters

The second methodological hurdle relates to whether, and to what extent, it is appropriate to use the word 'Trinity' in relation to Paul's letters. The word 'Trinity' itself does not occur in the Bible; explicit statements of the doctrine, as presently formulated, are also lacking. Presently, the doctrine, in the words of the Nicene Creed, states:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty maker of heaven and earth... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made ... We believe

in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.⁷

This statement of the doctrine, formulated in AD 325, followed a long history of redefinitions shaped by responses to various deviations and theological disputes of the time (cf. Humphreys 2006:288; Jenson 2002:329–339; La Due 2003). Accordingly, when seeking to identify Trinitarian references in the New Testament, a nuanced formulation of how the inspired biblical authors conceptualised the doctrine to address their own situations is necessary.

Without such a nuance, discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament are, according to Watson (1999:168), liable to be labelled as ‘anachronism’.⁸ As Wainwright (1962:4) also famously put this methodological problem, ‘there is no formal statement of trinitarian doctrine in the New Testament as there is in the Athanasian Creed or in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* ... If the word “Trinity” is a necessary feature of a statement of the doctrine, then it does not appear to have emerged before Theophilus (second century) who used the Greek Τριάς (‘triad’)’.

With this difficulty in mind, some interpreters qualify discourses about the doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament by speaking rather of ‘the New Testament’s embryonic affirmations of the Trinity’ (Phan 2011:3; cf. Edgar 2004; Letham 2004), or the New Testament’s ‘trinitarian formulae’ (Wainwright 2011:33), or its ‘trinitarian pattern’

⁷ This ICET translation of the Nicene Creed was accessed from <http://christian-bible.com/Exegesis/creeds.htm>.

⁸ Watson himself rejects such a characterisation, even though he warns that care must be taken not to extrapolate later Trinitarian formulae and language back into the New Testament.

(Wainwright 1962:6), or its 'triadic conception of God' (Wainwright 1962:248), or its 'underlying proto-trinitarian depth structure' (Schwöbel 1995:127), or the 'underlying logic of the New Testament's pervasively triadic God-language' (Watson 1999:169).

Other interpreters have made strong cases for using explicit criteria for identifying how the individual inspired writers of the New Testament represented the doctrine (e.g. Black 2010:151–180; Congdon 2008:231–258; Holsteen 2011:334–346; Humphreys 2006:285–303; Rowe 2003:1–26; Scaer 2003:323–334; Yeago 1994:152–164). One such approach, for example, examines how the epistle to the Hebrews shows 'clear evidence of the oneness of God and also evidence of three distinct persons' (Holsteen 2011:334; cf. Letham 2004; Warfield 1991:152–155). Another approach (Kostenberger and Swain 2008) focuses on proving the divinities of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, and thus, forming the conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity is evident in that gospel.

While these approaches are helpful, they nevertheless result in simply proving that the New Testament indeed contains the basic elements of the doctrine of the Trinity. They do not show how the inspired authors employed the doctrine to address their contemporary socio-theological and pastoral situation at hand. Without establishing the link between the presence of the doctrine and the immediate pastoral purposes for which they are deployed, it is difficult to demonstrate whether the writers were indeed conscious of the doctrine in the first place.

Moreover, these approaches tend to skew discussions of the Trinitarian doctrine towards primarily answering modern disputes about the doctrine, rather than demonstrating the New Testament's own presentation of the doctrine. As Humphreys (2006:290) puts this criticism, 'Both biblical exegesis and the search for intentional teaching

about the component Trinitarian themes are valuable, but they do not exhibit a doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament’.

For our present purposes, therefore, two alternative criteria for identifying Trinitarian references in Paul’s letters are preferred. Firstly, triadic references to God (or the Father), Jesus (or the Son) and the Holy Spirit, in a single thought unit,⁹ must be regarded as employing a Trinitarian doctrine as part of the thought of that unit. This criterion is based on the widely recognised nature of the Trinitarian pattern in the New Testament in which the biblical authors elaborate on the Father, Son, and the Spirit in close literary proximity to one another, and often, in a fashion not directly germane to the argument they were making.

So, Humphreys (2006:292 cf. Erickson 2000; McGrath 1988:148–149) for example, identifies that there are up to one hundred and twenty such thought units¹⁰ in the New Testament in which, ‘without any

⁹ I adopt Bailey and Broek’s (1992:51) definition of a biblical ‘thought unit’ as a statement or groups of statements representing a single idea, usually limited to a single paragraph.

¹⁰ As footnoted by Humphreys (2006:292 n.21), the 120 passages are: Matthew 1:18–23, 3:16–17, 4:1–3, 10:20, 12:18, 12:28, 12:31–32, 22:43, 28:19; Mark 1:10–11, 3:29, 12:36, 13:11; Luke 1:35, 1:15, 4:1, 6:7, 2:25–32, 3:22, 4:1–3, 4:14–19, 10:21, 11:13, 12:10, 12:12; John 1:32–34, 3:5, 3:34, 6:63–65, 14:15–17, 14:26, 15:26, 16:5–11, 16:12–15, 20:21–22; Acts 1:1–3, 1:7–8, 2:4, 11, 22, 2:33, 2:38–39, 4:30–31, 5:29–32, 7:55–56, 8:14–19, 8:29–39, 9:17–20, 10:38, 10:39–48, 11:15–17, 15:1–11, 16:6–10, 19:1–8, 20:21–23, 20:28, 28:23–25; Romans 1:1–4, 5:1–8, 8:1–2, 8:3–4, 8:9, 8:11, 8:15–17, 14:17–18, 15:12–13, 15:16, 15:18–19, 15:30; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, 3:16–23, 6:11, 6:19–20, 12:1–3, 12:4–6, 12:12, 13,28; 2 Cor 1:21–22, 3:3, 3:4–6, 3:17–4:1, 5:5–7, 13:14; Galatians 3:1–5, 3:6, 3:10–14, 4:4–6, 5:1–6, 5:21–25; Ephesians 1:13–14, 1:17, 2:18, 2:22, 3:5, 3:16, 4:4–6, 5:18, 6:10, 11, 17; Philippians 1:19, 3:3; Colossians 1:7–9; 1 Thessalonians 1:4–6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 3:15–16; 2 Timothy 1:3, 13,14; Titus 3:4–6; Hebrews 2:3–5, 6:4–6, 9:14, 10:29; 1 Peter 1:2, 1:3–

explanation whatever, reference is made to the Father, the Son and the Spirit together'. These passages provide the data for constructing the New Testament authors' deployment of Trinitarian doctrines to address their contemporary issues.

Secondly, there must also be other indications elsewhere in the same letter or book closely associating Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit, with God (or the Father), in a way as to indicate the author's conception that they separately shared God's divinity.¹¹ Such individual passages themselves are not to be taken to be Trinitarian, unless they contain triadic references.

However, these other passages are necessary for indicating that the author, in our case, Paul, regarded Jesus and the Holy Spirit as sharing in God's divinity, and that by bringing all three together in a triadic pattern elsewhere in the letter, he was consciously expressing a Trinitarian doctrine and expected his readers to make that conclusion. The delimitation of this criterion to the book or letter concerned is necessary for indicating that a Trinitarian thought is consciously being expressed and employed for the benefit of the first readers of that book or letter.

12, 3:18, 4:14; 1 John 3:23–24, 4:2, 4:13–14, 5:5–9; Jude 20–21; Revelation 1:4–6, 1:9–10, 2:1, 7, 3:21–22, 14:12–13, 22:16–18.

¹¹ Recent discussions in biblical scholarship on the relationship between ancient Jewish monotheism and the worship of Jesus as part of Christian origins (e.g. Bauckham 1998; Hurtado 2003) have laid firm foundations for understanding the historical development of the Trinitarian conceptions in New Testament times. I personally find this development extremely promising (Asumang 2010:81–102).

3.2. Definition of trinitarian worship

Based on the above methodological considerations, I can now define Trinitarian worship from a biblical perspective. Worship, though difficult to define, generally describes the believer's attitude of submission, devotion, and reverence to God, as well as the distinctive actions that naturally result from this devotion, often, but not exclusively, expressed in the context of the community of other believers (Segler and Bradley 2006; Shum 2008:35–53; Thompson 1997:121–132; Treier and Lauber 2009; Wainwright, Tucker and Westfield 2006).¹²

Exegetically, it is sometimes difficult to identify whether an attitude of worship is being stated or described in a particular passage. This difficulty is, however, often ameliorated by references to distinctive actions that result from these attitudes of worship. For example, references in the Bible to prayer, petition, singing, bowing, praising, glorifying, adoring, honouring, blessing or thanking God, or acts of giving, serving, or obedience to God, denote acts of worship and should be taken as such. This pragmatic approach to identification of passages in which worship is a theme has tremendously enhanced research into other areas of Biblical scholarship (cf. Hurtado 2003:31. n.10).

With these in mind, Trinitarian worship may be defined as attitudes of devotion and/or acts of worship of God which recognise him in triadic fashion by explicitly making references to God (or the Father), Jesus (or

¹² Martin (1982:4) defines worship as 'the dramatic celebration of God in His supreme worth in such a manner that His "worthiness" becomes the norm and inspiration of human living'. Though erudite and helpful, this definition nevertheless lacks the robustness that is required for collecting data from the Bible.

the Son), and the Holy Spirit in the same thought unit. The present essay employs this as its working definition of Trinitarian worship.

3.3. Trinitarian worship in Paul's letters

As Appendix 1 shows below (p. 43–45), forty-two thought units in Paul's letters contain triadic patterns which qualify to be identified as Trinitarian based on the above definition. These references are unevenly distributed among the letters and applied to wide-ranging circumstances and theological ideas, such as Paul's calling to be an apostle, his ministry itself, the nature of the gospel, sanctification, the nature of conversion and spiritual growth, and the nature and functions of the church. Indeed, the frequency of occurrences of the Trinitarian thought units favourably compares with the twenty explicit references to the cross in Paul's letters (Grieb 2005:225–252; Letham 2002:57–69; Treier and Lauber 2009). It is evident that the concept of the Trinity is an essential pillar of Paul's theological thought structure.

Of these forty-two triadic thought units, eleven fulfil the criteria laid out above as employing ideas on Trinitarian worship to address particular situations. Two of these references to Trinitarian worship occur as part of Paul's pronouncement of benediction on his readers (Rom 15:12–13; 2 Cor 13:14). Five of the references relate to prayer, by either describing the nature of prayer (Rom 8:15–17; Gal 4:6) or are employed within the context of Paul himself praying (Eph 1:17, 2:18, and 3:14–21). The other four references to Trinitarian worship occur in the context of Paul distinguishing valid worship from invalid worship (Rom 14:17–18; 1 Cor 12:1–3; Eph 5:18–21; Phil 3:3). These data essentially demonstrate that Trinitarian worship was an important component of Paul's beliefs, practices and teachings.

Of these eleven references to Trinitarian worship in Paul's letters, only two, namely, Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3 are directly employed in polemical arguments against the Judaizers. Conceptually and linguistically, Romans 8:15–17 parallels Galatians 4:6; but, Romans 8:15–17 is not directed at rebutting the teachings of the Judaizers, not in the manner that Galatians 4:6 does. Clearly, Paul could restate or readapt a doctrine previously employed in the service of one argument for other circumstances (cf. Campbell 2006:112). So, the parallels between Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15–17 are not surprising, despite their different contexts.

It is fair, therefore, to conclude that Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3 are the two instances in Paul's letters in which Paul's polemics against the Judaizers converge with his conceptualization of Trinitarian worship. This, then, begs the question: what is the exact role of the doctrine of Trinitarian worship in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers? The rest of the essay is devoted to answering this question.

4. Trinitarian Worship in Galatians 4:6 in the Dispute with the Judaizers

The situational context behind the writing of Galatians is as well-known as it is well-debated (Betz 1979; Schreiner 2010:21–59; Witherington III 2004). To summarise, in Paul's absence, certain Jewish opponents, namely, the Judaizers, undermined Paul's preaching in Galatia (Gal 1:6–9; 5:7–10) by insisting that the Gentile converts must obey the works of the Law in order to be saved (Gal 2:16). In particular, these

opponents demanded that the converts be circumcised (Gal 6:12–13) and celebrate the Sabbath and other Jewish festivals (Gal 4:10).¹³

It is evident by the passion expressed in the letter that Paul believed that his opponents had been successful in persuading some of the Galatians, even if there is no evidence from the letter that the Gentiles had actually submitted themselves yet to be circumcised. It also appears that, as part of their wider strategy of weaning the Galatians off the apostle, the Judaizers undermined Paul's authority, whether in relation to his accreditation as an apostle and/or in relation to the nature of his relationship with the other apostles in Jerusalem (Jervis 1999:7; Schreiner 2010:35).

Therefore, Paul wrote to the Galatians with a two-prong strategy in mind, namely, to refute the arguments of the Judaizers, and to restore the Galatians back to the gospel which was first preached to them, by reasserting this gospel and explaining its ramifications for their Christian existence in Galatia. The problem for interpreters lies in how to determine to which of these prongs of Paul's strategy a particular argument of the letter belongs.

Nevertheless, I now put forward five sets of arguments to demonstrate that the reference to Trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6 was directed at rebutting the Judaizers' stance on the nature of valid worship, and so, constitutes an important element in the dispute. To summarise, these sets of arguments are:

¹³ Most commentators (e.g. Dunn 1993:227–229; Garlington 2007:249; Longenecker 1990:182; Schreiner 2010:279) take Galatians 4:10: ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτοὺς (literally, 'you keep watch for days and months and seasons and years') to refer to the celebration of the Sabbath and other Jewish festivals.

- 1) Structurally, the section of the letter containing Galatians 4:6, that is 4:1–11, is of key importance in rebutting the Judaizers, and focuses on what constitutes valid worship by the true heirs of Abraham.
- 2) Rhetorically, the forceful assertion of Trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6 itself indicates Paul's attempt to demarcate clearly one of his differences with the Judaizers.
- 3) Theologically, the follow-on argument in 4:7–11, that adopting the teaching of the Judaizers would amount to apostatizing to paganism in general and idolatry in particular, indicates that the categorical choice for the Galatians was between Paul's Trinitarian worship and the Judaizers' non-Trinitarian and so idolatrous worship.
- 4) Christo-pneumatologically, the repeated associations of Jesus and the Holy Spirit with divinity elsewhere in the letter supports the view that Trinitarian worship was being consciously expressed in Paul's triadic assertion in Galatians 4:6.
- 5) Stylistically, the overall Trinitarian pattern of the letter to the Galatians, with 4:6 as its fulcrum, indicates that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship was important to Paul's argument with the Judaizers.

I shall now briefly explain each of these points.

4.1. Valid worship by the true heirs of Abraham in Galatians 4:1–11

The most sustained theoretical argument of Galatians is found in Galatians 3–4. Almost all commentators (e.g. Barrett 1976:6; Betz 1979:14–25; Hays 2002; Longenecker 1998; Schreiner 2010:191) therefore believe that the extensive appeal to Abraham in this section was not incidental to Paul's argument, but served as a direct polemical

rebuttal against the Judaizers. Exactly what the Judaizers made of Abraham is not explicitly stated. Even so, it is logically inevitable that the Judaizers would have appealed to the circumcision of Abraham in their attempt to convince the Galatians to adopt the rite (cf. Jervis 1999:83).

In addition however, and given the wide-ranging nature of the argument in Galatians 3–4, it is also most likely that Paul differed from the Judaizers on several other facets of the interpretation of the scriptural account on Abraham which was employed to serve their theological agenda.

As the structure of the argument of Galatians 3–4 below shows, at the centre of Paul's series of refutations in this regard is Galatians 4:1–11, which asserts that only the sons and true heirs of Abraham can render valid worship to God. And this valid worship is explicitly defined as Trinitarian in Galatians 4:6.

Galatians 3–4 is made up of five interwoven sub-sections:

Galatians 3:1–5. Paul appeals to the Galatians' experience of the Spirit as evidence of their salvation without circumcision, and thus, confirming the veracity of his gospel. This also prepares the ground to show in the rest of Galatians 3–4 that the Galatians have already received the blessing of Abraham, and so, having been authenticated as God's sons through incorporation into Christ, they are able to worship God in a valid manner (Jervis 1999:86; Kwon 2004:108–111).

Galatians 3:6–29. Paul uses several Old Testament passages¹⁴ to argue that those who believe his gospel of faith are the true sons and heirs of Abraham. As sons, they inherit the blessing of Abraham, which Paul identifies as the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those who believe (3:14). Similarly, as sons of Abraham, believers, through being united with Christ who is Abraham’s Seed, are thereby also sons of God.¹⁵ Those who seek to be circumcised are conversely depicted as slaves who, by focusing on the Mosaic Law, only inherit the curse of the law (Betz 1979:181–185; Gordon 2009:240–258; Longenecker 1990:110; Schreiner 2010:189).

Galatians 4:1–11. Paul reiterates his previous point on the validation of those of faith as heirs of Abraham by arguing that they have been liberated from the slavery of the Mosaic Law, have received the Spirit promised in the Abrahamic covenant, and so, have been enabled to worship God in a valid manner. In its details, the argument of this subsection, which flows in four logical steps, employs several terminologies related to attitudes and actions of worship.

In *Galatians 4:1–3*, Paul uses an everyday illustration to argue that, before being in Christ, humanity is enslaved (δεδουλωμένοι), in other

¹⁴ These include Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6; Genesis 12:3 and 18:18 in Galatians 3:8; Deuteronomy 27:26 and 28:58 in Galatians 3:10; Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians 3:11; Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12; Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13.

¹⁵ Paul equates υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραάμ (‘sons of Abraham’, Gal 3:7) with υἱοὶ θεοῦ (‘sons of God’, Gal 3:26) by employing a complex exegesis based on resonance of the terminologies (cf. Jervis 1999:86), as well as the idea that Christ is the Seed of Abraham, and so believers who are united with him are his siblings in both respects (Schreiner 2010:256).

words, humanity worships¹⁶ the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ('the elements of the world'). Exactly who or what these στοιχεῖα are is hotly debated by interpreters. Opinions range from the physical elements (e.g. Schweizer 1988:455–468; Thielmann 1989:80–83), the fundamental principles of all religions (e.g. Bundrick 1991:353–364; Matera 1992:149–150), the regulations of the Torah (e.g. Fung 1988:181; Longenecker 1990:165–166), the dominion of the flesh, sin, and death (e.g. Vielhauer 1976:553), the spirits of the planetary systems (e.g. Hong 1993:165), or most likely, the principalities and powers (e.g. Arnold 1996:55–76; Schreiner 2010:268). In any case, Paul compares and contrasts these στοιχεῖα with 'gods' in Galatians 4:8–9. Thus, whichever is the correct view, there is no doubt that Paul characterises life before becoming united with Christ as constituting worship of the στοιχεῖα, 'the elements of the world'.

In *Galatians 4:4–6*, Paul restates his gospel in redemptive-historical and Trinitarian terms, asserting that in Christ, God has now made valid worship of God possible by sending *the Spirit of his Son* to redeem the enslaved so that they worship him in a valid fashion (4:6; cf. Betz, 1979:213). In loving devotion and in the language that Jesus himself used for his Father (Mark 14:36), believers worship by earnestly and joyfully crying aloud to God and calling him Abba Father (Αββα ὁ πατήρ cf. Longenecker 1990:174). This is valid worship. Indeed, as Witherington (2004:291) puts it, this language of worship is 'a relic of the earliest Aramaic Christians' unique manner of addressing God, perhaps, in 'ecstatic utterances' (cf. Dunn 1993:222).

¹⁶ For a recent study of the use of the terminologies of slavery as a metaphor for worship of God, idols, and the Emperor, see Jeffers (2002:123–139). On the sociological background of this concept, see Patterson (1982:68–70).

In *Galatians* 4:7–8, Paul further explains that the Christian’s present existence in Christ is therefore one of valid worship in the sense that he is no more ‘enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods’ (4:8). In the past, the unredeemed did not εἰδότες (‘know’) God. But now, through redemption by the Spirit of God’s Son, they ‘have come to know God, or rather to be known by God’ (4:9). This technical terminology of ‘knowing’ God or ‘being known’ by God is derived from the Old Testament and again describes the nature of valid worship of God (e.g. Gen 18:19; Amos 3:2; Jer 1:5, 9:25–27; cf. Rom 1:18–23; Baugh 2000:183–200; Rosner 2008:207–230). In Jeremiah 9:23–27, for example, knowing that ‘I am the Lord’ is contrasted with the ‘circumcision of the foreskin’, and underlined as the distinctive mark of those who ‘glory’ or ‘boast’ in the Lord. As we shall shortly see, Paul repeats a similar argument in *Philippians* 3 against the Judaizers (cf. Koperski 1996:20–59; Schreiner 2010:277)

Galatians 4:9–11 completes the sub-section by asserting that logically, therefore, submitting to the teachings of the Judaizers would amount to abandoning the valid worship of God, and apostatising to paganism and idolatry. The equation of the celebration of the Jewish calendar to relapsing into paganism in 4:10 again places the argument of the section under the theological rubric of valid worship. Indeed, as pointed out by Betz (1979:217), the word παρατηρεῖσθε (‘you keep watch’) in 4:10 is used in the context of worship, since it describes a ‘typical behaviour of religiously scrupulous people’.

***Galatians* 4:12–20.** Paul directly appeals to the Galatians based on his friendship with them as a way of seeking to persuade them to be restored back to their relationship, and so, to accept his side of the argument.

Galatians 4:21–31. Paul employs an allegory of Sarah and Hagar as a secondary supporting argument to apply further the slavery-sonship antithesis to the dispute between him and the Judaizers with the aim of distancing the Galatians from the Judaizers.

It is evident from this literary structure of Galatians 3–4 that Galatians 4:1–11 is central to Paul's argument. A running theme of Galatians 4:1–11 is that the hallmark of the true heirs of Abraham is their valid worship of God. Specifically, Paul's position was that the true heirs of Abraham validly worship God in a Trinitarian manner. Conversely, people like the Judaizers, who wished to claim sonship of Abraham based on the works of the law, cannot render valid worship to God because their worship is not Trinitarian. This shows that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship was a key issue in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers.

4.2. The forceful assertion of trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6

The rhetorically forceful nature of Paul's assertion of Trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6 further indicates the important role that this doctrine played in his dispute with the Judaizers. There are several reasons for this conclusion. Firstly, Galatians 4:6 represents a logically decisive statement concluding the preceding argument which began in Galatians 3:1. In rhetorical terms, it combines *pathos* with *logos* to establish its point.

In fact, as a conclusion, Galatians 4:6 reiterates the introductory statement in Galatians 3:1–5, that 'the powerful presence of the Spirit marks the Galatians out as members of the people of God' (Schreiner 2010:271). The forcefulness of the conclusion in 4:6 therefore supports the view that Paul wished to use the statement to make a demarcation between him and the Judaizers.

Secondly, the rhythmic nature of the preceding Galatians 4:4–5¹⁷ suggests that Galatians 4:6 is used to demarcate sharply Paul from the Judaizers. The doctrine of Trinitarian worship itself is stated in 4:6 through a simple formula: ‘God has sent *the Spirit of his Son* into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”’ This, in itself, is a rhetorically impressive pithy phrase, especially given that it is the only place in Paul’s letters with such a rendering of the triadic formula (Witherington 2004:290).

However, Betz (1979:205–207), Longenecker (1990:166–170) and Tolmie (2005:149) have also argued extensively that the preceding Galatians 4:4–5 was part of a pre-Pauline confessional which Paul now rephrases, with Galatians 4:6 serving as the inevitable corollary of that confessional. It is difficult to be certain whether this suggestion is correct. All the same, the rhythmic nature of Galatians 4:4–5 indicates that the Trinitarian worship emphasised in the subsequent Galatians 4:6 was a key Pauline emphasis that he wished to make in distinction from his opponents.

Thirdly, the Trinitarian doctrine in Galatians 4:6 is introduced as an inevitable logic of sonship of Abraham with the use of the emphatic phrase *Ὅτι δέ ἐστε υἱοί* (to paraphrase in translation, ‘because it is a fact that you are sons’). This emphatic introduction suggests that Paul wanted to drive home the statement to follow as a rhetorical apex of his argument. Certainly, this introduction means that the Trinitarian doctrine that follows it cannot be regarded as an aside to Paul’s argument. I propose that the reason for this rhetorical forcefulness is because he differed from the Judaizers on that point.

¹⁷ For a recent account of the verbal rhythms in Galatians 4:4–5 see Tolmie (2005:145–156; cf. Lightfoot 1957:168).

Finally, the shifts in the pronouns of the passage, from second person plurals in Galatians 4:1–5, to the first person plural in Galatians 4:6, and then to second person singular in 4:7, are categorical and indicate the importance to which Paul wished the Galatians to take the Trinitarian worship doctrine he was propounding in Galatians 4:6. Betz (1979:211 n.96) is certainly correct in arguing that these changes in the pronouns suggest the presence of diatribe rhetoric against Paul's opponents. In that case, the rhetorical features of Galatians 4:6 indicate a point of difference between Paul and the Judaizers.

4.3. Apostasy to paganism in Galatians 4:7–11

In what, to many interpreters, constitutes an 'astonishing' (Schreiner 2010:278; cf. Garlington 2007:249; Hays 2000:287) statement, Paul submits that the celebration of Jewish religious festivals by the converted Galatians would have amounted to apostatising back into paganism. It would mean turning 'back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits' (4:9). This remarkable warning begs the question: in what way does subscription to works of the Law by the converted Galatians amount to pagan worship?

The answer to this question is found in the theological logic of Galatians 4:1–11. If, as Galatians 4:6 indicates, the only valid worship in the new eschatological era ushered in by Christ is Trinitarian worship, then any other form of so-called worship, which falls short of this Trinitarian worship, must be regarded as idolatrous worship. The categorical choice before the Galatians, therefore, was between continuing in Trinitarian worship, and defecting to the idolatrous worship propounded by the Judaizers.

Indeed, Calvert (1993:222–237) has shown that the argument of Galatians 4:1–11 employs several Old Testament and ancient Jewish

traditions about Abraham which stress the patriarch's rejection of idolatry to receive Yahweh's covenant. Paul's argument in 4:7–11, then, is that abandoning the Abrahamic covenant amounted to returning to the idolatry from which Abraham was redeemed; and, as he has argued, heirs of Abraham validly worship God in a Trinitarian manner. So, abandoning this Trinitarian worship was equivalent to Abraham's heirs returning to their forefather's idolatry. Asserting Trinitarian worship thus constituted a key argument in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers.

4.4. The divinities of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in Galatians

As stated in § 3.1 above, to conclude reliably that in using the triadic God language in Galatians 4:6, Paul was *consciously* employing a Trinitarian doctrine, it must be shown that elsewhere in Galatians, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are underlined as sharing in God's divinity. The fulfilment of this criterion will now be addressed.

4.4.1. The divinity of Jesus in Galatians

There is certainly ample evidence in Galatians to lead to the conclusion that Paul regarded Jesus as sharing in God's divinity. A few examples will suffice. The very first statement of Galatians indisputably distinguishes Jesus from human beings and explicitly associates him with God: 'Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead' (Gal 1:1). The polemical nature of this verse is well recognised. However, also of importance, is the underlying assumption of Jesus' divinity in this verse. Jesus, though human (Gal 4:4–5), is explicitly distinguished from human beings, and closely associated with God in a manner as indicating that he shares in God's divinity (cf. Letham 2004:52).

The greeting of Galatians 1:3 amplifies this close association of Jesus with God when Paul requests for grace and peace from *both* 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' to be bestowed on the Galatians. Indeed, a few verses later, in Galatians 1:6, the grace is said to proceed from Christ alone. The word 'grace' itself occurs on seven occasions in Galatians. On two occasions (1:15 and 2:21), grace proceeds from God alone. On two occasions (1:6 and 6:18), grace proceeds from Christ alone. On one occasion (1:3), it is from both God and Christ, and on two occasions (2:9 and 5:4), it lacks indication of the source, whether from God or from Christ. These data on the source of grace in Galatians indicate a Pauline assumption that Christ shared in the divinity of God.

A similar literary-theological phenomenon occurs in Paul's consistent use of the title 'Lord' for Jesus throughout Galatians (1:3; 1:19; 5:10; 6:14; cf. Hurtado 1993:560–569). Other thought units which closely associate Jesus with God in Galatians are 1:3–4; 2:20–21; 4:4–6; 6:16–18.

Another indication of the divinity of Jesus in Galatians is in relation to Galatians 4:4, which underlines that Jesus was ἐξαπέστειλεν ('sent out') by God when the eschatological time of redemption arrived. The idea that Jesus was 'sent' does not, on its own, naturally indicate his divinity. However, in the immediate context of describing his birth under the Law, it underlines Jesus' pre-existence, an important feature of the New Testament's doctrine of Jesus' divinity (cf. Rom 8:3; Phil 2:5–11; cf. Betz 1979:206–207; Longenecker 1990:167–170; Matera 1992:150; Schreiner 2010:270).

Perhaps the most important statement of the divinity of Jesus is in the Trinitarian formula to Galatians 4:6, in which Paul describes the Spirit of God as the *Spirit of his Son*. This exact phrase πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ

αὐτοῦ is unique in Galatians, even though the description of God’s Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus occurs elsewhere in Paul’s writings (Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19; cf. Acts 16:7).

Fee’s (1994:404) observation on the significance of this description of God’s Spirit as Jesus’ Spirit is therefore apt: ‘besides saying something significant in terms of Christology (it is no small thing that the Spirit of God can so easily also be called the Spirit of Christ), it also says something significant about the Spirit (that the indwelling Spirit, whom believers know as an experienced reality, is the way both the Father and the Son are present in the believer’s life)’. Given these indications in other passages in Galatians that Jesus shared in God’s divinity, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul *consciously* applies a Trinitarian doctrine with the triadic formula of Galatians 4:6.

4.4.2. *The divinity of the Holy Spirit in Galatians*

The case of the divinity of the Holy Spirit in Galatians is less clear-cut. Even so, there are suggestions in the letter that Paul held such a conception. The Spirit is certainly underlined as ἐπιχορηγῶν (‘supplied’) by God, and indeed is described as the agent by whom God works miracles among the Galatians (Gal 3:5; cf. Fee 1994:388–389; Letham 2004:66; Schreiner 2010:186).¹⁸ This idea of the Spirit as an agent of God is, in itself, significant, and indicates a conception in Paul that God’s Spirit shared in God’s nature, fully represents him as his agent, and therefore, shares in his divinity.

¹⁸ Fee (1994:372–376) has argued that though passages such as Galatians 2:2, 2:19–20, and 3:21–22 do not explicitly refer to the Spirit, there are indications that the presence of the Spirit is assumed in the statements of these verses. In that case, these passages also underline the divinity of the Spirit.

A similar idea of God working miracles through the agency of the Spirit underlines Paul's claim in Galatians 4:29 regarding the birth of Isaac. Isaac, Paul points out, was 'born according to the Spirit'. In other words, Isaac's miraculous birth was through the Spirit's activity in the same manner as the Spirit works miracles among the Galatians. Given the consistency with which Galatians 3–4 claims that the true heirs of Abraham are the true sons of God, incorporated into Christ by the Spirit (Gal 4:6), it is not surprising that it is also claimed that Isaac, the legitimate heir of Abraham, was also born by the Spirit. This indicates the conception that the Spirit shared in God's divinity, just as much as Christ does.

Another indication in Galatians that the Spirit shares in the divinity of God is the parallel that Galatians 4:4–6 creates between God sending Jesus his Son, and also sending the Spirit. Significantly, Paul uses the same word, ἐξαπέστειλεν, to describe both commissioning acts of God. If, as argued above, the sending of Jesus indicates his pre-existence, and thus, the idea that he shared in God's divinity, then the same notion applies to the Spirit.

As Beale (2005:10–11) has shown, the Old Testament background to this idea (i.e. the sending of the Messiah and the Spirit) is found in Isaiah 48:16–17, and serves as one of the roots of the doctrine of the Trinity. Its full deployment in Galatians 4:4–6 indicates that Paul *consciously* wished to project that doctrine.

To conclude the present section, there are definite indications in Galatians that Paul held, and consciously expressed, the conception that Jesus and the Spirit shared in God's divinity. Therefore, it is safe to surmise that the triadic statement of Galatians 4:6 expresses a Trinitarian doctrine of worship.

4.5. The trinitarian thought structure of Galatians

One more piece of circumstantial evidence, supporting the notion that Galatians 4:6 explicitly employs a Trinitarian doctrine of worship in Paul’s polemics against the Judaizers, is the apparently Trinitarian thought structure of the whole letter. As figure 1 summarises below (p. 33), and Appendix 2 details (p. 43-45), the relative frequencies of the references to God, Jesus, and the Spirit in Galatians follow an interesting pattern in which references to the Father and the Son dominate earlier parts of Galatians, and references to the Son and the Spirit, the latter parts.

This apparently triadic pattern of distribution of the references to the Godhead is not unique to Galatians. Wainwright (1962:248–259; cf. Letham 2002:52–72) has indeed demonstrated that sections of a number of Paul’s letters, such as Romans 1–8 and 1 Corinthians 1–3, exhibit this ‘Trinitarian thought structure’ by following an outline which first addresses theological issues related to the Father, followed by those related to the Son and then those related to the Spirit.

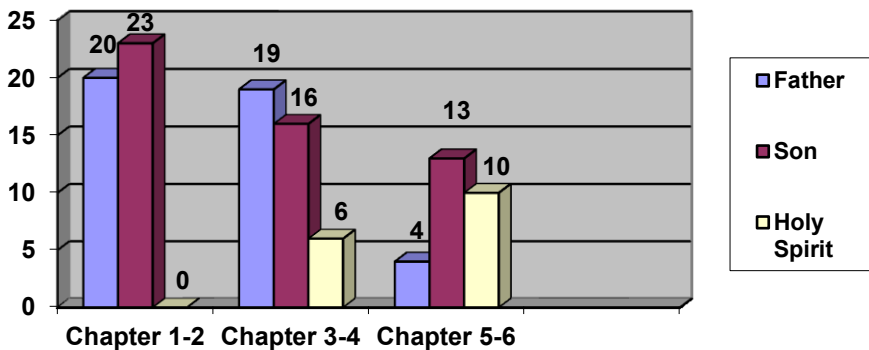


Fig 1: Distribution pattern of references to the Godhead in Galatians

Galatians is, however, distinctive in the sense that the distribution of the frequency of references to the Godhead involves the whole of the letter and not sections of it. Admittedly, as a letter, Galatians is shorter than, say, Romans or 1 Corinthians. Even so, this triadic pattern is interesting and should not be dismissed as an irrelevant coincidence.

On its own, this triadic pattern in Galatians does not necessarily indicate a conscious Trinitarian concept enveloping the whole of the letter. However, it seems to indicate a Trinitarian mind-set of Paul the writer. And this, in turn, supports the proposition that Galatians 4:6, since it is the most condensed expression of the triadic thought in Galatians, serves as the fulcrum to the Trinitarian references of Galatians. Martyn (1997:388) is certainly right in this regard in positing that Galatians 4:6 is 'the theological centre of the entire letter'. In that case, the thesis, that Paul consciously expounds the doctrine of Trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6 should be upheld. Certainly, the indication is that the doctrine was an important point of difference between Paul and the Judaizers.

4.6. Summary: trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6 and Paul's dispute with the Judaizers

Several pieces of evidence have been advanced in support of the thesis that Paul consciously expresses the doctrine of Trinitarian worship in Galatians 4:6, and that this doctrine was one of the issues at stake in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers. Moreover, it was this element of the dispute which lies behind Paul's insistence that adopting the teaching of the Judaizers would amount to apostatising to paganism.

The pieces of evidence advanced include the fact that (a) Galatians 4:1–11 characterises valid worship by Abraham's true heirs as Trinitarian, (b) the forceful rhetorical features of Galatians 4:4–6, suggesting the

likelihood that a diatribe against opponents occurs in that passage, and (c) the dramatic contention that adopting the teachings of the Judaizers would amount to invalid worship and idolatry in particular. I shall now demonstrate that this proposal is consistently reproduced in Paul's polemic against the Judaizers in Philippians 3.

5. Trinitarian Worship in Philippians 3:3 and the Dispute with the Judaizers

In a rhetorically charged triple invective in Philippians 3:2, Paul warns the Philippians to 'Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh'. Majority of interpreters (e.g. Bockmeuhl 1997:182–185; DeSilva 1995:27–54; Fee 1999:131; O'Brien 1991:354–357; Silva 2005:147; Thurston and Ryan 2009:119) agree that the opponents against whom Paul directs this invective were the Judaizers, even though the exact situation of these opponents, whether in Philippi, Rome, or elsewhere is uncertain and debated.

Whatever their situation was, Paul's reaction to these opponents is unambiguous. He counters his own triple attack of the Judaizers with an equally emphatic triple counterclaim in Philippians 3:3, to wit that, 'it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus [having] no confidence in the flesh'. Thus, Philippians 3:2–3 uses a very precise language to characterise the dispute between Paul and the Judaizers by placing an ironic description of the Judaizers in direct opposition to Paul's self-characterisation.

In what follows, I advance five pieces of argument to demonstrate that Philippians 3:3 confirms the thesis that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship was an important element in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers.

5.1. Paul distinguishes valid from invalid worship in Philippians 3:3

In Philippians 3:3, Paul employs a number of technical terminologies of worship to characterise the dispute and to defend his own position. These indicate that a key element of the dispute was the definition of what constituted valid worship.

Firstly, with a biting play on words, Paul characterises the Judaizers' circumcision as *κατατομήν*, ('mutilation of the flesh'). This ironic characterisation of circumcision, equates it to the kind of self-mutilation which was associated with the pagan rites condemned by passages such as Leviticus 19:28, Deuteronomy 14:1, Isaiah 15:2 and 1 Kings 18:28 (cf. O'Brien 1991:357; Witherington III 2011:190). In other words, Paul equated the rites demanded by the Judaizers as equivalent in nature to the pagan worship practices. This exactly mirrors his argument in Galatians 4:7–11, and characterises the worship of the Judaizers as invalid and idolatrous.

Secondly, Paul is emphatic that, unlike the Judaizers, he, and evidently his team members and the Philippians, *λατρεύοντες* ('worship', Phil 3:3b) in the Spirit of God. Up until Paul's time, *λατρεύοντες* was only used to describe 'the carrying out of religious duties, especially of a cultic nature' (BAGD). Fee (1994:752) is therefore correct in pointing out that *λατρεύοντες* in Philippians 3:3 describes 'service rendered to God as a form of devotion to Him'. In other words, it describes valid worship.

Thirdly, *καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*, ('glory in Christ Jesus', Phil 3:3c) is a typical terminology of worship. In the LXX, *καυχώμενοι* is used in passages such as Jeremiah 9:23–26 and Deuteronomy 10:21 to describe joyful praise and thanksgiving to God (cf. Bockmeuhl

1997:193). Paul's emphasis, then, is that true believers glory or worship in Jesus Christ, by God's Spirit, and not in the flesh. In other words, their worship was validly Trinitarian. The Judaizers, in contrast, did not worship God in the valid manner.

Fourthly, and as in the case of Galatians 4:1–11, Paul later employs other terminologies of worship, such as 'knowing' Christ (Phil 3:8–11) and, in the negative sense, δόξα ('glory', Phil 3:19) to describe and delineate the nature of Christian existence in positive and negative terms. Given the repeated contrasts throughout the chapter, it is clear that Paul wished to distinguish valid from invalid worship in Philippians 3:2–3 (cf. O'Brien 1991:454; Witherington III 2009:206).

Therefore, we must conclude that, as with Galatians 4:6, the polemic against the Judaizers in Philippians 3:3 is expressed within the context of distinguishing valid worship from invalid worship. According to Philippians 3:3, for worship to be valid, it must be Trinitarian.

5.2. Triple denial of invalid worship in Philippians 3:2–3

The assertion of Trinitarian worship in Philippians 3:2–3 is arranged and presented as a vigorous denial of the invalid worship of the Judaizers. In this arrangement, the triple alliterative warnings against the Judaizers in Philippians 3:2 is matched by an equally arresting triple rebuttal in Philippians 3:3. Fowl (2005:147) is therefore likely correct in positing that in the triple alliterative warnings of Philippians 3:2, Paul is 'using language that Judaizers might have used about themselves and turning it on its head.'

Witherington III (2011:189) describes the genre of this rhetorical device as an example of ancient 'rhetorical amplification' and '*synkrisis*'. The repeated contrasts throughout the chapter indeed add to the rhetorical

effects of refuting and denying the invalid worship of the Judaizers (cf. Bockmeuhl 1997:182; cf. Thurston and Ryan 2009:115). In that case, Paul's equally triple response sharply demarcates his differences with the Judaizers in stark terms.

This triple denial of the triple position of the Judaizers in Philippians 3:2–3 therefore indicates that the question of Trinitarian worship was important in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers. At least, and as Heil (2010:118; cf. Silva 2005:148–149) rightly points out, the potent presentation of Paul's argument is designed to 'jolt' the audience. The most likely reason for this is that the Trinitarian worship was a direct cause of disagreement with the Judaizers.

5.3. Rhetorical nature of the assertion of Trinitarian worship in Philippians 3:3

Paul's retort against the Judaizers in Philippians 3:3 basically emphasises that the true people of God, the 'we who are the circumcision', offer Trinitarian worship to God (Fee 1995:302; Silva 2005:149; Wainwright 1962:243). They 'worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus'. This assertion is made in a rhetorically and acoustically effective manner that virtually matches the opposite position of the Judaizers in Philippians 3:2 (cf. Bockmeuhl 1997:184). The rhetorical design of the verse, then, appears to support the thesis that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship was an important element in the dispute.

5.4. The description of the Judaizers as idolatrous in Philippians 3:18–19

In Philippians 3:18–19, Paul further characterises a group of opponents as 'enemies of the cross of Christ ... their end is destruction; their god

is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things'. It is widely disputed among interpreters whether these opponents were the same as those in Philippians 3:2–3, namely, the Judaizers, or a different group. However, while not all interpreters agree, the view that the opponents described in Philippians 3:18–19 were the Judaizers appears to be the most convincing (Heil 2010:135–136; Moiser 1997:365–366; O'Brien 1991:456; Rosner 2007:94–98; Silva 2005:181).¹⁹

If this view is correct, Paul's emphasis, that the god of the Judaizers was their 'belly', must be taken as accusation that their worship, which overly focuses on eating the correct food, was idolatrous, and so, invalid. The parallel to this description in Romans 16:18, that 'such people do not δουλεύουσιν ('serve') our Lord Christ, but their own appetites' supports the view that Paul was characterising the Judaizers' worship as idolatrous (cf. O'Brien 1991:455–456; Witherington III 2011:194). As with Galatians 4:1–11, Paul could make such a claim in Philippians 3:19 exactly because the worship engendered by the Judaizers was not Trinitarian worship.

5.5. The Divinities of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in Philippians

There are several pieces of evidence in other sections of Philippians supporting the view that the triadic reference in Philippians 3:3 represents a conscious expression of Trinitarian doctrine by Paul.

¹⁹ Important in this judgment are (a) Paul's consistent application of the message of the cross in his polemics against the Judaizers elsewhere, such as 1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 3:1; 5:11; 6:12–13, (b) the use of κοιλία ('belly') in passages such as Mark 7:19 and Romans 16:18 to represent Jewish scruples about food laws, (c) the double *entendre* use of αἰσχρόνη ('shame') for circumcision and shamefulness. For an alternative view, see Fee (1999:161–164).

Several passages, such as Philippians 1:2, 1:8, 1:11, 2:11, 3:9, 3:14, 4:7, and 4:19, associate Jesus with God in such a manner as to indicate that Jesus shares in God's divinity (cf. Letham 2002:40–51; Wainwright 1962:187–188). Similarly, Philippians 2:5–7 underscores the pre-existence and equality of Jesus with God before his incarnation. Indeed, as Fee (1999:84) has shown, Paul also expresses a Trinitarian pattern in Philippians 2:1, just as he does in Philippians 3:3.

The Holy Spirit is also associated with God in Philippians in a manner as to indicate his sharing in God's divinity. He is identified as Spirit of Christ (Phil 1:19) as well as Spirit of God (Phil 3:3). Similarly, in Philippians 2:1, he is associated with Jesus and God in a triadic pattern which resonates with the Trinitarian grace of 2 Corinthians 13:14 (cf. Asumang 2012:26–27). Consequently, it may be concluded that Paul *consciously* expressed the idea of Trinitarian worship in Philippians 3:3 in his rebuttal of the Judaizers.

6. Conclusion and Implications of Findings

In conclusion, the thesis, that Trinitarian worship played a secondary role in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers, has been demonstrated and defended as evident in both Galatians 4:6 and Philippians 3:3. This thesis has some implications of historical, theological, and contemporary pastoral importance.

Firstly, the fact that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship was one of the secondary issues at stake in Paul's dispute with the Judaizers somewhat illuminates aspects of the historical background of the 'parting of the ways' between Judaism and Christianity. Clearly, the evidence marshalled above does not warrant a conclusion that the Judaizers

totally rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, as it was conceptualized in New Testament times.

Yet, given that Paul consistently asserts the doctrine of Trinitarian worship in contrast to the Judaizers' emphases, it is reasonable to surmise that the Judaizers held a defective notion of the doctrine. Certainly, the above thesis underscores the fact that the doctrine of Trinitarian worship played an important role in the fissure between Judaism and Christianity. Put another way, the vehemence with which Paul asserted the doctrine of Trinitarian worship highlights it as a key defining feature of biblical Christianity.

Secondly, the above thesis casts significant doubt on the prudence of the recent trend within influential circles of biblical scholarship which seeks to rehabilitate the 'voiceless Judaizers'. As has been shown, Paul regarded the doctrine of Trinitarian worship as a 'red line' which divided Christianity from all other forms of worship. Interpreters, who wish to deny that the Judaizers were on the wrong side of the argument, may well be offering an apology for a religion that is not Christian.²⁰

Thirdly, the above thesis makes a methodological contribution to research on the Trinity in the New Testament. It is suggested that the two criteria for identifying Trinitarian references in the New Testament may be useful in other studies. As has been shown, these criteria provide transparent bases for studying and assessing the presence of the doctrine, and delineating how the inspired authors consciously

²⁰ It seems to me that this trend has been fuelled by the postmodern tendency to resist uncritically 'dominant' voices and support 'the voiceless'. This postcolonial approach to biblical scholarship may well have its uses in some cases; but, as shown in the present essay, it can lead to wrongly skewing biblical interpretation. For a gentler critique of this particular trend in relation to the Judaizers, see Witherington III (2011:232).

employed the doctrine to address the socio-historical and theological issues in their churches.

Finally, there is an important pastoral implication of the above proposal, given that the thesis hopefully provides a critique of contemporary Christian worship. Among conservative churches, it is not uncommon to find imbalances in the various emphases on the three persons of the Trinity. Some conservative churches, especially those of older denominations, may overly focus on the agency of Christ in worship to the neglect of the work of the Spirit who mediates the presence of God in Christian worship. Others, such as the newer conservative Charismatic churches, may focus on the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in worship with apparent neglect of the agency of Christ and the Father to whom the worship is directed.

This thesis has shown that both scenarios deviate from valid Christian worship and has significant implications. Paul vehemently underlines any worship that is short of Trinitarian as idolatrous worship. That must be a sobering thought for all Christians today.

Appendix 1: Triadic references to the Trinity in Paul's Letters

Passage	Application of triadic conception
Rom 1:1–4	The gospel is Trinitarian
Rom 5:1–8	Post-justification ethical conduct is Trinitarian
Rom 8:1–4	Sanctification is Trinitarian
Rom 8:9	Sanctification is Trinitarian
Rom 8:11	Assurance of salvation is Trinitarian
Rom 8:15–17	Trinitarian worship (prayer)
Rom 14:17–18	Trinitarian worship (fellowship)
Rom 15:12–13	Trinitarian worship (benediction)
Rom 15:15–16	Paul's priestly calling is Trinitarian
Rom 15:18–19	Paul's ministry achievement is Trinitarian
Rom 15:30	Prayer request is stated in Trinitarian terms
1 Cor 2:6-16	Christian wisdom is Trinitarian
1 Cor 3:16–23	Trinity and ecclesiology
1 Cor 6:11	Sanctification is Trinitarian
1 Cor 6:19–20	Ecclesiology is Trinitarian
1 Cor 12:1–3	Trinitarian worship (Christian confession)
1 Cor 12:4–6	The spiritual gifts are Trinitarian
2 Cor 1:21–22	The Trinitarian God's acquisition of us for his own
2 Cor 3:3	The Corinthians are Trinitarian
2 Cor 3:4–6	Trinitarian confirmation of Paul's ministry
2 Cor 3:17–4:1	Sanctification is Trinitarian
2 Cor 5:5–7	Christian migrant existence is Trinitarian
2 Cor 13:14	Trinitarian worship (benediction)
Gal 3:1–6	Christian existence is Trinitarian
Gal 3:10–14	Justification is Trinitarian

Gal 4:4-6	Trinitarian worship (prayer)
Gal 5:21-25	Sanctification is Trinitarian
Eph 1:13	Conversion is Trinitarian
Eph 1:17	Trinitarian worship (prayer)
Eph 2:18	Trinitarian worship (prayer)
Eph 2:22	The church's Trinitarian existence
Eph 3:14-21	Trinitarian worship (prayer)
Eph 4:4-6	Ecclesiology is Trinitarian
Eph 5:18-21	Trinitarian worship (corporate)
Eph 6:10-18	Spiritual armour is Trinitarian
Phil 2:1	Christian fellowship is Trinitarian
Phil 3:3	Trinitarian worship (general statement of Christian worship)
Col 1:7-9	Christian growth is Trinitarian
1 Thess 1:4-6	Conversion is Trinitarian
2 Thess 2:13	Conversion is Trinitarian
1 Tim 3:15-16	Christian confession is Trinitarian
Titus 3:4-6	Conversion is Trinitarian

Appendix 2: Distribution of references to the Godhead in Galatians

Chapter	Father/God	Son/Jesus/Christ/Lord	Spirit
Chapter 1	God:1, 3, 4, 10, 13, 15, 20, 24 Father: 1, 3, 4 He: Him: 16 His: 15, 16	Son: 16 Jesus Christ: 1, 3, 12 Christ: 6, 7, 10, 22 He: 4 Him: 1, 6 Lord: 19	
	15	12	0
Chapter 2	God: 6, 17, 19, 20, 21	Son: 20 Jesus Christ: 4, 16a, 16b Christ:16, 17a, 17b, 20a, 20b, 21 He: 8	
	5	11	0
Chapter 3	God:6, 8, 11, 17, 18, 20, 21, 26 He: 5a, 5b, 16	Son: Jesus Christ: 1, 14, 22, 26, 28 Christ: 13, 16, 17, 24, 27a, 27b, 29	2, 3, 5, 14
	11	12	4
Chapter 4	God: 4, 7, 8, 9, 9, 14 Father: 6 He: Him: His: 4	Son: 4, 6 Jesus Christ:14 Christ: 19,	6, 29
	8	4	2
Chapter 5	God: 21	Son: Jesus Christ: 6 Christ: 1, 2, 4, 24 Him: 8 Lord: 10	5, 16, 17a, 17b, 18, 22, 25a, 25b

	1	7	8
Chapter 6	God: 7, 14, 16	Son: Jesus Christ: 14, 15, 17, 18 Christ: 2, 12	8a, 8b
	3	6	2

Reference List

- Arnold CE 1996. Returning to the domain of the powers: 'Stoicheia' as evil spirits in Galatians 4:3, 9. *Novum Testamentum* 38(1):55–76.
- Asumang A 2012. Modelling the gospel in joyful partnership: exemplars and the uniting theme of Philippians. *Conspectus* 13:1–50.
- _____ 2010. *The formation of the disciples as agents of divine power and revelation: a comparative study of the Gospels of Mark and John*. PhD dissertation, South African Theological Seminary. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Bailey BJL and Van der Lyle D 1992. *Literary forms in the New Testament: a handbook*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox.
- Barclay JM 1996. *Jews in the Mediterranean diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Barclay JM 2002. Mirror-reading a polemical letter: Galatians as a test case . In M Nanos, *The Galatians debate: contemporary issues in rhetorical and historical interpretation*, 367–382. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Barnett PW 1984. Opposition in Corinth. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22:3–17.
- Barrett GK 1976. The allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the argument of Galatians. In J Friedrich, W Pöhlmann, and P Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernest Kasemann zum 70:1–16*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

- Bauckham R 1998. *God crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Baugh SM 2000. The meaning of foreknowledge. In TR Schreiner and BA Ware (eds.), *Still sovereign*, 183–200. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Beale GK 2005. The Old Testament background of Paul's reference to 'the fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians 5:22. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15:1–38.
- Betz HD 1979. *Galatians: a commentary on Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Bird M 2006. Justification as forensic declaration and covenant embership: a via media between Reformed and Revisionist readings of Paul. *Tyndale Bulletin* 57(1):109–130.
- _____ 2005. When the dust finally settles: coming to a post-new perspective perspective. *Criswell Theological Review* 2(2):57–69.
- Black CC 2010. Trinity and exegesis. *Pro Ecclesia* 19(2):151–180.
- Bockmuehl M 1997. *Epistle to the Philippians*. London: A & C Black.
- Boyarin D 1994. *A radical Jew: Paul and the politics of identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bundrick D 1991. Ta stoicheia tou kosmou (Gal. 4:3). *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34:353–364.
- Calvert N 1993. Abraham and idolatry: Paul's comparison of obedience to the Law with idolatry in Galatians 4:1–10. In CA Sanders, *Paul and the scriptures of Israel*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Sup 83:222–237. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Campbell WS 2006. *Paul and the creation of Christian identity*. LNTS Series. London: T & T Clark.
- Canales IJ 1985. Paul's accusers in Romans 3:8 and 6:1. *Evangelical Quarterly* 57:237–245.
- Carson DA, O'Brien PT, and Seifrid MA (eds.) 2004. *Justification and variegated nomism volume II: The paradoxes of Paul*, 2:181. Mohr Siebeck.

- Congdon DW 2008. The Trinitarian shape of pistis: a theological exegesis of Galatians. *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2(2):231–258.
- Cosgrove CH 1988. *The cross and the Spirit: a study in the argument and theology of Galatians*. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Crownfield FR 1945. The ingular problem of the dual Galatians. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64(4):491–500.
- DeSilva DA 1995. No confidence in the flesh: the meaning and function of Philippians 3:2–21. *Trinity Journal* 15(1):27–54.
- Dunn JD 2008. *The new perspective on Paul*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 1993. *The theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____ 1990. *Jesus, Paul and the Law: studies in Mark and Galatians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- _____ 1983. The new perspective on Paul. *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65:95–122.
- Edgar B 2004. *The message of the Trinity: life in God*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Elmer IJ 2009. Paul, Jerusalem and the Judaisers: the Galatian crisis in its broadest historical context. *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (2)258. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Erickson M (2000). *Making sense of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Esler P 1998. *Galatians: New Testament readings*. Routledge: London.
- Fee GD 2010. Who are Abraham's true children? The role of Abraham in Pauline argumentation. In SA Hunt (ed.), *Perspectives on our father Abraham: essays in honor of Marvin R. Wilson*, 126–137. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 1999. *Philippians*. IVP New Testament commentary series. Downers Grove: IVP.
- _____ 1995. *Paul's letter to the Philippians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- _____ 1994. *God's empowering presence: the Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Fowl S 2005. *Philippians*. Two horizons New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Fredriksen P 2010. Judaizing the nations: the ritual demands of Paul's gospel. *New Testament Studies* 56:232–252.
- Fung RY 1988. *The epistle to the Galatians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Gager JG 2000. *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garlington D 2007. *An exposition of Galatians: a reading from the new perspective*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
- Gordon DT 2009. Abraham and Sinai Contrasted in Galatians 3:6–14. In JV Bryan Estelle, *The Law is not faith: essays on works and grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, 240–258. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed.
- Grieb AK 2005. People of God, Body of Christ, Koinonia of the Spirit: the role of ethical ecclesiology in Paul's 'Trinitarian' language. *Anglican Theological Review* 87(2):225–252.
- Gupta NK 2012. Mirror-reading moral issues in Paul's letters. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34:361–381.
- Hays R 2002. *The faith of Jesus Christ: the narrative sub-structure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 2000. The letter to the Galatians: introduction, commentary, and reflections. *The new interpreter's Bible* (vol. II). Nashville: Abingdon.
- Heil JP 2010. *Let us rejoice in being conformed to Christ*. Atlanta: SBL.
- Holsteen ND 2011. The Trinity in the Book of Hebrews. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:334–346.
- Hong I-G 1993. *The law in Galatians*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 81. Sheffield: Academic Press.

- Humphreys F 2006. The revelation of the Trinity. *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33(3):285–303.
- Hurtado LW 2003. *Lord Jesus Christ: devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 1993. Lord. In G Hawthorne, *Dictionary of Paul and his letters*, 560–569. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Jeffers JS 2002. Slaves of God: the impact of the cult of the Roman Emperor on Paul's use of the language of power relations. *Fides et Historia* 34(1):123–139.
- Jenson RW 2002. The Bible and the Trinity. *Pro Ecclesia* 11(3):329–339.
- Jervis LA 1999. *Galatians*. New international biblical commentary. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Kern PH 2011. The cultural context of Paul's gospel: the cross and suffering in Galatians. *Reformed Theological Review* 70(2):135–154.
- Kim S 2002. *Paul and the new erspective: second thoughts on the origin of Paul's gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kirk JR 2006. The sufficiency of the cross (II): the law, the cross and justification. *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 24(2):133–154.
- Koperski V 1996. *The knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: the high christology of Philippians 3:7–11*. Contributions to biblical exegesis and theology 16. Kampen: Kok Pharos.
- Kostenberger A and Swain S 2008. *Father, Son and Spirit: the Trinity and John's Gospel*. New studies in biblical theology. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Kwon Y-G 2004. *Eschatology in Galatians: rethinking Paul's response to the crisis in Galatia*. WUNT 2/183. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- La Due WJ 2003. *The Trinity: guide to the Trinity*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International.

- Laato T 1995. *Paul and Judaism: an anthropological approach*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Lea TD 1994. Unscrambling the Judaizers: who were Paul's opponents? *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 37(1):23–29.
- Letham R 2004. *The Holy Trinity: in scripture, history, theology and worship*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing.
- _____ 2002. Ternary patterns in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 13:57–69.
- Lightfoot JB 1957. *The epistle of St Paul to the Galatians with introductions, notes and dissertations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Longenecker BW 1998. *The triumph of Abraham's God: the transformation of identity in Galatians*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Longenecker RN 1990. *Galatians*. Word biblical commentary. Dallas: Word.
- Luter AB Jr. 1988. 'Worship' as service: the New Testament usage of *latreuō*. *Criswell Theological Review* 2(2):335–344.
- Lutgers W 1919. *Gesetz und Geist: eine untersuchung zur vorgeschichte des Galaterbriefes*. Gutersloh: Bertelsmann.
- Lyons G 1985. *Pauline autobiography: toward a new understanding*. Society of biblical literature dissertation series. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Martin RP 1982. *The worship of God: some theological, pastoral and practical reflections*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 1987. The opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: an old issue revisited. In GH Betz, *Tradition and interpretation in the New Testament: essays in honour of E. Earle Ellist on his 60th Birthday*, 279–289. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Martyn JL 1997. *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*. Anchor Bible commentary series. New York: Doubleday.
- Matera F 1992. *Galatians*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press.

- McGrath A 1988. *Understanding the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Moiser J 1997. The meaning of Koila in Philippians 3:19. *Expository Times* 108:365–366.
- Morgado JJ 1994. Paul in Jerusalem: a comparison of his visits in Acts and Galatians. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37(1):55–68.
- Murphy-O'Connor J 1986. Pneumatikoi and Judaizers in 2 Corinthians 2:14–4:6. *Australian Biblical Review* 34:42–58.
- Nanos MD 2010. Galatians. In DE Aune, *The Blackwell companion to the New Testament*, 455–474. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- _____ 2000. The inter and intra Jewish political context of Paul's letter to the Galatians. In RA Horsley, *Paul and politics: ekklesia, Israel, imperium, interpretation: Essays in honour of Krister Stendahl*, 146–159. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International.
- O'Brien PT 1991. *The epistle to the Philippians*. New international Greek testament commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Patterson O 1982. *Slavery and social death: a comparative study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Perkins P 2001. *Abraham's divided children: Galatians and the politics of faith*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International.
- Phan PC 2011. *The Cambridge companion to the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Räsänen H 1986. *Paul and the Law*. WUNT 29 (2nd ed.). Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck.
- Ratke D 2012. *The new perspective on Paul: perennial questions and contemporary challenges*. New York: Kirk House Publishers.
- Rhoads DM 2004. Children of Abraham, children of God: metaphorical kinship in Paul's letter to the Galatians. *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31(4):282–297.
- Ropes JH 1929. *The singular problem of the epistle to the Galatians*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Rosner B 2008. 'Known by God': the meaning and value of a neglected biblical concept. *Tyndale Bulletin* 59:207–230.
- _____ 2007. *Greed as idolatry: the origin and meaning of a Pauline metaphor*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Rowe CK 2003. Luke and the Trinity: an essay in ecclesial biblical theology. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56:1–26.
- Russell W 1990. Who were Paul's opponents in Galatia? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:329–350.
- Sanders EP 1977. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: a comparison in patterns of religion*. London: SCM.
- Scaer DP 2003. The doctrine of the Trinity in biblical perspective. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67(3–4):323–334.
- Schmithals W 1972. *Paul and the Gnostics*. Translated by J Steely. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Schreiner TR 2010. *Galatians*. Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- _____ 2009. An old perspective on the new perspective. *Concordia Journal* 35(2):140–155.
- Schweizer E 1988. Slaves of the elements and worshipers of angels: Gal. 4:3, 9 and Col. 2:8, 18, 20. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107:455–468.
- Schwöbel C 1995. Christology and Trinitarian thought. In C Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian theology today: essays on divine being and Act*, 127. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Segler F and Bradley R 2006. *Christian worship: its theology and practice*. New York: B & H Academic.
- Seifrid M 1994. Blind alleys in the controversy over the Paul of history. *Tyndale Bulletin* 45:73–95.
- Shum S-L 2008. 'Present your bodies as a living sacrifice...': an investigation of Paul's view on worship with reference to Romans 12:1–15:13. *Hill Road* 11(1):35–53.

- Silva M 2005. *Philippians*. Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Stuhlmacher P 2001. *Revisiting Paul's doctrine of justification: a challenge to the new erspective*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Sumney JL 1993. Those who 'pass Judgement': the identity of the opponents in Colossians. *Biblica* 74(3):366–388.
- Thielmann F 1989. *From plight to solution*. SupNovT 61. Leiden: Brill.
- Thompson MB 2002. *The new perspective on Paul*. Cambridge: Grove.
- _____ 1997. Romans 12:1–2 and Paul's vision for worship. In MB Thompson, *A vision for the church: studies in early Christian ecclesiology*, 121–132. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Thurston BB and Ryan JM 2009. *Philippians and Philemon*. Sacra Pagina commentary series. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Tolmie DF 2005. *Persuading the Galatians: a text-centred rhetorical analysis of a Pauline letter*. WUNT 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Treier DJ and Lauber D 2009. *Trinitarian theology for the church: scripture, community, worship*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Tyson JB 1968. Paul's opponents in Galatia. *Novum Testamentum* 10(4):241–254.
- Vielhauer P 1976. Gesetzesdienst und stoicheiadienst im Galaterbrief. In J Friedrich and PW Pohlmann, *Rechtfertigung: festschrift für Ernst Kdsemann zum 70. Geburtstag*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Wainwright AW 1962. *The Trinity in the New Testament*. London: SPCK.
- Wainwright E 2011. Like a finger pointing to the moon: exploring the Trinity in the New Testament. In PC Phan, *The Cambridge companion to the Trinity*, 33–47. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wainwright G, Tucker K, and Westfield S 2006. *Oxford history of Christian worship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Warfield BB 1991. The biblical doctrine of the Trinity. In BB Warfield, *Biblical doctrines*, 152–155. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Watson F 2007. *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: beyond the new perspective*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 1999. Trinity and community: a reading of John 17. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1(2):168–184.
- Westerholm S 2003. *Perspectives old and new on Paul: the “Lutheran” Paul and his critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Williams SK 1987. Justification and the Spirit in Galatians. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29:91–100.
- Wilson TA 2006. The leading of the Spirit and the curse of the Law: reassessing Paul’s response to the Galatian crisis. *Tyndale Bulletin* 57(1):157–160.
- Witherington III B 2011. *Paul’s letter to the Philippians: a socio-rhetorical commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 2004. *Grace in Galatia: a commentary on Paul’s letter to the Galatians*. New York: T & T Clark.
- Wright N 2005. *Paul: in fresh perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Wright NT 1997. *What St. Paul really said: was Paul of Tarsus the real founder of Christianity?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Yeago DS 1994. The New Testament and Nicene dogma: a contribution to the recovery of theological exegesis. *Pro Ecclesia* 3:152–164.

Stage Development Theory and the Use of Elementary Exegesis in Bible Teaching to Children: A Child-Focused and Bible-Orientated Pedagogical Approach

Robert Brodie¹

Abstract

This paper advocates the use of a child-focused and Bible-orientated stage development approach to the teaching of the Bible to children. Piaget's theories on the cognitive development of children and the adaptation of those theories to religious education by Goldman and others provide the overall framework for an evaluation of aspects of a presentation of a Bible story compiled from assignments submitted by South African theological students. The evaluation identifies several shortcomings in the presentation. The article then considers two major difficulties in teaching the Bible to children before proposing how the shortcomings in the students' presentation can be addressed.

Introduction

This paper addresses the issue of how to assist teachers of the Bible who are untrained pedagogically and theologically to prepare and

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

present Bible material in a manner that is faithful to the meaning and message of the passage, and yet, is understandable and relevant to children. In view of the current renewal of interest in Child Theology, the issue is relevant and timely. However, it should be emphasised at the outset that the theological and philosophical approach advocated in this paper is one that fully recognises the Bible as the inspired Word of God, rather than adopting an anthropocentric pedagogical approach. In the context of this paper, the approach advocated may be termed *child-focused* and *Bible-orientated* in order to distinguish it from classical child-centred pedagogy.

The cognitive development theories ('stage' theories) of Piaget, Goldman *et al.* are discussed. Stage development theory is then utilised to critique the presentation of aspects of a Bible story compiled from assignments submitted by South African distance education theological students. Two major difficulties in teaching the Bible receive attention. The paper ends with suggestions as to how theologically and educationally untrained Bible teachers can improve the effectiveness of their teaching of the Bible to children.

1. Goldman's Adaption of Piaget's 'Cognitive Development Phases' to Religious Education

Jean Piaget, the Swiss biologist, philosopher, psychologist, and educationist, is regarded as one of the most important child development researchers of modern times (Hamachek 1979:83; Munari 1994:311). Flowing from his intensive clinical and empirical investigations, he isolated four distinct stages in the intellectual development of children. These four cognitive development stages are the sensorimotor stage (from birth to about two years of age), the preoccupation stage (two to seven years old), the concrete operational

stage (seven to about ten or eleven years), and the formal operations stage (about twelve years and older) (Mwamwenda, in Summers and Waddington 1996:97–101; Piaget and Inhelder 1972; Phillips n.d.:11). In England, Ronald Goldman (1964) utilised Piaget’s model to investigate the relationship between cognitive and religious development (Roux, in Summers and Waddington 1996:110–111). His ground-breaking findings exerted considerable influence on the theory and practice of religious education in Britain, Europe, and the U.S.A. Goldman, and others, such as Harold Loukes (1961) and Edwin Cox (1966), identified the inadequate presentation of biblical material as a major weakness in the Bible-centred religious education prevalent in British schools during the 1960s and 1970s. The researchers discovered, among other things, that children remembered little of what they had been taught, but, more seriously, they often had distorted understandings of what they did remember (Holm 1976:1). There was a strong critical response to Goldman from, among others, Hyde (1968), Francis (1976) and Murphy (1980) before McGrady (1994) strengthened the growing belief that Goldman’s research had not taken sufficient account of the metaphorical and operational aspects of religious thinking (Thomson 2009:2; Worsley 2004:203–204). Donaldson (1978) added to the existing criticisms of Piaget’s overall theory, postulating that Piaget had given insufficient weight to the developmental role of language, and that the rigid application of the developmental stages discouraged some religious educators from intellectually ‘stretching’ gifted and talented children (Worsley 2010:116). However, the broad assumptions of Goldman’s Piagetian developmental perspective have continued to enjoy wide acceptance in Sunday schools and in other religious education circles (Worsley 2004:203–204). James Fowler, for example, constructed his theories of the stages of human religious development on a Piagetian foundation. Fowler is regarded as a leading exponent of the ‘stage’ theory in the

development of faith in children (Roux, in Summers and Waddington 1996:113). Kohlberg (1969) and Kohlberg and Turiel (1971) attempted to adapt cognitive stage theory to moral development (Gordon 1975:204).

As Wood put it, while the theories of Piaget have undergone modification in the light of more recent experimental and observational work, they continue to be foundational to our understanding of how human beings develop and function (1981:70). Bidell and Fischer draw attention to the long-standing debate about 'age-stage' development theories, but comment that large-scale cognitive development from pre-concrete to concrete, and then to abstract thinking, has been frequently replicated and that such research has generally borne out Piaget's conclusions about the order of the stages and the approximate age Piaget assigned to each stage. However, research now suggests that there is more individual variation in cognitive development than Piaget's theory posits (Bidell and Fischer 1992:115).

The assumption in this article is that, notwithstanding the disagreement over details such as the fundamental characteristics of each stage, the general tenets of stage development theory are valid and applicable to religious education. The widely-accepted general didactic principle of proceeding from the concrete to the abstract (Duminy 1977:91) is in harmony with this assumption.

Based on the evidence the writer has gleaned from grading thousands of theological assignments at undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels over twenty-seven years, the issue of the unsatisfactory teaching of the Bible appears to be an on-going problem in South Africa. The scientific verification of this hypothesis awaits a properly-constituted academic investigation. In the absence of verifiable scientific data, this paper can do no more than address the general issue of how to assist

untrained teachers of the Bible to teach it more effectively. This issue is an important one, because the research of Goldman and others has shown that undesirable educational and spiritual consequences frequently follow the inadequate teaching of the Bible. One assumes that this will also be true in South Africa, even though the detailed findings of overseas researchers cannot simply be imposed on the local South African context. This assumption is supported by Cornelia Roux's empirical research (1988) in South Africa, which showed that:

The incorrect choice of biblical and other religious tales can, for example, lead to a fatalistic attitude. If the divine judgement of God is over-emphasised and taken out of context, the child can be negatively influenced. The child sees judgements primarily as punishment (Roux, in Summers and Waddington 1996:124).

Fortunately, the believing teacher of the Bible does not have to depend solely on human technique, wisdom, and effort in his or her teaching endeavours. The long-standing conviction of the church has been that God the Spirit empowers and guides those who, in sincerity and truth, seek to expound the teachings of scripture to others, and that he graciously assists those being taught to interpret biblical truth correctly.

2. A Bible Story as Presented by South African Theological Students

Here is an example of how an apparently simple Bible story can be presented in a way that, in terms of stage development theory, is unsuitable for children. The presentation is a compilation of assignments submitted by several theological students. In the interests of concealing the identity of the students, their submissions have been blended into one document. This compilation should not be regarded as

a case study, because it was not possible to base it on a scientifically-verifiable sample. However, while the resulting document could be critiqued as being somewhat artificial and contrived, it is nevertheless contended that it is legitimate for the purpose of this article, in that it is based on actual presentations and is used solely to illustrate pitfalls in those presentations from a stage development perspective.

The selection of the work of these particular students should not be interpreted as an attempt to belittle them. The students chosen are not trained educators, and so, it is inevitable that they would fall short of the mark in some aspects of their pedagogical practice. Their work has been chosen for illustrative reasons because it is contended that stage theorists would regard it as being educationally deficient in several respects and because it therefore serves the purpose of this article. Those being taught were pre-adolescents between the ages of roughly nine to eleven years. This would approximate to Piaget's 'concrete operations' stage and would overlap his 'formal operations' stage.

The italicised words and phrases will be commented on in due course. As the extent to which the terms demand explanation from a teacher depends on the level of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual maturity of individual children within the group, as well as the average age of the group itself, the comments that follow are necessarily generalisations. While there are other aspects of the presentation that could also be selected for discussion, those chosen should be sufficient for the purposes of this article.

Samuel the prophet anointed David with a horn of oil after the Lord gave Samuel sacrificial business to do. David was put in the household of Saul for training. He played the harp to soothe Saul who was tormented by a demon. One day David volunteered to go out and fight the giant Goliath. His brothers did not encourage him

because he was very young; even Saul questioned his ability to overcome the boastful Philistine. So Saul gave him the armour but he refused it and took his staff, five stones and a sling. *David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with the sword, a spear and javelin but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied' (1 Sam 17:45). So his strength was reliance on the Lord's name.* Then *Jonathan made a covenant with David* and they became great friends. Saul later became David's enemy because of jealousy. God sent an evil spirit to torment Saul in order to drive him to repentance. David used to play the harp to soothe Saul when the evil spirit came upon him. Saul appointed David commander of more than one thousand soldiers. Saul owed David a princess wife; but instead gave him another task. *He wanted David to bring him the foreskins of a hundred Philistines.* King Saul didn't really want the foreskins, he wanted David to get killed while fighting the Philistines. After the servants told David what the King said, David was pleased to be the king's son-in-law. So David and his men went and killed 200 Philistines and David brought their foreskins to the King. *David later pretended to be loyal to the Philistines, but he deceived them by destroying their cities.*

We learn from this story that when the Lord is with you, he gives you victory. The power of the Lord came on David immediately after he got anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13). This enabled him to defeat Goliath though he was a giant. The next thing we learn is that, someone who appeared as a big and experienced man was overcome by someone who was a young man and without experience. Saul compared David to Goliath as a 'boy and Goliath as someone who has been fighting from his youth' (1 Sam 17:33). This teaches us that *experience without the Lord's hand or power on you is useless.*

3. A Critique of the Presentation from a Stage Development Perspective

An evaluation of the presentation from a stage development perspective detected the following deficiencies, among others:

3.1. Little or no explanation of unfamiliar terms

Samuel the prophet anointed David with a horn of oil after the Lord gave Samuel sacrificial business to do.

The term 'prophet' is not explained. What would 'anointed' in the context of the story mean to children? Similarly, the term 'horn of oil' is obscure. What does 'sacrificial business' mean? The presenter either needs to explain these terms, or should simply omit those that are not essential to the thrust of the story and that are likely to cause confusion. Goldman's research suggests that much of the content of Bible-centred religious education syllabuses in British schools was too advanced for young pupils (1965:6–7).

David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with the sword, a spear and javelin but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty.'

What is a 'Philistine'? What is a 'javelin'? How does a javelin differ from a spear? What does it mean to 'come against you in the name of the Lord'?

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David.

What does 'covenant' mean?

3.2. Use of terms that are too advanced for young children

Saul wants David to bring him the foreskins of a hundred Philistines.

From a modern perspective, this is a barbaric act. Explaining it to children is likely to be difficult and embarrassing, and likely to distract the class from the main aim of the story. Best draws attention to the inadvisability of exposing young children to certain concepts and incidents in the Bible before they are ready for them (2010:333).

3.3. The use of Christian jargon

So his strength was reliance on the Lord's name.

How can strength (in the child's mind this might well be physical strength, particularly as David was challenging Goliath to a physical duel) flow from relying on a name?

Experience without the Lord's hand or power on you is useless.

The meaning of 'experience' in this context probably needs clarification. What does it mean to have the 'Lord's hand or power' on us?

Older children from Christian families might understand some of the allusions above, but it should not be assumed that all Sunday school children necessarily understand them. Piaget's investigation into the level of understanding of secular proverbs by children between the ages of nine and eleven revealed that while they thought they understood the meaning of the proverbs presented to them, the majority of them did not understand them at all (1932:129). Wood observes that young children are prone to be confused by adult use of language, even when seemingly simple words are used (n.d.:68).

3.4. Use of concepts that can mislead children as to the true nature of the Lord and of Christianity

God sent an evil spirit to torment Saul.

Does God still send evil spirits to torment people, including children who are naughty? How was Saul tormented? Was the Lord being cruel in doing this to Saul? Is the Lord unloving?

While it is not suggested that such concepts should not be taught to children, it is suggested that presenters should be aware of the difficulties inherent in teaching them and that they should therefore be taught with discretion and wisdom.

David later pretended to be loyal to the Philistines, but he deceived them by destroying their cities.

Is deceiving others legitimate, particularly in this extreme way? Are Christians expected to follow David's example?

3.5. The students' underlying error: presentation of material inappropriate to the children's developmental stage and life-world

A common thread running through the errors the students made is that their approach to teaching the Bible to children is inappropriate to the children's developmental level. This issue is discussed in greater detail further on in the article. A second major shortcoming is that the students were so fixated on teaching the content of the passage that they overlooked the necessity of aligning their presentation to the life-world of the children. Naka and Malherbe (2011) comment in the course of their discussion of the incident in Matthew 18:1–6 (Mk 9:33–37; Lk 9:46–48) where Jesus made a child the centre of discussion: 'And so Jesus exposes the wrong theology and theologising of his disciples and

challenges them to theologise from the perspective of the child in order to see, understand and experience the Kingdom of God better.’ Thomson also refers to this passage as a reminder to us of the value Jesus placed upon children and, by implication, the importance of influencing them to their overall benefit in terms they understand (2009:4). While it is accepted that the Bible holds truths that all people of all ages and intellectual capacities can comprehend (Thomson 2009:13), it does not follow that the Bible should therefore be taught to everyone in the same way.

4. Two Major Difficulties in Teaching the Bible to Children

The deficiencies in the students’ assignments underline the pitfalls inherent in teaching the Bible to children. Teaching the Bible to children is difficult for at least two reasons: these are the nature of the Bible and the nature of children (Schachter 1985:308).

4.1. The nature of the Bible

Some of the factors that complicate biblical interpretation are the following:

1. The Bible was not written by one author with one specific viewpoint, but by more than forty authors, in three languages, in more than one continent, over many centuries. Admittedly, there is a unity that binds these diverse books together, but accurate interpretation of the peculiar message of each book requires that we should not lose sight of their differences (McDowell 1979:17).

2. The cultural background of the Bible is far removed from modern experience. The customs, laws, norms, social structures, and religious

practices of the Old and New Testaments must be carefully studied and understood, lest we simplistically apply them to life in the twenty-first century. According to Tate (1997:29), the best way to counteract the tendency of the interpreter to impose his or her contemporary view of the world on the world of the text is to undertake an in-depth study of the world from which the text emerged. Doveton illustrates this by commenting that for many of us, the sacrifice of animals and birds is distasteful, and that a prohibition on eating crayfish, langoustines, and prawns because they have neither fins nor scales sounds eccentric to modern ears. Similarly, any threat of being evicted from one's dwelling for a week because fungus has appeared on the walls would not be taken seriously today (Doveton 1986:4).

3. Literal biblical teaching is interwoven with symbolic language; therefore, the use of literary devices—such as Jesus' use of parables and the poetry of the Old Testament—must be identified and interpreted accordingly (Tate 1997:106–110, 127–128).

4. While the Bible is the principal source book of Christianity, it was written for adults and not for children. In order not to alienate and confuse children, biblical content must be taught in a way that children can understand (Goldman 1965:71).

4.2. The nature of the children

While the central message of the Bible about God's salvation in Christ might be easy to understand, there are other aspects of the biblical message that are so challenging, that a life-time of study cannot exhaust their spiritual and intellectual riches. Teaching the Bible to adults can therefore be difficult, but trying to make children understand it is far more difficult, given their intellectual immaturity, linguistic limitations, and restricted experience (Goldman 1965:38). The task is made more

difficult if we adopt a naïve teaching approach that takes little or no account of the limiting factors inherent within children, particularly the crucial one of adapting our presentation to their stage of religious development.

Any teacher of children must be aware of the development level of the children being taught (Roux, in Summers and Waddington 1996:127). The intellectual capacity of a fifteen-year old learner differs from that of a learner of six or ten years of age, so the type and level of learning to which the fifteen-year old is subjected should be more differentiated and advanced than that to which younger children are exposed (Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian 1978:30). Piaget's studies suggest that children of eleven or twelve years old begin to shift away from concrete, specific, 'black or white' reasoning, and begin to adopt the hypothetico-reasoning skills characteristic of adult problem-solving. His research revealed that it is between the ages of about eleven to fifteen that young people generally develop and perfect their ability to understand and use symbols (Hamachek 1979:159–160). However, research conducted in the U.S.A. indicated that many North American teenagers continue to function on a concrete operational level (Mwamwenda, in Summers and Waddington 1996:102). Fowler's research findings postulate that a child in what he terms the 'mythic-literal' stage (six to twelve years old), remains rooted in the concrete world of sensory experience and tends to avoid abstract concepts (Roux, in Summers and Waddington 1996:115). In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is conceivable that this also applies to South African pre-adolescents and adolescents (Mwamwenda in Summers and Waddington 1996:102). Teachers of children should therefore be cautious in their use of symbolic, abstract expressions when teaching children who are still largely in a concrete 'here-and-now' developmental stage (Hamachek 1979:161).

The developmental level is significant for many aspects of the pedagogical process. Some of these aspects relate to the choice of teaching material, the method of presentation, the nature of visual and other teaching aids, and the degree of interaction demanded of the children (Conradie 1976:48). The current renewed emphasis on child theology (as distinct from humanistic child-centred theology) is a salutary reminder that while the message of the Bible remains constant, it needs to be re-interpreted in terms understandable to each new generation. One could add to this that the use of Bible translations written in the idiom of bygone eras hinders such re-interpretation, particularly when such outdated translations are used to teach children.

While the South African students referred to above should be commended for their efforts to remain true to the complexity of the biblical text, their pedagogical approach is likely to be ineffective in conveying the message of the text in terms that modern children can understand. The students, no doubt, believed that their approach was legitimate, but they made the mistake of not realising that the Bible is an adult book written within a cultural mindset vastly different from that of twenty-first century children living in Southern Africa. This criticism of the students' excessively Bible-centred pedagogy should not be interpreted as an argument for its replacement by an experience-orientated, humanistic, anthropocentric pedagogy that regards human life as the centre and aim of its philosophy (Cilliers 1975:88; Gunter 1977:54-55). Instead, the approach advocated is one that fully recognises the Bible's historic status as the inspired Word of God, but also recognises that its message cannot be communicated to children as if they are adults. In the context of this paper, the approach advocated may be termed 'child-focused' and 'Bible-orientated'.

The error the South African students made is one that has constantly occurred in the past. According to the recollections of an anonymous

teacher that appeared in *Christian Education*, a publication of the Christian Education Movement, Bible lessons in South African schools during the 1930s tended to be tedious. The anonymous writer had herself been a pupil during that decade. As many teachers explained nothing about the meaning of the story, most of the class allowed their minds to wander during the lesson. The children found the Old Testament books particularly irrelevant, as no attempt was made to match them to the pupils' developmental stage, or, to relate them to their own experience of life (*Christian Education Movement*, 1945:n.p.). At least one young person in New Testament times also reacted to inappropriate teaching by letting his mind wander. Florence observes that Acts 20:7–12 contains the first recorded incident of someone who was literally bored to death by Bible teaching (2007).

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. 'Don't be alarmed', he said. 'He's alive!' Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted (NIV).

Florence describes this passage as a devastating indictment of the harmful effects of inappropriate Bible exposition. She says it exposes the potential of such exposition to marginalise and anaesthetise young people to the power of biblical preaching (Florence 2007).

J. M. MacDougall Ferguson wrote of the unintended confusion that can be caused in the minds of children, particularly young children, when Bible stories are narrated without explanation. Ferguson told of a teacher who was recounting the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4. 'Jesus therefore being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour' (Jn 4:6 KJV). It later transpired that at least one of the pupils had interpreted 'well' to mean 'whale'. Another child, after hearing the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, believed that the onlookers had spread their clothes on the road because they had no clothes-lines on which to hang them. Even senior primary school children were liable to be confused by biblical statements such as the one that the Queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon 'with a great train', for this had occurred before the invention of railways (*Christian Education Movement*, 1946:2).

The rote learning of Bible passages without understanding their meaning has sometimes led to amusing results. One boy's attempt at rendering the Lord's Prayer began with 'Harold by Thy name' (Wilson 1946:81). Another pupil believed for years that the Lord's Prayer began like this, 'Our Father *witchard* in Heaven'. His understanding was that 'witchard' stood for a cross between a witch and a wizard (Wilson 1946:81).

While these examples of misinterpretations and misunderstandings culled from the past might amuse us, they should also alert us to the cardinal importance of ensuring that children understand and can relate to the biblical concepts we offer to them. Merely offering to them factual information—and even finding through testing that they can remember what they have been taught—is no guarantee that they have attained insight and an ability to apply the knowledge in functional situations. Even if a child learns a Bible story by heart, but fails to

connect meaningfully with the subject matter, then, education has not taken place (Duminy 1977:15–16). As Vrey expresses it, the child may learn much about the Bible, but ‘he has to give meaning to it in his personal capacity’ (1979:119–120). This is not to imply that knowledge of the Bible is unimportant, but De Wet reminds us that Bloom’s taxonomy places knowledge as the lowest of its six educational objectives (1989:23). The five that follow knowledge are comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Zais 1976:309).

5. A Proposed Solution

5.1. Teach only material essential to the lesson aim and appropriate to the children’s developmental stage

In view of the need to adapt teaching to the developmental level of learners, teachers of the Bible should divest themselves of the notion that they need to teach all the content within a passage of scripture to children. A recognised didactic principle is that a lesson, no less than an entire curriculum, should include only essential learning material (Van der Stoep n.d.:111–112). A teacher should, therefore, select only the material that is directly appropriate to his or her teaching purpose within a specific lesson, rather than overwhelming children with an over-abundance of irrelevant details. An examination of the biblical account of the interactions between David and Saul clearly revealed that some of the concepts recorded were too advanced for the pre-adolescent age group. This is not unexpected, as the Bible was not written for children (Schachter 1985:308). Sound pedagogical practice dictates that an explanation of such concepts should be postponed until the learners are mature enough to profit from a discussion of them. Schachter counsels us to free ourselves of the notion that we must be bound to the

sequence and structure of a biblical narrative. Young children have no need to hear biblical stories in sequence and as complete units. This can be done as they mature, details can be filled in, and the stories fleshed out in later years. The crucial issue is that children must find relevance and personal meaning in the way Bible stories are taught to them (Schachter 1985:309). Goldman distinguishes between 'teaching the Bible' and 'teaching from the Bible'. He maintains that endeavouring to transmit the sheer volume of biblical material ('teaching the Bible') is often counterproductive for teachers and children. Instead, he advocates an approach that eschews quantity in favour of selecting material according to the children's needs, capacities, and experiences (Goldman 1965:71). Berryman's research suggests that if a biblical story is presented in an abbreviated form, the possibility of children misunderstanding the meaning is reduced (in Burton *et al* 2006:7).

5.2. Elementary exegesis as an essential technique in teaching the Bible to children

Achieving a sound understanding of what the Bible teaches and applying that understanding to one's own life and the lives of others through ministry can be regarded as the ultimate aim of theological study. However, understanding what the Bible teaches is a complicated task that is rendered considerably more difficult when we attempt to help young children understand it.

5.2.1. An analysis of key words in order to determine the original meaning of a text

Dale identifies language as a major obstacle a child encounters in understanding the Bible. He illustrates this by quoting the comment of a learner: 'The Bible's full of hard words'. In his experience, words such as 'Sabbath', 'synagogue', 'Pharisees' and 'Sadducees', among others,

hinder understanding and comprehension. If the teacher habitually refers, without explanation, to remote and seemingly irrelevant biblical concepts, then the child is likely to respond, 'It's just a strange story that has nothing to do with me'. If, in addition, the teacher utilises an outdated Bible translation that uses antiquated language, then this is likely to strengthen the child's misconception about the relevance of the scriptures. If the Bible is to become a vital and inescapable source of wisdom and guidance for their lives, then children must hear it discussed in language they understand (Dale, in Walton 1977:32–33). In order to achieve this, it is imperative that the teacher of the Bible should research the meanings of key terms in the passage in the course of his or her preparation. If the teacher does not understand them, then it is unlikely that he/she will be able to master the overall meaning of the text in sufficient depth. Once the teacher understands the 'hard terms', s/he will be in a position to explain them to children. Dale suggests that to avoid interrupting the flow and sweep of the story by continually stopping to define these terms, the teacher could substitute the terms mentioned in the previous paragraph with words and phrases such as 'holy day of the Jews', 'meeting house', 'religious leaders' and 'rich political leaders'. Although it must be conceded that an accurate explanation of terms such as these cannot be deferred indefinitely if a child's religious education is to be complete, yet, in the interests of achieving the lesson aim, it is probably inadvisable to devote too much time to their exposition, unless a specific issue concerning one or more of them arises in the course of the lesson (Dale, in Walton 1977:32–33).

Elementary exegesis, therefore, requires the Bible teacher to consider which words in the verse or passage can be classified as 'hard words'. Mark 14:3 (NIV) provides a convenient illustration of such words:

'While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.'

During the teacher's preparation, he/she would research issues such as the following (Doveton 1986:15–16):

1. Where and what is Bethany?
2. What do we know about Simon the Leper? If he was a leper, why was Jesus in his house?
3. What does 'reclining' at table mean?
4. Who was the woman?
5. What is an alabaster jar?
6. What is pure nard? What was it used for?
7. Why did the woman break the jar?
8. Why was the perfume poured on Jesus' head?

In researching questions such as the above, the teacher would be anticipating questions the children themselves might ask.

In order successfully to conduct sound research, the teacher should ideally have access to reference books, such as up-to-date expository commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible reference books, and at least one modern scholarly Bible translation. In determining the meaning of a key term within a passage, care should be taken to exegete it within its scriptural, historical, and cultural contexts, rather than in isolation. While the circumstances applicable to many Sunday school teachers and youth group leaders ministering in Southern Africa might make it difficult for them to meet this requirement, it is nevertheless essential for them to access whatever sound biblical resources they can in the interests of satisfactory lesson preparation.

5.2.2. The appropriate application of the original meaning to modern circumstances and to the children's life-world and developmental stage

The object of analysing the meanings of key terms in context is not an end in itself—the primary objective is to determine the original meaning of the passage or story being analysed. The original meaning of the text to the original readers must be differentiated from the application of the original message to us today—this is the secondary objective. While the original meaning remains constant, its application does not, because it will be influenced by changes in the post-biblical and post-modern world. If expositors—including Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders and home cell facilitators—succeed in establishing through a basic, but sound exegetical analysis what the original meaning of the text they are expounding is, then there is a high possibility that their application of that meaning to the circumstances and development level of modern children will be valid and relevant. Conversely, if their interpretation of the original meaning is based on speculation and/or a questionable exegetical technique, then, it is likely that their application to the modern situation will not be true to the essence of the biblical truth contained within the passage (Doveton 1986:31).

Conclusion

This paper utilised the broad principles of stage development theory to evaluate a Bible story compiled from the presentations by several South African students to pre-adolescents. Several deficiencies in the presentation were identified. It was concluded that much could be done to improve the effectiveness of such presentations. It was suggested that the teaching of the Bible to children must take as its point of departure

the child's cognitive development stage and the child's experience of reality. In effect, the child must be placed in the centre of attention, as Jesus demonstrated in Matthew 18. Secondly, it was proposed that Bible teachers should teach only the material that is essential to the aim of their lesson. Thirdly, it was recommended that untrained educators should utilise a simple exegetical technique, based on whatever sound biblical resources they can access, to analyse the key words in a passage, and so, expose the original meaning of the text. The final requirement is that they should apply the original meaning in a manner that is relevant and understandable to the children they are teaching. The pedagogical approach advocated was termed 'child-focused' and 'Bible-orientated' in order to distance it from purely humanistic and anthropocentric pedagogies.

Reference List

- Ausubel DP, Novak JD, and Hanesian H 1978. *Educational psychology. A cognitive view* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Best R 2010. Review of H Worsley, A child sees God. Children talk about Bible stories. *Pastoral Care in Education* 28(4):331–337.
- Bidell TR and Fischer KW 1992. Beyond the stage debate: action, structure and variability in Piagetian theory and research. In RK Sternberg and CA Berg (eds.), *Intellectual development*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Burton LD, Paroschi EE, Habenicht DJ, and Hollingsead CC 2006. Curriculum design and children's learning at church. *Religious Education* 101(1):4–20.
- Christian Education Movement. *Christian Education* 12, 1945. Johannesburg: Christian Education Movement of Southern Africa.
- Christian Education Movement. *Christian Education* 17, 1946. Johannesburg: Christian Education Movement of Southern Africa.

- Cilliers JL leR 1975. *Education and the child*. Durban: Butterworths.
- Conradie PJ 1976. *Didactics HED*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Cox E 1966. *Changing aims in religious education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- De Wet DR 1989. *Biblical studies teaching. A new perspective*. Pretoria and Cape Town: Academica.
- Doveton I 1986. *An introduction to exegesis*. Pietermaritzburg: NCE.
- Duminy PA 1977. *General teaching method* (3rd ed.). Cape Town: Longman.
- Florence AC 2007. Bored to death. *Theology Today* 64(2):233–243.
- Goldman R 1965. *Readiness for religion*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Gordon IJ 1975. *Human development: a transactional perspective*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Gunter CFG 1977. *Aspects of educational theory*. Stellenbosch and Grahamstown: University Publishers and Booksellers.
- Hamachek D 1979. *Psychology in teaching, learning and growth*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hirst PH and Peters RS 1970. *The logic of education*. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Holm J 1976. *Teaching religion in school*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Loukes H 1961. *Teenage religion*. London: SCM.
- McDowell J 1979. *Evidence that demands a verdict* (rev. ed.). San Bernadino: Here's Life Publishers.
- Munari A 1994. Jean Piaget (1896–1980) in Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education. Paris: UNESCO: *International Bureau of Education* XXIV(1/2):311–327.
- Nakah V and Malherbe J 2011. Child theology: a challenge to seminaries. Paper presented at Now and Next Child Theology Conference, 9–12 March, Nairobi.

- Piaget J 1932. *The language and thought of the child* (2nd ed.). New York: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner.
- Piaget J and Inhelder B 1972. *The psychology of the child*. New York: Basic Books.
- Phillips JL 1975. *The origins of intellect: Piaget's theory* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Freeman.
- Schachter L 1985. Alternative to Bible stories for young children. *Religious education* 80(2):308–309.
- Summers HC and Waddington RR (eds.) 1996. *Religious education for transformation*. Pretoria: Kagiso.
- Tate W R 1979. *Biblical interpretation. An integrated approach* (rev. ed.). Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Thomson DR 2009. Growing in favor with God: young children's spiritual development and implications for Christian education. D.Ed. thesis, University of North Texas. Texas, U.S.A.
- Van der Stoep F and OA n.d. *Didactic orientation*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Vrey JD 1979. *The self-actualising educand*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Walton RC (ed.) 1977. *A source book of the Bible for teachers*. London: SCM.
- Wood M E 1981. *The development of personality and behaviour in children*. Harrap: London.
- Worsley H 2004. How children aged 9–10 understand Bible stories: a study of children at a church-aided and a state primary school in the Midlands. In *International journal of children's spirituality* 15(2):115–127.
- _____ 2010. The Bible in the family context. In *International journal of children's spirituality* 15(2):115–127.
- Zais RS 1976. *Curriculum. Principles and foundations*. New York: Harper and Row.

Sons of God Marrying Daughters of Man: An Exercise in Integrated Theology.

Frank Jabini¹

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the issues of spiritual spouses and identify possibly ways in which the church can respond to this phenomenon. The study conducted was a biblical, historical, and systematic enquiry into this phenomenon, with relationship between the ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughter of man’ in Genesis 6:2 as the point of departure. The study revealed that the scriptures and both past and present church leaders taught that spiritual beings can be involved in sexual activities with human beings. The paper concluded by proposing practical ways in which the church should respond to this phenomenon.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Gifford (2004:97) described cases in the ministry of the Ghanaian prophet, Elisha Salifu Amoako, where spirit beings were said to have had sexual intercourse with human beings. One woman was said to have married a marine spirit. He explains: ‘a man involved in witchcraft

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

was said to have eight wives pregnant in the spirit realm, who included crocodile spirits and spirits of rats ... One really forlorn pregnant woman who admitted she had no husband was told she had been impregnated by a spirit taking the form of a man' (p. 97).

The phenomenon of claiming human beings having sexual intercourse with spirits are not limited in Africa to Ghana alone. In my country of origin, the republic of Suriname, spirit beings play a critical role in the life of the Afro-Surinamese people. Many have claimed possession by different kinds of spirits, some of which may have even force some into prostitution or illegitimate sexual relationships. For example, a woman with a male Apuku spirit would claim having sexual relationships with that spirit in her dreams. Understandably, it is difficult for such a woman to develop and maintain a permanent relationship with a man. Social scientist, Gloria Wekker (1994:83–84), and the Roman Catholic priest, Karel Choennie (1997:55), have both discussed this phenomenon in their works.

Having studied various African Christian television broadcasting networks over the past five years, some episodes stand out. For example, during the services of the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN), broadcasted on Emmanuel TV, deliverance from 'spiritual husbands' and 'spiritual wives' are not uncommon. These spiritual spouses are described as evil spirits that come in the night, in the form of human beings, to have intercourse with their human 'spouses'. In extreme cases, the spiritual spouses seem to appear not only in night dreams, but also, during the day. In the case of a 'spiritual spouse', the normal marital life of that person is often in disarray. In the examples from Ghana and Suriname, the spiritual spouses were limited to black Africans. In the case of SCOAN, there were a number of white people involved. The issue of spirits having sexual intercourse with human beings seems to be a serious problem in contemporary Christianity.

People witnessed to the impact that these so-called spiritual spouses have on their personal and marital life. Marriages of such people often end in divorce. At the deliverance services, these spirits claimed to have destroyed the lives of husbands and wives, including their businesses.

This phenomenon did not start with contemporary Christianity. In the history of Christianity, these so-called spiritual spouses were known by their Latin names, namely, *incubus* (male) and *succubus* (female).

The Church Father Augustine wrote: “‘incubi’, had often made wicked assaults upon women, and satisfied their lust upon them’ (*City of God*, 15.23.1). More than a millennium later, Martin Luther also wrote about this issue: ‘I do not deny, but believe, that the devil may happen to be either a succubus or an incubus’ (Luther 1960:11).

It seems that claims of spirits having intercourse with people was a familiar phenomenon to Christians, both past and present.

In his book, *A Way to Escape*, Neil Anderson made the point that a unique situation appeared in Genesis 6. According to him, the ‘sons of God’, who were apparently fallen angels, ‘cohabited with human women to produce human offspring’ (1997:70). The reference to Genesis 6 is interesting, because some theologians believe that the passage refers to angels who left their place, came to the earth, and married women. The second-century church leader, Justin Martyr (AD 100–160), was of a similar opinion. According to him, the offspring of the angels and the women ‘are those who are called demons’ (*Second Apology*, 5). Is Genesis 6, then, speaking about spiritual beings having sexual relationship with human beings?

1.2. The research problem

Is there biblical evidence for the idea that spirits (angelic or demonic) can have sexual relationships with human beings? And, what should be the church's response to the claims of members who claim that they have spiritual spouses?

1.3. Methodology

The paper will conduct an integrated theological inquiry into the possibility of spirits having sexual relationships with human beings. Smith (ch. 6) said the following about the integrated theological inquiry as proposed by the South African Theological Seminary: 'We are committed to the belief that holistic theological reflection ought to integrate perspectives from biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology.'

The idea for such an approach is the belief that 'theology is fundamentally a single discipline; therefore, we need a model of theology that integrates insights from various sub-disciplines' (Smith, ch. 6). This paper is an attempt to apply this holistic theological reflection to the above-mentioned problem. Following the introduction, this study is divided into the following four sections:

- (1) A historical study of the interpretation of the phrase 'sons of God' in Genesis 6 in the works of selected theologians and their views on the role of spirits in having sexual relationships with human beings.
- (2) An exegetical study of the phrase 'sons of God' in Genesis 6 and the rest of the Old Testament, and a biblical theological study of the relationship between 'angels/spirits' and women in the New Testament.

- (3) A systematic formulation of the findings addressing questions concerning the influences of spirit beings in the sexual life of human beings.
- (4) A pastoral approach is suggested for handling these cases.

2. A Historical Perspective

This section of the study is concerned with the history of the interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:2 from a thematic perspective, with special focus on the possibility of spiritual beings having sexual relationships with human beings. A review of the literature revealed four major views on the identity of the ‘sons of God’, namely, (a) the godly-line of Seth view, (b) the dynastic rulers view, (c) the assembly of the gods view, and (d) and the view that the sons of God refer to angels. The first two views advocate that the sons of God are human beings, whereas the third and fourth views identify them with spiritual (supernatural) beings.

2.1. The godly line of Seth theory

2.1.1. Biblical evidence for this the godly line of Seth theory

According to this view, Seth’s descendants, who were godly people, intermarried with the ungodly line of Cain. In the book of Genesis, we find many examples of such intermarriages (cf. Gen 26:34–35; 27:46). The Hebrew phrase, *benê-hā’elōhîm*, translated ‘sons of God’, is used to express the relationship between God and the believers.

Keil and Delitzsch (vol. 1, book 1, 1996:128) gives further scriptural evidence for this view in his commentary on Genesis 6, and argues as follows:

For it is not to angels only that the term 'sons of Elohim', or 'sons of Elim', is applied; but in Psalms 73:15, in an address to Elohim, the godly are called 'the generation of Thy sons', i.e. sons of Elohim. In Deut. 32:5 the Israelites are called His (God's) sons, and in Hos. 1:10, 'sons of the living God', and in Psalms 80:17, Israel is spoken of as the son, whom Elohim has made strong. These passages show that the expression 'sons of God' cannot be elucidated by philological means, but must be interpreted by theology alone.

Livingston (1969:53) supports Keil, and quotes some New Testament passages where believers (human beings) are clearly called sons of God (cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:14; Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1; Rev 21:7). It is important to note that Adam is called the son of God in Luke 3:38. Augustine (*City of God* 15.23.1) argues that godly men, such as John the Baptist (Mark 1:2) and Malachi (Mal 2:7), were called 'angels' in scripture. Therefore, even if the phrase 'sons of God' was identified to mean 'angels', it could be referring to righteous people.

Examples of several Christian scholars who have supported this view follows.

2.1.2. Sextus Julius Africanus (c.160–c. 240)

Sextus Julius Africanus, a late second-century and early third-century AD African Christian writer, wrote that 'the descendants of Seth are called the sons of God on account of the righteous men and patriarchs who have sprung from him, even down to the Saviour Himself' (Africanus, 1997:131). In his view, the daughters of men were the 'the descendants of Cain', who have 'nothing divine in them'.

2.1.3. Ephrem the Syrian (c.AD 306–373)

Ephrem, a fourth-century Christian from the city Nisibis (present-day Turkey), argued that ‘Noah overcame the waves of lust, which had drowned in his generation the sons of Seth. Because his flesh revolted against the daughters of Cain’ (*Nisibene Hymns* 1.4). He made the same remark in his commentary on Genesis.

2.1.4. Augustine (AD 354–430)

The church father, Augustine of Hippo, also supported this view (*City of God* 15.22.1). He wrote: ‘Giants therefore might well be born, even before the sons of God, who are also called angels of God, formed a connection with the daughters of men, or of those living according to men, that is to say, before the sons of Seth formed a connection with the daughters of Cain’ (*City of God* 15.23.2).

2.1.5. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

The thirteenth-century Italian church leader, Thomas Aquinas, quoted Augustine verbatim in his *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas agreed that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were the descendants of Seth. Concerning the role of incubi in procreation, he wrote (vol. I, Question 53, Article 3, *Reply to Objection* 6):

Still if some are occasionally begotten from demons, it is not from the seed of such demons, nor from their assumed bodies, but from the seed of men taken for the purpose; as when the demon assumes first the form of a woman, and afterwards of a man; just as they take the seed of other things for other generating purposes ... so that the person born is not the child of a demon, but of a man.

Even though he was not of the opinion that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were angelic beings, he believed that (demonic) spirits could have sexual relationships with human beings and even play a role in procreation.

2.1.6. Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The German Reformer, Martin Luther, identified the sons of God with what he called 'those who had the promise of the blessed Seed and belonged to the blessed Seed' (Luther 1960:10). They are, according to him, 'the true church'. He continued to write: 'When they yielded to the seductions of the Cainite church, they also proceeded to gratify the desires of the flesh and to take wives from the Cainite race, likewise concubines, as many as they wanted and whomever they chose' (p. 10).

Luther disagreed with those who identified the sons of God with 'incubi' or 'the sons of the mighty'. Even though he does not deny the existence of incubi, he does not believe that they were involved in Genesis 6. Luther denied 'that anything can be born from the union of a devil and a human' (p. 11). He explained that 'the true meaning of the passage is that Moses designates as sons of God those people who had the promise of the blessed Seed. It is a term of the New Testament and designates the believers, who call God Father and whom God, in turn, calls sons' (p. 12).

Even though he does not mention the name of Seth, it can be gathered from his description that he is referring to Seth's offspring as the people who had the promise of the 'blessed seed'.

2.1.7. *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

According to the French Reformer John Calvin, it is clear from the context that the sons of God are the sons of Seth. The distinction between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’ is one of ‘godliness’ and ‘godlessness’. He says the following in his commentary of Genesis 6:1 (2002:n.p.): ‘It was, therefore, base ingratitude in the posterity of Seth, to mingle themselves with the children of Cain, and with other profane races; because they voluntarily deprived themselves of the inestimable grace of God.’

2.1.8. *Scholars from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries*

The godly line of Seth theory was supported and defended by the following scholars in their commentaries from the seventeenth-century onwards: Albert Barnes (1798–1870), Adam Clarke (1762–1832), Burton Coffman (1905–2006), Thomas Cooke (1747–1814), John Gill (1697–1771), Matthew Henry (1662–1714), John Peter Lange (1802–1884), Herbert Carl Leupold (1891–1972), Matthew Poole (1624–1679), Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921) and John Wesley (1703–1791).

The well-known *Commentary critical and explanatory on the whole Bible*, by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (1871), and *The pulpit commentary*, edited by Spence and Exell (c. 1890), also supported this view.

Therefore, it seems that from Augustine onwards, a number of respected scholars supported and defended the godly line of Seth view.

2.2. The dynastic-ruler theory

American theologian, Meredith Kline, wrote an article entitled 'Divine Kingship and Gen. 6:1–4', in which he defended the dynastic-ruler theory. According to him, the phrase 'sons of God' refers to kings or dynastic rulers. He argues (pp. 191–192):

From the several great kingdoms which formed the setting of Old Testament history the evidence has been amassed, showing that kings were often regarded as in one sense or another divine and that they were indeed called sons of the various gods... From the titulary of this pagan ideology of divine kingship the term *benê-hā'elōhîm* was appropriated in Genesis 6:1–4 as a designation for the antediluvian kings.

In Romans 13:6, Paul calls the dignitaries 'servants of God'. He could have used the phrase 'sons of God' (p. 193), since the Old Testament called rulers *'ēlōhîm* ('God' or 'gods'). The word *'ēlōhîm* is used in the sense of 'judges' in Exodus (21:6; 22:8–9, 28). The Targum Onkelos translated this last verse as follow: 'Thou shalt not revile the judges, nor curse the ruler of My people' (Exod 22:27), and the Targum Pseudo Jonathan reads in the first part: 'Sons of Israel My people, ye shall not revile your judges'. Contrary to the Targumim, the English translations normally translate *'ēlōhîm* in the first part of the verse as 'God', as in the NET: 'You must not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people'.

Kline shows further support for this view in the translation of *benê-hā'elōhîm* in the Targumim and the Greek translation of Symmachus (p. 194), explaining that Onkelos translated it as 'the sons of the mighty' and Pseudo Jonathan as 'the sons of the great'. Symmachus translated it as 'sons of the *dunasteuontōn*', 'sons of the powerful'.

Kline continues (1962:195–196):

The sin was that of Cainite Lamech, the sin of polygamy, particularly as it came to expression in the harem, characteristic institution of the ancient oriental despot's court. In this transgression the benê-hā'elōhîm flagrantly violated the sacred trust of their office as guardians of the general ordinances of God for human conduct.

Kline provided further support for this view from extra-biblical sources. The idea of dynastic rulers before the flood is found in sources such as the old Babylonian flood epic (p. 197–198) and the Sumerian King List (p. 198 ff.).

Kaiser (1996:108), in his discussion on the dynastic-ruler theory, draws the following conclusions:

‘Sons of God’ is an early, but typical, reference to the titularies for kings, nobles and aristocrats in the ancient Near Eastern setting. These power-hungry despots not only lusted after power but also were powerfully driven to become ‘men of a name’ (or ‘men of renown’—Gen 6.4). ... They also became polygamous, taking and marrying ‘any of [the women] they chose’ (Gen 6.2).

Kline (pp. 203–204) concluded his article on a Christocentric note. According to him, none of the rulers in ancient Israel ruled in perfect righteousness (p. 203). It was necessary to warn them that they would die like men (Ps 82:7).

But it is the confession of the church that the king-ideal has found embodiment in the seed of David whom David called ‘my Lord’; to whom God declared, ‘Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee’; who was a priest-king after the order of Melchizedek,

'without father, without mother'; the righteous Servant who was the King of kings and the Gibbor of Gibborim, for he was, the mighty One who is God (Isa. 9:6); who lusted not after a name but humbled himself in obedience unto the death of the cross, and therefore has been given a name which is above every name, that at his name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9–11).

2.3. Assembly of the gods

In recent years, much attention was given to the possibility that the 'sons of God' may have been 'the sons of the gods' or 'the assembly of the gods'. Different arguments are presented in favour of this view. In Hebrew, the word *ben* may have the meaning of 'belonging to a group or category'. Therefore, the phrase, 'sons of God', may be interpreted to mean, 'beings belonging to the divine category or group'.

According to Brendan Bynre (1992:156), there was a time when there was room for a plurality of divine beings in Israel's history. The sons of God refer to these divine beings, who were members of the 'assembly of the gods'. This view was also known among the Canaanites, and it was allegedly reflected in the Psalms. In the Bible, however, these gods are subject to the authority of Yahweh (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 82:6; 89:6; cf. Deut 32:43, LXX). Some of the alleged conversations that took place in the assembly of the gods are still found in the mysterious plural passages in Genesis (cf. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). Bynre is not alone in holding this view.

In extra-biblical sources from Mesopotamia, during the period of the Old Testament, the phrase *puḫur ilāni*, 'assembly of gods', was not uncommon. In Ugarit, the phrase 'assembly of the gods' was also recognised. The sons of El, who were all members of the assembly of the gods, were called '*ilm*, 'gods'. The Ugaritic phrase, *phr bn `ilm*, was

used for the ‘assembly of the gods’. This idea is also known in a Hittite myth. These gods were able to eat, drink, and procreate (Beyerlin 1978:158).

According to Mullen (1992:215), the Old Testament referred to these gods, who were members of the assembly of the gods, in passages such as Psalms 82:6. They were called *bēnē ’elyôn*, ‘sons of the most High’, and in Psalms 29:1 and 89:7, *benē ’ēlīm*, ‘sons of Gods’. ‘A more general designation of the members of Yahweh’s court is *qēdōšīm*, “holy ones” (Deut 33:2–3; Job 5:1, 15:15[Q]; Pss 16:3; 89:6, 8; Zech 14:5; Prov 9:10; 30:3), or the collective meaning of *qōdeš* (Exod 15:11; Pss 77:14; 93:5; cf. Ugarit *bn qdš*)’ (p. 215).

Genesis 6:2 is also considered to be a reference to the members of the divine assembly.

2.4. The sons of God are angels

The oldest theory about the identity of the sons of God is that they were angels. The earliest Jewish and Christian writers supported this view.

2.4.1. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 40)

Philo of Alexandria was an Egyptian Hellenistic Jewish Bible expositor. He wrote very detailed expositions on the Pentateuch. In his exposition *On the Giants* (§6), he made the following comments: ‘And when the angels of God saw the daughters of men ... Those beings, whom other philosophers call demons, Moses usually calls angels; and they are souls hovering in the air.’

The Greek translation of the text on which Philo based his exposition translated the phrase as ‘the angels of God’. It is rather remarkable that

he does not accept them to be demons, but angels, souls that hover in the air.

2.4.2. Flavius Josephus (AD 37–110)

Josephus, a Jewish historian from Jerusalem, seemed to have used a Greek text that supported the angelic theory. He wrote (*Antiquities* I, iii 1): 'Many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength.'

He seems to support the idea that these spirit beings were able to procreate and produce sons that were unjust.

2.4.3. The Book of Enoch

The pseudo-epigraphic book of Enoch is a collection of writings that were allegedly composed between the third-century BC and the first-century AD. The Ethiopian Church considered this book to be part of the canon of the church. The book gave a detailed description of the events discussed in Genesis 6. Fragments of this book were found in the Qumran documents, making it an old work. 'And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after ... the beautiful and comely daughters of men'. The leader of the group was Semjaza. Other angels who were chiefs of tens supported him (1 Enoch 6:1–8).

In chapter 9, the angel Uriel was sent to warn Noah about the flood that was to come. Gabriel was sent to destroy the giants and Raphael to take charge of Azazel, who was to be covered with darkness until the great day of judgment when 'he shall be cast into the fire' (1 Enoch 10:4–6). Michael was given the responsibility to deal with Semjaza and his associates. They were also given a temporary judgment 'till the

judgment that is for ever and ever is consummated' (1 Enoch 10:11–12). This book is not recognized as canonical by the rest of the church, but Jude and 2 Peter used it in their canonical letters in the New Testament. Enoch also supported the notion that the angels were able to procreate with human beings and that the offspring of those union were giants.

2.4.4. The Book of Jubilees

The pseudo-epigraphic book of Jubilees is probably older than the LXX, Josephus, and Philo. It is also considered to be canonical by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. According to Charles (1913:163), this book should be dated before the Maccabean era. It is an extended paraphrase of Genesis and parts of Exodus. According to this book, the angels were sent to the earth to teach the people 'that they should do judgment and uprightness on the earth' (Jub 4:15). After that, they saw the beautiful daughters that were born to mankind on earth and they took them as wives. 'They bear unto them sons and they were giants' (Jub 5:1–2). Jubilees not only supported the angelic view, it also supported the idea of angelic procreation with human beings.

2.4.5. Other Jewish writings

The *Genesis Apocryphon* that was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls also seemed to support the angelic theory (*1QapGen2*). One of the fragments described Lamech's doubt about the child that was born to him and his wife Batenosh. He asked his wife whether the child was from the 'Watchers' (the word used in Jubilees 4:15 for the sons of God). Batenosh denied it and assured Lamech that this child was of his seed.

Even though the *Targum Pseudo Jonathan* translated *benê-hā'elōhîm* as the 'sons of the great' in verse 2, it referred to angelic leaders in verse 4. It says the following: 'Schamchazai and Uzziel, who fell from heaven, were on the earth in those days'. The reference to Schamchazai and Uzziel's fall from heaven seems to indicate support for the angelic theory. The children who were born to the daughters of men, however, were from the sons of the great, human leaders (Gen 6:4).

2.4.6. *The Church Fathers*

The early Church Fathers supported the angelic view. Justin Martyr (AD 100–160) referred to this view in his *Second Apology* (5), writing the following: 'But the angels transgressed this appointment, and were captivated by love of women, and begat children who are those that are called demons'. He referred to the children, who came out of these unions, as demons.

Athenagoras of Athens (c. AD 133–190) followed Justin. He wrote: 'but some [angels] outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them ... these fell into impure love of virgins'. These angles procreated with these women and giants were born to them (Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 24).

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215) referred to the angelic view when he wrote that 'the angels who had obtained the superior rank, having sunk into pleasures, told to the women the secrets which had come to their knowledge' (*Stromata* 5.1). Origen of Alexandria (AD 184–253) probably supported this view (*Against Celsus* 5.54).

Tertullian (AD 160–220) from Carthage called the sons of God 'those angels, the deserters from God, the lovers of women' (*On Idolatry* 9; see also his *Against Marcion* 5.18). In his *On the Veiling of Virgins* (7),

he gave an exposition of 1 Corinthians 11, explaining why women and, in particular virgins, ‘ought to be veiled’. In his exposition of verse 10, he referred to the event in Genesis 6. He wrote the following: ‘For if (it is) on account of the angels—those, to wit, whom we read of as having fallen from God and heaven on account of concupiscence after females.’ If these angels lusted after older women, will they not ‘be inflamed for virgins’? He continued to argue that it is ‘the duty of virgins to be veiled’, because it is ‘more possible for virgins to have been the cause of the angels’ sinning’ than the older women. He clearly supports the angelic view.

2.4.7. Scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Even though the godly line of Seth theory was the predominant view from the Reformation onwards, some scholars continued to support the angelic view (e.g. Umberto Cassuto 1961; Samuel Rolles Driver 1909; Derek Kidner 1967; John Skinner 1910; George James Spurrell 1887; Merrill Unger 1981). In 1981, Willem VanGemeren wrote a detailed exegetical study, in which he defended the angelic view.

3. A Biblical Perspective

What is the biblical view on the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:2? Is there any biblical support for the notion that angels procreated with human beings?

3.1. The text

The Hebrew phrase translated as ‘sons of God’ in the Masoretic Text is *benê-hā’elōhîm*. It presents translation challenges, and older

translations and versions also seem to have problems translating and understanding it.

3.2. The translations

How did the older translators deal with this passage? The Latin Vulgate translated the single words as *filius Dei*, 'sons of God', but according to George James Spurrell (1887:66), the *Vetus Itala*, the old Latin translation, translated *angeli Dei* as 'angels of God'. The Syriac Peshitta transliterated the Hebrew phrase as 'sons of God'. Some manuscripts of the LXX rendered this phrase as *huioi tou theou* ('sons of God') or *angeloi tou theou* ('angels of God'). The Aramaic versions of the Old Testament (Targumim) have different readings as well. The *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* reads: 'that the sons of the great ones (Onkelos, 'mighty') saw that the daughters of men'.

A majority of English Bibles translate the phrase as 'sons of God' (e.g. ESV; KJV; NASB; NET; NIV; NJB; NKJV; NLT). A few translate it differently:

- Today's English Version (TEV): 'some of the heavenly beings' or 'sons of the gods' or 'sons of God'.
- Revised English Bible (REB): 'The sons of the gods'.
- Contemporary English Version (CEV): 'supernatural beings'.
- Jewish Publication Society (JPS): 'the divine beings'.

Why do the translations differ, if the Hebrew text does not have variant readings? The differences are 'translational', that is, different ways of translating the same word(s). This will become clearer in the later grammatical and lexical segments of the study.

3.3. Lexical interpretation

According to Gesenius (1857, s.v. *'elōhîm*) the phrase *benê-hā'elōhîm* is used for three groups in the Old Testament, namely: 'angels, kings ... and men who piously worship God'. According to him, the phrase in Genesis 6:2 refers to angels.

The dictionary of Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1906, s.v. *'elōhîm*), which is largely based on the work of Gesenius, identifies four possible meanings for the phrase: 'a. rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power; b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels; c. angels; d. gods.'

Bēnê hā'ēlōhîm ('sons of God') is given the following explanation: 'the sons of God' or 'sons of gods' are equivalent to 'angels' in the following passages: Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; Genesis 6:2, 6:4. It indicated that other usages of the phrase include 'sons of princes, mighty men'.

HALOT (Koehler et al s.v. *'elōhîm*) followed BDB, giving the same definitions for *'ēlōhîm*: 'a. rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power; b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels; c. angels; d. gods, the (true) God.'

Haag (1975:157ff.) seems to favour the idea of divine beings, who are members of 'a pantheon under the leadership of a supreme god'. This idea is supported by Near Eastern documents. Caragounis (1996:676) disputed this idea, since Israel's monotheism did not leave room for 'gods in a pantheon'. He argued for 'heavenly beings'.

The lexica (Gesenius; BDB; HALOT) support the idea of 'angels' in Genesis 6, whereas the theological dictionaries (Haag 1975; Caragounis 1996) argued for either divine or heavenly beings, even though Caragounis supported an angelic interpretation of the phrase in Job.

3.4. Grammatical interpretation

According to Gesenius (§ 128v) *běné* ('sons of') denotes 'membership of a guild or society (or of a tribe, or, any definite class)'. The phrase *běné hā'ēlōhîm* means 'beings of the class of 'ēlōhîm'.

Joüon and Muraoka's (§ 129j) advanced grammar stands in agreement with Gesenius. "Sons of", *běné*, "is also used to indicate that an individual belongs to a class of beings". The phrase *běné hā'ēlōhîm* then refers to individuals belonging to the class of *ēlōhîm*, therefore "divine beings".

The lexica and grammars provide various translational options for the phrase *běné hā'ēlōhîm*. The grammars favours 'divine beings'. The lexical options are much more diverse, including 'sons of gods', 'sons of God', 'angels', and 'sons of the rulers or judges'. Therefore, the differences in the translations are based on the possible meanings of the phrase in Hebrew. Does the context and historical setting of the passage provide further details?

3.5. Historical and Literary Context

Newman (1984:14–15) states that 'Gen 6:1–4 seems to be something of an "erratic boulder" for all interpreters, standing apart to some extent from its context' (p. 14). Some exegetes discussed the passage within the whole of Genesis 1–11. Houtman (1976:72) argued that the passage should be seen as a paragraph within a broader context.

Ross (1988:180) drew attention to the literary allusions that resemble the fall of Eve. In Genesis 6:2, the sons of God ‘saw’ and ‘took’. That resembles what Eve did in Genesis 3:6. Eve also ‘saw’ and ‘took’. Furthermore, Ross treated Genesis 6:1–8 as a whole, and discovered the following structural indicators: ‘the sons of God saw’ (v. 2) and the Lord saw’ (v. 5). The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were ‘beautiful’, whereas God saw that the ‘wickedness’ of man was great. Ross (p. 180) summarized the message of Gen 6:1–8 as follows: ‘In response to the wickedness on the earth, in which superhuman beings overstepped their bounds and mankind’s thoughts and deeds were completely evil, the Lord God determined to destroy all living creatures except the recipients of grace.’

Furthermore, the context seems to suggest that the daughters of men (v. 2) were the offspring of humankind that began to multiply itself (v. 1). Verse 1 focused specifically on the fact that ‘daughters’ were born to humankind. They appear in verse 2 as offsprings of humankind. ‘Sons of God’ in verse 2 seem to indicate *beings belonging to another class* (that was not mentioned before), rather than simply referring to humankind. The passage seems to focus on the fact that the sons of God ‘took wives’ (v. 2) and were having ‘sexual relations’ with them (v. 4). If this is correct, as the lexical and grammatical interpretation suggests (i.e. the sons of God are divine beings or angels), then, this passage may be referring to ‘spirits’ that had sexual relations with human beings. Does the broader biblical context of the phrase provide further information?

3.6. Biblical Context

Are there other biblical passages in the Old and New Testament that refer to the events in Genesis 6:2, 4? In addition, how is the phrase *bēnē*

hā'ēlōhîm translated in other Old Testament passages? This section is an analysis of all the appearances of the phrase in the Old Testament and how scholars have interpreted it. The following section is a closer look at New Testament passages that seem to refer to the Genesis 6 event.

3.6.1. Bēnê hā'ēlōhîm and related phrases in the Old Testament

Bēnê hā'ēlōhîm appears in a few Old Testament passages (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7). Psalms 29:1 and 89:7 spelled 'God' as *'ēlîm* instead of *'ēlōhîm* (see Gesenius GKC § 124 q). In Daniel 3:25, we have the Aramaic phrase *bar 'ēlāhîn*, which is similar to *bēnê hā'ēlōhîm*. How were these phrases translated and interpreted?

The LXX translated the phrase as 'the angels of God' in the book of Job. Hartley (1988:71) calls them 'the celestial beings or angels whom God created as his servants'. Clines (2002:18) says they are God's 'courtiers, other heavenly beings neither human nor divine in the full sense, but 'sons of God', their being derivative from his, and their rank superhuman'. Pope (1965:9) translated the phrase as 'the gods'. According to him, they are 'lesser members of the ancient pagan pantheon who are retained in later monotheistic theology as angels'. He argued that they are simply called 'gods' in Psalm 82:1. Interpreters tend to favour the supernatural identity of the sons of God in Job. Liberal interpreters, such as Pope, see them as celestial beings, whereas evangelical scholars, who do not believe in the pantheon theory, call them angels.

In his explanation of the phrase in the Psalms, Dahood (1966:175) argued that, in the Old Testament, the sons of God 'refer to the angels or spiritual beings who are members of Yahweh's court and do his biddings'. Goldingay (2006:416) agrees, suggesting that the Middle

Eastern use of the word ‘god’ seems to refer to ‘anything that is not regular humanity’.² Broyles (1999:152) captured the Old Testament understanding of the concept well, when he wrote: ‘What their neighbours regarded as gods serving their kings, Israel regarded as heavenly beings that do Yahweh’s bidding.’ The sons of God in the Psalms are angels or spiritual beings.

Scholars seem to understand the phrase *bar ’ēlāhîn* in Daniel 3:25 in the same way as they do with *bēnē hā’ēlōhîm*. The Greek translations rendered this phrase in two different ways. One translated it as ‘angel of God’, and the other ‘son of g(G)od’. The English translations also handle the phrase in different ways:

- a son of the gods (Dan 3:25, ESV)
- the Son of God (Dan 3:25, KJV)
- a god (Dan 3:25, NET)

The reading of the KJV, which capitalizes ‘Son’, seems to refer to the second person of the trinity, the pre-incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how some Church Fathers identify the mysterious fourth person in this event (see Montgomery 1926:215). Young also seems to adopt this view (1949:94–95). He refers to Isaiah 43:1–3, where God promises that he himself will be with his people in time of difficulties. Verse 2: ‘When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you’ (NET).

² An example of this is seen in the Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 28:13, where Saul said he saw ‘*ēlōhîm* coming up from the ground’. In this verse, *ēlōhîm* refers to a deceased person.

'A god' or 'a son of the gods' in the sense of a being belonging to the 'race of the gods' may be a better way of translating the phrase (Keil and Delitzsch 1996:575). According to Aalders (1962:83), this is more in agreement with the general Semitic understanding. The king who spoke was not a Jew, and he seemed to have a different explanation for this person (v. 28). According to him, God sent *mal'akēh* 'his angel, messenger' to deliver his servants. He identified the divine being with an angel. The angelic view is also supported by Jewish expositors (see also Aalders p. 83). Miller (1994:123) quoted Slotki, who said that the Talmud identified this angel as with Gabriel.

3.6.2. The New Testament and the events of Genesis 6:2, 4

A number of New Testament passages are relevant for the understanding of the Genesis 6 account. The first passage is Matthew 22:30, where Christ spoke about the angels of heaven that do not marry. Both Peter (2 Pet 2:4) and Jude (Jude 6) seem to refer to angels who have sinned. Some scholars (e.g. Bauckham 1998:51) refer to the passages in 1 Corinthians 11:10, 1 Timothy 2:9, and 1 Peter 3:19–20.

In Matthew 22:30, the Lord Jesus said, 'angels do not marrying'. This, to some, is a clear indication that the 'sons of God' who married the daughters of men were not angels (e.g. Livingston 1969:52).

It seems that 2 Peter 2:4–6 refers to three events in the book of Genesis, in successive order. Peter spoke about angels who sinned (v. 4), the ancient world to which Noah preached (v. 5), and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6). These events are described respectively in Genesis 6:1–4, 7–9, and 18:16–19:29. By making that connection, Peter accepted the idea that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were angels. A number of major commentaries confirm that Peter is referring to the sons of God in Genesis 6 (Bauckham 1998:248; Davids 2006:225;

Kelly 1969:331; Reike 1964:164; Schneider 2003:336). Peter does not specify the sin of the angels. His emphasis is on the certainty of God's judgement for sinners. These angels were thrown 'into hell and locked ... up in chains in utter darkness', and are 'kept until the judgment' (2 Peter 2:4).³

Jude 6–7 is similar to 2 Peter 2:4–6. Jude, however, provides more details about the nature of the sin that the angels have committed. Two issues are mentioned, namely, 'position' (v. 6), and the kind of sin that they have committed (v. 7).

The NIV translation articulates it as follows: they did not keep their positions of authority, but abandoned their own home (see also ESV). In other words, the angels *left* their own homes. Bauckham (1998:52) notes that ἀρχήν, here, means a position of heavenly power or sphere of dominion which the angels exercised over the world in the service of God.

These angels left their place of authority that they had and came down to the daughters of men. This led to their consequent sin, sexual immorality (v. 7). The NET translates this verse as follows: 'So also Sodom and Gomorrah ... since they indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire in a way similar to these angels.'

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was the same as that of the angels. They have given themselves to fornication. The NIV translates it as

³ Augustine argued that the passage of 2 Peter does not refer to the angels of Genesis 6. According to him, Peter 'speaks of these who first apostatized from God, along with their chief the devil, who enviously deceived the first man under the form of a serpent' (*City of God* 15.23.1). Angels, in his view, could not have fallen to the level that is described in Genesis 6.

follows: 'In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah ... gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.' The sin of the angels, then, clearly was sexual sin. This corresponds with the account of Genesis 6:1–4.

4. A Systematic Perspective on the Sons of God

The previous sections revealed several characteristics about the identity of the sons of God. The biblical perspective indicated that the phrase, *benê-hā'elōhîm*, can be translated and interpreted in various ways. The view that had most support among the early Jewish and Christian writers was the angelic view. From Augustine onwards, however, there seemed to have been a move away from the angelic view, in favour of the godly line of Seth theory. These two views represent a supernatural versus a human theory respectively. Remarkably, these two opposing views reappear under two different views, namely, the divine assembly (supernatural) versus the dynastic-ruler (human) respectively. This section presents a systematic perspective on the identity of the sons of God and the problem of spiritual spouses as a conclusion of the biblical and historical perspectives.

4.1. The sons of God in the Old Testament are angels

All references to the phrase *benê-hā'elōhîm* in the Old Testament seem to refer to heavenly or divine beings (see 3.4). In the context of scripture, these beings should be identified as angels, since the Old Testament's monotheistic view does not support the notion of 'gods' under a major God (see 3.3; 3.6.1). Therefore, in this paper, I accept that the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6:2 are angels, who left their place of origin and came down to marry human beings.

The godly line of Seth theory argues, that the contrast in Genesis 6:2 between the ‘daughters of men’ and ‘sons of God’, is religious (i.e. the unbelieving daughters of Cain versus the believing sons of Seth). ‘Men/humankind’ (*hā’ādām*) in Genesis 6:1 refers to the human race in general, and not to the line of Cain. ‘Men’ (*hā’ādām*) in verse 2, in the same context, should be interpreted in the same way. ‘Daughters of men’ (*běnôt hā’ādām*) are daughters born into the human race. They are clearly contrasted with ‘sons of God’. In other words, the ‘earthly’ is contrasted with the ‘heavenly/divine’. It is also not certain that all the people in the line of Seth were godly people, and that those of Cain were ungodly. For that reason, the two lines (i.e. Cain and Seth) cannot be exhaustively separated based on ungodliness and godliness.

Also, it is often advocated that the phrase, ‘sons of God’, is likewise used to refer to human beings in the Old Testament. Lange’s commentary (1869) provides an important argument in favour of the Genesis 6 passage to be interpreted as a reference to human beings. In it, he concludes that the angelic meaning of the phrase only appears in ‘a few poetical places, and in one nominally prophetic’, and ‘in the pure historical pieces the angels are never styled sons of God’. There can be little doubt, that in the Old Testament, the word *ben*, ‘son’, sometimes referred to human beings. But in all its appearances, the complete phrase ‘sons of God’ refers to supernatural beings. Contrary to Lange’s observation, the phrase does appear in Job 1, which is not poetry, but prose.

4.2. The New Testament addresses sexual sin of angels in Genesis 6

The New Testament references to this passage favour the angelic view (see 3.6.2). Both Jude and 2 Peter called the sons of God, *angels*.

Livingston (1969:52) refers to the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:30, in which he explained that the angels of God do not marry (Mark 12:25). Therefore, according to him, it is not scriptural to speak about 'marriage between the angels and human beings'. Angels are spirits, but when they are on earth, they are referred to as men (See Dan 10:5, 16; Gen 18:1–8) and as performing 'human duties' (e.g. they ate with both Abraham and Lot [Gen 19:3]). When the angels came from heaven to destroy Sodom, the people of Sodom wanted to have 'sex' with them (cf. Gen 19:5). If this is related to the good and faithful angels, what about angels who disobeyed their creator? A proper reading of Matthew 22:30 reveals that the Lord is speaking about the angels in heaven. Both Matthew and Mark make use of the phrase, 'in heaven'. The parallel passage in Luke 20:36 omits it, but reads, 'they are equal to angels and are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection'. This, however, is not true for angels who left their original place and came to live with women on earth. The angels in Genesis 6 left their dwelling place in heaven (see Jude 6). When they were here on earth, they married, which has caused their fall.

These angels were not originally servants of Satan originally (e.g. demons, as some have argued). They were servants of God, but when they sinned, they became servants of the devil. It appears that in the gospels, and subsequently, demons are still able to carry out evil attacks on human beings. The 'fallen angels' in this passage, however, were thrown 'into hell and locked them up in chains' (2 Pet 2:4).

Jude clearly refers to the fact that the sin that these angels have committed was sexual. Church leaders from different generations seemed to share the opinion that spirits (in particular demons) can have intercourse with human beings. They differ in their views about procreation.

4.3. Church leaders supported the angelic theory

The predominant view in the early Jewish and church writings was the angelic theory. Church leaders also seemed to support the idea that ‘spirits’ could have sexual relations with women. This view, however, has been challenged from various sides, both Jewish and Christian.⁴

4.4. ‘Evil’ spirit can have sexual intercourse with human beings

Church historians give several examples of alleged sexual unions, and sometimes, procreating between spirit beings and human beings. Leaders who did not accept the angelic theory in Genesis were still of the opinion that evil spirits could have sexual affairs with human beings (e.g. Augustine; Luther). Some would even argue that these spirits can procreate with human beings. Schaff gave several examples of the work of *incubi* during the Middle Ages in his *History of the Christian church* (vol. 5 § 136; vol. 6 § 59). A well-known example was that of Merlin, the son of an *incubus* and a British nun. Eleanor, wife of Louis VII, and then of Henry II of England, was reported to be the child of an *incubus* and a woman. An *incubus* also prevented the parents of Guibert of Nogent from having sexual intercourse for three years, until the *incubus* was driven out. The theory of how *incubi* procreating are explained in detail in the works of Thomas Aquinas. The spiritual beings are identified as evil spirits, demons.

Scripture, however, does not teach that this was the work of the good angels of God. If the passage in Genesis 6, as understood in this paper (see also the New Testament passages) can be used as a biblical example of spirit beings having intercourse with human beings, it must

⁴ Some of these arguments were discussed briefly in section 4.1 and 4.2.

be emphasised that it was the disobedient angels that did this. Furthermore, this action was met with divine judgement. Genesis 6 and the New Testament references speak about the judgement that followed the sin of the angels. The human beings involved in the sexual activity with the angels died during the flood. God kept the disobedient angels 'in eternal chains in utter darkness, locked up for the judgment of the great Day (Jude 6). If church leaders, past and present, know about sexual activities between spirit beings and human beings, these can only be demonic activities and never the work of good angels. The good angels are 'all ministering spirits, sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation' (Heb 1:14).

A critical question in this regard is the role of human beings in such a relationship. Neither the references in Genesis 6, nor the New Testament references seem to give any indication as to the role that the women played. Finally, the comments made by Newman (1984:36) in his exegetical article on this passage are an appropriate conclusion to this systematic perspective:

May it not be possible that we enlightened, twentieth-century Christians can learn something positive from the ancient exegetes? Perhaps they were right in seeing an angelic incursion in Genesis 6:1–4 and we are wrong in denying it. Perhaps with a great interest in the supernatural and angels some ancient interpreters scoured the Scriptures to locate any hints it might contain on this subject. In such a case, they might well have reached some valid insights which God preserved by inscription in the NT.

5. A practical perspective

Is there a relationship between spirits having sexual relationships with human beings, and the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6? What should be the

church's response to those members who claim to have spiritual husbands and wives? The conclusion drawn in the previous section was that spirit beings, namely, disobedient spirits and demons, can have sexual intercourse with human beings. Spiritual husbands and wives should therefore be seen as demons that have sexual relationships with human beings. What should the church do about this specifically, and demonic activities in the lives of believers generally. Some possible applications from different practical theological perspectives follow.⁵

5.1. Pastoral

The presence of demonic activities in the life of a believer calls for a pastoral response. Heitink (2000:256) describes this kind of pastoral response as developing a 'helping relationship' with a person, in the light of the gospel and in unity with the church of Christ.⁶ The purpose of such a relationship is to find a way to answer questions relating to faith and life. The issue of demonic attacks or spiritual spouses is one such question. The Lord Jesus Christ made a case for this kind of pastoral care when he set a woman free, who had a disabling spirit (Luke 13:11). She was a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years. Deliverance from the bondage of evil spirits was a major activity of Christ during his earthly ministry, and the early church followed his example.

The church's pastoral response should also focus on 'false alarms'. Some believers tend to perceive demonic activities where there is in

⁵ Within the context of this paper, demonic activity is not synonymous with demon possession.

⁶ Heitink studied this aspect of the practical theology under what he calls 'poimenics', the academic study of individual and group pastoral care. The word is derived from the Greek *poimainō*, which means 'to shepherd'.

fact none. This function of pastoral care is what Heitink (p. 257) called 'guiding'. The purpose of 'guiding' is to help people make sound decisions based on their convictions. Sometimes, pastoral care can help bring these convictions in line with an evangelical Christian worldview. In the light of our topic, the counsellor could guide the person, who is of the opinion, for example, that he/she is tormented by an evil spirit (as a result of, for example, erotic dreams). There may be various explanations for such dreams, including watching pornographic movies, or reading erotic literature.

5.2. Ethical

The presence of demonic activities in the life of believers raised the following ethical question: has the believer played a role in this activity? Douma (1999:23) sees ethics as a reflection on the moral actions. If demonic activities manifest in the life of a believer, is there a connection between that particular manifestation, and the life-choices that that person has made? Also, who is responsible for such actions? From my own ministry experience, I have come to realise that believers can and do open themselves up to demonic influences by participating in satanic or demonic activities. The church father Tertullian gave a few examples of this in his *The Shows* 26: 'We have the case of the woman—the Lord Himself is witness—who went to the theatre, and came back possessed. In the outcasting, accordingly, when the unclean creature was upbraided with having dared to attack a believer, he firmly replied, "And in truth I did it most righteously, for I found her in my domain."'⁷

⁷ See also his *Apology* 1:37; *Idolatry* 2:11; *The Shows* 29; *Scapula* 5:2. See also *The Clementine Homilies* 7:3 'As, then, when you partook of meat offered to idols, you became servants to the prince of evil'.

In Acts 5, we have an example of a believer who opened himself to Satan. Peter said to Ananias: ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?’ (Acts 5:3), and in verse 4, he said ‘How have you thought up this deed in your heart?’ (Acts 5:4). Even though the devil filled his heart, Peter held Ananias responsible for his own action. Believers cannot blame evil spirits for their deeds (e.g. ‘I cannot help that I am having extra-marital affairs; it is because of an evil spirit’). Christian leaders seem to blame ‘spiritual spouses’ for their sexual sins and those of their congregants. One Ghanaian pastor, when asked who is responsible for sexual offences among pastors, is reported to have said: ‘My arithmetical estimates are that 10 percent of the blame should go to the pastors who have inborn habitual lust, and 40 percent to Eve-like tempting women, and 50 percent to Satan’ (Gifford 2004:110).

It is true that evil spirits can control people, so that they lose control of themselves (e.g. Luke 5). The New Testament, however, does not give any example of such control over believers.

There are cases, in which parents of children forced them into participating in demonic activities and practices. Sometimes, these children were even ‘sold’ or ‘given’ to demons by their parents before these children became Christian believers. Some of these will continue to feel the burden of that connection even after they become a Christian, and may require deliverance. Honesty, therefore, is important in this matter.

5.3. Spiritual, didactical, and homiletical

Genesis 6:5 displays a low level of spiritual life among humankind: ‘But the LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was

only evil all the time'. A context like this, where the Lord is not at the centre, is the breeding ground of satanic activities. It is critical for God's people to maintain fellowship with him, through prayers, meditating on the Word, and participating in the meetings with God's people (see Firet, in Heitink 2000:259). However, a context like this requires more than the activities of the individual believer. The teaching ministry of the church should also play a role. Heitink called these tasks the *koinonia*, a Greek word meaning 'fellowship'. He lists four tasks that are important in this respect: (a) building up the structures of the church, (b) educating the people in the church (catechesis), (c) liturgy, and (d) homiletics (p. 271).

In the face of spiritual attacks, the church should teach and preach to its members about their place of victory in Christ. Sermons and Bible studies should regularly emphasise the fact that believers were taken out of the kingdom of darkness and were brought into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:12–13). Christ triumphed over the power of darkness by 'disarming the rulers and authorities' and making 'a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Col 2:15). Therefore, the kingdom of darkness does not have any right over a son or daughter of light. Believers should fear God and give *him* glory through their lives.

Teaching and preaching should also focus on passages of scripture that teach us to 'flee from idolatry' (1 Cor 10:14), and guard ourselves 'from idols' (1 John 5:21), and not 'give the devil an opportunity' (Eph 4:27). Believers cannot flirt with the demonic world without being influenced by it.

It is important for the church to have structures in place that will accommodate the spiritual growth of all the believers, young and old.

5.4. Missional and evangelistic

The church's response to this problem will not be limited to those within. Heitink (2000:287) sees three situations through which the church can engage the public square: evangelism, social welfare work, and through the ministry of the individual believers. Christ's mandate to his disciples was to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20). This message also includes deliverance from demonic activities. Acts 8:5, Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, and as a result of his preaching, 'unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, were coming out of many who were possessed' (Acts 8:7).

Personally, it has always been a joy for me to see how the glorified Christ works through his church's missions and evangelistic activities in bringing deliverance to those who are oppressed by demons. 'Most missionaries from the West have not received training in this practice. Some have been previously led to view the entire concept as a superstition or as an action limited to the first-century' (Terry, Smith, and Anderson 1998:627). The other extreme is the unhealthy interest in, and overemphasis on, demonic activities. Terry, Smith, and Anderson (1998:636), quoted Wakely, wrote the following:

Satan and his demonic assistants must never be allowed to take centre stage in our theology or our practice. It is Jesus who has 'all authority on ... earth' (Matt. 28:18). He reigns 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come' (Eph. 1:21).

Our evangelistic and missional activities should lead people to grow in the knowledge and grace of Christ, not Satan and his demons. To him be the honour both now and on that eternal day (2 Peter 3:18).

Reference List

- Aalders GCh n.d. *Genesis. Korte Verklaring van de Heilige Schriften* (vol. 1). Kampen: JH Kok NV.
- Africanus 1886. *The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus*. In A Roberts, J Donaldson and AC Coxe (eds.). *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume VI: Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arnobius*. New York: Christian Literature Company.
- Anderson NT 1997. *A way of escape*. Oregon: Harvest House.
- Aquinas Thomas 1947. *Summa Theologica*. Five Volumes. Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Bros.
- Archer GL 1982. *Encyclopedia of Bible difficulties*. Michigan: Zondervan.
- Athenagoras of Athens 1885. A Plea for the Christians. In A Roberts, J Donaldson, and AC Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*. Translated by BP Pratten. New York: Christian Literature Company.
- Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*. Translated by M Dods, in P Schaff (ed.) 1887. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume II: St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine. New York: Christian Literature Company.

- Bauckham RJ 1998. *2 Peter, Jude*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word Incorporated.
- Beyerlin W (ed.) 1978. *Near Eastern religious texts relating to the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Brown F, Driver SR, and Briggs CA 1906. *A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament with an appendix containing biblical Aramaic. Based on the lexicon of William Gesenius, as translated by Edward Robinson, and edited with constant reference to the thesaurus of Gesenius as completed by E. Rödiger, and with authorized use of the German editions of Gesenius*. Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Calvin J 2002. *Calvin's commentaries*. Electronic edition. Galaxie Software.
- Caragounis CC 1996. *Ben*. In WA Van Gemeren, *The new international dictionary of Old Testament theology & exegesis* (vol. 1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Charles RH 1913. *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Choennie K 1997. *Een pastoraaltheologische herwaardering van het Caribisch familiesysteem bij de volkscreolen in Paramaribo. Verhandeling tot verkrijging van de graad van Licentiaat in de Godgeleerdheid*. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Clement of Alexandria 1885. *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*. In A Roberts, J Donaldson, and AC Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*. Translated by BP Pratten. New York: Christian Literature Company.
- Clines DJA 2002. *Job 1–20*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word Incorporated.

- Davids PH 2006. *The letters of 2 Peter and Jude*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Douma J 1999. *Grondslagen christelijke ethiek*. Kampen: J H Kok.
- Ephrem the Syrian 1898. *The Nisibene Hymns*. In P Schaff and H Wace (eds.), A select library of the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers of the Christian church, second series (vol. XIII). New York: Christian Literature Company.
- Ephrem the Syrian 2004. *Selected Prose Works: Commentary on Genesis, Commentary on Exodus, Homily on Our Lord, Letter to Publius*. The Fathers of the Church, Volume 91. Translated by Mathews EG Jr., Amar JP, and McVey K. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.
- Freedman DN (ed.) 1992. *The anchor Bible dictionary*. New York: Doubleday.
- Gesenius W 1857. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament scriptures translated, with additions, and corrections from the author's Thesaurus and other works by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles*. London: Samuel Bagster & Sons
- Goldingay JE 1998. *Daniel*. Word biblical commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- Haag H 1975. *Ben*. In GJ Botterweck and H Riggren (eds.), Theological dictionary of the Old Testament (vol. 2). Translated by Willis JT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Heitink G 2000. *Praktische theologie: geschiedenis–theorie–handelingsvelden*. Kampen: Kok.
- Jamieson R, Fausset AR, and Brown D 1871. *Commentary critical and explanatory on the whole Bible*. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- Josephus Flavius 1987. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Translated by W Whiston. Peabody: Hendrickson.

- Kaiser WC Jr., Davids PH, Bruce FF, and Brauch MT 1996. *Hard sayings of the Bible*. Illinois: IVP.
- Keil CF and Delitzsch F 1996. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Kelly JND 1969. *A commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*. Harper's New Testament commentaries. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kline M 1962. Divine kingship and Gen. 6:1–4. *Westminster Theological Journal* 24:187–204.
- Koehler L, Baumgartner W, and Stamm J 2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated by Richardson M. Leiden: E J Brill.
- Lange JP (ed.) 1869. *A commentary on the Holy scriptures: critical, doctrinal, and homilectical, with special reference to ministers and students*. Translated by P Schaff. New York: C. Scribner & Company.
- Livingston GH 1969. *Genesis*. Beacon Bible commentary. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.
- Luther M 1960. *Luther's works. Volume 2: lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*. In Pelikan JJ, Oswald HC and Lehmann HT (eds.) Saint Louis: Concordia.
- Martyr Justin 1885. The Second Apology of Justin. In A Roberts, J Donaldson, and AC Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*. Translated by BP Pratten. New York: Christian Literature Company.
- Mathews KA 2001. *Genesis 1–11:26*. The new American commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Miller SR 1994. *Daniel*. The new American commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.

- Montgomery JA 1927. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Book of Daniel*. International Critical Commentary. New York: C. Scribner.
- Mullen TE Jr 1992. Divine Assembly. In DN Freedman (ed.), *The anchor Bible dictionary*. New York: Doubleday.
- Murray J 1957. *Principles of conduct*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Newman RC 1984. The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4. *Grace Theological Journal* 5:13–36.
- Philo of Alexandria 1995. *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*. Translated by CD Yonge. Massachusetts: Hendrickson.
- Reike B 1964. *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday.
- Richardson A 1953. *Genesis 1–11*. London: SCM.
- Schreiner TR 2003. *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. The new American commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Smith KG 2012. *Integrated theology: discerning God's will in our world*. Unpublished manuscript. South African Theological Seminary. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Speiser EA 1964. *Genesis*. Anchor Bible. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Spence HDM and Exell JS 1950. *The pulpit commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Spurrell GJ 1887. *Notes on the Hebrew text of the book of Genesis: with two appendices*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Stigers HG 1976. *A commentary on Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Terry JM, Smith E, and Anderson J 1998. *Missiology: an introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Tertullian 1885. The Shows, or De Spectaculis. In A Roberts, J Donaldson, and AC Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras,*

- Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*. Translated by BP Pratten. New York: Christian Literature Company.
- Van Gemeren WA (ed.) 1998. *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology and exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- VanGemeren WA 1981. The sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: an example of evangelical demythologization? *Westminster Theological Journal* 43(2):319–348.
- Vawter B 1977. *On Genesis: a new reading*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Von Rad G 1973. *Genesis: a commentary* (rev. ed.). Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Wekker G 1994. *Ik ben een gouden munt. Ik ga door vele handen, maar verlies mijn waarde niet: Subjectiviteit en sexualiteit van Creoolse volksklassevrouwen in Paramaribo*. Amsterdam: Feministische Uitgeverij Vita.
- Wenham GJ 1991. *Genesis*. Word biblical commentary (paperback ed.). Milton Keynes: Word Books.
- Wuest K 1954. *In these last days*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Young EJ 1949. *The prophecy of Daniel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

John Versus the Synoptic Gospels on Mary Magdalene's Visit to the Tomb

Jake H. O'Connell¹

Abstract

In this article, a solution is proposed to an alleged contradiction between the Gospel of John, and the Synoptic Gospels—an apparent contradiction concerning whether or not Mary knew that Jesus was raised when she saw the disciples after her visit to the tomb. John appears to suggest that Mary did not know that Jesus was raised from the dead, whereas the Synoptic Gospels appear to indicate that she did know this. However, it is most likely that Mary Magdalene did not know Jesus was raised from the dead, but the other women did. Therefore, there is no contradiction, because Mary Magdalene and the other women made two different visits to two different groups of disciples. Mary Magdalene left the tomb by herself before the angels had appeared. Before anyone had realised that Jesus had been raised, she reported to Peter and the Beloved Disciple. The other women left the tomb after the angels had appeared, and hence, they did know Jesus was raised, and they reported to another group of disciples.

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

Introduction

The view that the resurrection narratives are filled with blatant and irresolvable contradictions is widespread among New Testament scholars. One hears statements such as those of Bart D. Ehrman: '[T]here are numerous differences in our accounts that cannot be reconciled with each other' (2006). David Catchpole (2000:40) claims Matthew has 'drastically changed' Mark's empty tomb story. Likewise, C. F. Evans (1970: 28) is emphatic that 'it is not simply difficult to harmonize these traditions, but quite impossible.' Further, it is common to appeal to the presence of contradictions as a basis for arguing that the resurrection narratives are generally unreliable as historical accounts. According to Robert Price (2005:427), the presence of 'gross contradictions' is one of 'many reasons' we have to 'dismiss the gospel Easter narratives as unhistorical.' And Reginald H. Fuller (1980:2) declared: 'the stories themselves appear incredible on the grounds of their palpable inconsistencies.'

The first thing to note in response to this is that most of the alleged discrepancies are confined to inessential matters, and thus, do not cast doubt on the general reliability of the narratives. For example, there are seeming disagreements over how many women went to the tomb, and whether it was dark or light when they had arrived. Even if the gospel writers do contradict each other on these minor points, this hardly leads to the conclusion that the essence of the story (the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and his subsequent appearances to the disciples) is unhistorical. As an analogy, consider the discrepancies surrounding Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game. Chamberlain claims he had ten assists that game (1991:190–191), but the official box score reveals he had only two (Burwell 2001:127). Some accounts have Chamberlain scoring his 100th point on a layup, while others say it was a dunk (p.

126). When Chamberlain scored his 100th point, the crowd rushed onto the court, but some accounts say that the game was called at this point (p. 126), while others claim that the crowd was cleared and the game resumed (p. 126). Hence, irreconcilable contradictions do exist regarding the details of Chamberlain's 100-point game; yet, no one uses these contradictions to argue that Chamberlain's 100-point game has never occurred. Thus, the argument that, because the resurrection narratives disagree on minor matters, they are unreliable on major matters, is a non sequitur. (I am not implying that the so-called minor contradictions cannot be harmonised. I am only arguing that if in fact they are, this does not affect the general reliability of the accounts.) However, here, I will focus on one apparent contradiction which, if it is an actual contradiction, would indicate that the gospel writers do disagree on an essential matter regarding the women's visit to the tomb, and therefore, call into question the basic reliability of the resurrection accounts. I will argue that, despite the initial appearance of the situation, there is in no contradiction present.

1. Mary Magdalene's Visit to the Tomb

It seems that John blatantly contradicts the Synoptic Gospels concerning whether the women at the tomb knew that Jesus was resurrected before they met the disciples. In the Synoptic Gospels, the women arrived at the tomb and meet an angel (or a young man) who tells them that Jesus has risen and that they are to go and tell this to the disciples. However, John wrote that Mary Magdalene returned from the tomb alone. Upon her return, she is not only unaware of Jesus' resurrection, but she tells Peter and the Beloved Disciple that she thinks someone has taken Jesus' body. Peter and the Beloved Disciple then run to the tomb and see that it was empty, but they also do not see an angel.

Hence, in John's account, Mary Magdalene had not encountered an angel at the tomb announcing Jesus' resurrection, while the Synoptic Gospels appear to indicate that she had, indeed, encountered an angel.

Before addressing how this apparent contradiction ought to be solved, the following problem illustrates how harmonisation should not be done. Some have resorted to postulating an extremely improbable scenario in order to avoid admitting a contradiction. The case in point is the suggestion that Mary Magdalene did encounter an angel at the tomb, but she still thought that the body of Jesus was stolen because she was unable to comprehend fully what the angel had said. In the words of Gleason Archer (1982:348): 'She apparently had not yet taken in the full import of what the angel meant when he told her that the Lord had risen again and that he was alive.' But this suggestion is not at all feasible, for the words of the angel at the tomb are unambiguous. If Mary was indeed at the tomb when the angel spoke these words, she could hardly have misunderstood what he meant, and to suggest otherwise is recourse to desperation akin to Eusebius's attempt to harmonise the resurrection narratives by hypothesising the existence of two Mary Magdalenes (see Dungan 1999:109). However, there is a more plausible way of resolving this seeming contradiction. In order to do so, it is important to note three facts.

First, although John's account makes mention of only Mary Magdalene, it implies that Mary had gone to the tomb with at least one other person. Mary states, 'They have taken the Lord from the tomb and we don't know where they put him' (20:2). While scholars have offered other interpretations, the clear implication of Mary's use of the word 'we' is that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb with others, but left them at some point in order to tell Peter and the Beloved Disciple.

Second, the disciples almost certainly did not all stay in the same place on Sunday morning. In the gospels, the term, ‘disciples’, is never equated with the ‘Twelve’. ‘Disciple(s)’ is a broad term used to refer to more than just the ‘Twelve’. Thus, whatever their number may have been, there were certainly more than twelve of them. In all likelihood, their number was large enough to safely assume that they were not all to be staying in one place. In addition, Mark and John testify that the Twelve themselves were not all gathered in one place on Sunday morning. This is obvious in John’s account: only Peter and the Beloved Disciple are present when Mary arrives, and only they go to the tomb. Hence, John thinks the other disciples are somewhere else. The same situation is implied in the Synoptic Gospels, which note Jesus saying ‘strike the shepherd and the sheep will be dispersed’ (Mark 14:27). This implies that the disciples would scatter after his arrest. Likewise, Mark 16:7 may imply that Peter was staying separately from the main group of disciples, for it presents the job of telling Peter, and telling the disciples, as two different commands. Thus, there is ample reason to believe, that different disciples, even different members of the Twelve, were staying in different locations on Sunday morning.

Third, Luke indicates that the angels were not at the tomb immediately upon the women’s arrival. According to Luke, it was ‘while they were puzzling over’ (24:4) the missing body that the angels appeared and told them that Jesus was raised. Thus, the women did not know Jesus was raised immediately upon seeing the empty tomb. Rather, for an indefinite amount of time, they remained at the tomb ‘puzzling over’ why the body was missing. Only after the appearance of the angels did they realise Jesus was resurrected. Consequently, there was a time gap of unspecified length; from the time the women arrived at the tomb’ until the time when the angels appeared.

2. The Solution

Taking these three facts into account, a plausible reconstruction is as follows: John indicates that Mary went to the tomb with others, and then left. Luke relates that the angels were not at the tomb immediately upon the women's arrival, but rather, the women stood at the tomb puzzling over the missing body for an unspecified length of time prior to the arrival of the angels. If we hypothesise that Mary Magdalene left the tomb while the other women were still puzzling over the missing body, the solution becomes apparent: Mary Magdalene did not know that Jesus was raised, because she left the tomb before the angels arrived. Since the angels were the ones who announced that Jesus had been raised, if Mary left the tomb before the angels arrived, she would not have known that Jesus was resurrected. Rather, as she ran to tell Peter and the Beloved Disciple, she would have still been 'puzzling over' what had happened to Jesus' body, just as the other women (still at the tomb) were doing. Hence, when she saw Peter and the Beloved Disciple, her best guess was that someone had stolen the body. As Mary Magdalene was in the process of telling Peter and the Beloved Disciple, the rest of the women saw the angels, heard that Jesus was resurrected, and then left the tomb. Since different disciples were staying in different places on Sunday morning, and since Mary Magdalene, in her panic, may not have told anybody where she was going, the women went to tell a different group of disciples besides Peter and the Beloved Disciple. As Peter and the Beloved Disciple were heading to the tomb, the other women were leaving. By the time Peter and the Beloved Disciple arrived at the tomb, the women had left.

The following question arises: why would John narrate these events from a very different perspective than the other gospel writers? In order to answer this question, it is important to remember that none of the

gospel writers tried to give a comprehensive account of everything which took place on the morning of the resurrection. One gospel omits what another gospel includes, and in some cases, it cannot be maintained that the writer who omitted an event simply did not know about it. In order to ascertain why a particular fact was included or omitted in a particular gospel, one should rather look at the question in terms of *what would be of interest to which gospel writer*. If the reconstruction above is valid, the following scenario occurred: a group of women went to the tomb, heard that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and then left. Mary Magdalene left this group of women without knowing Jesus had been raised, and told Peter and John, who then went to the tomb and saw only the empty tomb and grave clothes, without seeing Jesus. It is clear that the most significant event in all of this is the appearance of the angel who announced Jesus' resurrection. Mary Magdalene's departure from the tomb, and Peter and John inspecting the empty tomb, are comparatively unimportant features of the narrative. It is not surprising, then, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke keep their focus on the major event (the appearance of the angel) without 'bothering' to relate Mary's departure to tell Peter and John about the empty tomb and their subsequent return. That series of events accomplished little, and so, it would be an unnecessary digression for the gospel writers.

Why then, if Mary's departure, as well as the inspection of the tomb by Peter and the Beloved Disciple was not of interest to the other three gospel writers, was it of interest to John? This is easily explicable if one considers the fourth gospel's claim to rest on the eyewitness testimony of the Beloved Disciple (John 19:35; 20:24–25). While the events of John 20:1–11 would, for Matthew, Mark, and Luke be of less interest than the appearance of the angel, for the Beloved Disciple, they were of

greater interest, because, unlike the other three gospel writers, he was an eyewitness to those events.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have examined an apparent contradiction between John and the Synoptic Gospels and found that there is, in fact, no contradiction. Although it appears that John and the Synoptic Gospels disagree as to whether Mary Magdalene knew Jesus was raised when she left the tomb, we have seen that this is not actually the case. It turns out, that though the other women knew Jesus was raised when they left the tomb, Mary Magdalene did not know this, because she had left the tomb before the appearance of the angel. Critics who charge that there is a definite contradiction here are being a little too rash in their judgment. In any case of an apparent discrepancy, the text should be examined closely, and possible harmonisations should be explored before charges of contradiction are warranted.

Reference List

- Archer GL 1982. *New international encyclopaedia of Bible difficulties: based on the NIV and the NASB*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Bauckham R 2006. *Jesus and the eyewitnesses: the gospels as eyewitness testimony*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Bultmann R 1971. *The Gospel of John: a commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Burwell B 2001. *At the buzzer! Havlicek steals, Erving soars, Magic deals, Michael scores: The greatest moments in NBA history*. New York: Doubleday.
- Carson DA 2001. *The Gospel according to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- Catchpole DR 2000. *Resurrection people: studies in the resurrection narratives of the gospels*. London: Darton, Longman, & Todd.
- Chamberlain W 1991. *A view from above*. New York: Villard.
- Dungan DL 1999. *A history of the synoptic problem: the canon, the text, the composition, and the interpretation of the gospels*. New York: Doubleday.
- Ehrman BD 2006. Is there historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? A debate between William Lane Craig and Bart D. Ehrman. Online article. Online article. Accessed from www.bringyou.to/apologetics/p96.htm, 29/08/2012.
- Evans CF 1970. *Resurrection and the New Testament*. Naperville: Alec R. Allenson.
- Fuller RH 1980. *The formation of the resurrection narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Keener CS 2003. *The Gospel of John: a commentary* (vol. 1). Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Kostenberger AJ 2004. *John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Moloney FJ 1998. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville: Liturgical.
- Price RM 2005. By this time he stinketh: The Attempts of William Lane Craig to Exhume Jesus. In RM Price and JJ Lowder (eds.), *The empty tomb: Jesus beyond the grave*, 411–431. Amherst: Prometheus.

The Victory Song of Moses in Christological Perspective within the Apocalypse of John

Martin Pohlmann¹

Abstract

Christians typically seek to approach life from a biblical perspective. Within this biblical perspective, an apocalyptic view on life encourages them to experience the reality of a relationship with God in adverse conditions. With this in mind, this article focused on the biblical apocalyptic tradition found in Exodus chapter 15, later interpreted christologically in the Apocalypse of John chapter 15; the ‘victory song of Moses’, and the ‘victory song of Moses and the Lamb’. Literature on the dialogue between these two songs was researched, and the implications for suffering Christians were explored. Finally, this article demonstrated how Christians may be aware of the ‘secular’ onslaught on this ‘sacred’ perspective.

1. Orientation

Songs and singing are essential to the worship of God’s people, both in times of suffering and in times of celebration (Manson 2005:731). It is against this background that the songs of Exodus 15:1–18 and Revelation 15:3–7 are considered. Both the Exodus and the Apocalypse

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

are punctuated with worship songs to the God who rescues his people from perilous circumstances. Moses, leading a nation in obedience to God's guidance, is able to overcome the greatest challenges—while the author of the Apocalypse, drawing inspiration from the Exodus narrative, observes how Jesus Christ leads his people to overcome with rejoicing.

The song in Revelation 15 is not a direct quotation of the song in Exodus 15. The first song contains five verses, while the second song contains eighteen. Yet, Revelation 15:3² attributes the song to Moses: 'They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God' (NKJV). What is important for the purposes of this article is how the song of Moses is also attributed to Jesus: 'And the song of the Lamb'. Pohlmann (2008:90) points out the following: 'An interesting song is sung which does not directly quote from the song of Moses, but rather presents a Christ-centred interpretation (or application) of the old battle hymn.'

There is, further, a substantial amount of theological 'translation' between the two songs (Erickson 1998:126–129). The Exodus song is sung after Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egypt, and the context is the journey through the Red Sea waters (Exod 14:29–15:1), while the Revelation 15 song is sung by followers of the 'Lamb' (Rev 15:3), and the context is Roman—likely Domitian's persecution (Livingstone 2000:493). The 'translation' between the two songs will be further explored.

In the following section, a plan is developed for comparing the song in Exodus 15 with the song in Revelation 15—from three distinct points of view.

² All scriptures will be quoted from the NIV, unless otherwise stipulated.

2. Plan

First, both songs will be explored and compared—in particular, the shared world-view in Exodus 15 and Revelation 15 will be considered. Further, Christians will be encouraged to consolidate the importance of a ‘biblical’ world-view and to maintain it within the twenty-first century.

Secondly, the theological term ‘*Heilsgeschichte* of God’ will be explored—which refers to the combined past and present history of humanity as interpreted in the light of an anticipated salvation (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling 1999:58). From this perspective, God’s purposes are fulfilled through the ‘Lamb’. Some participate in these purposes, while others oppose them or are oblivious to them (1 Cor 2:8–16). These purposes are inseparable from God’s nature as a distinctively moral God (Exodus 20).

Thirdly, the Apocalypse makes a ground-breaking shift in placing the ‘mantle’ of Moses on the shoulders of the ‘Lamb’: ‘They held harps given them by God and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb’ (Rev 15:3, NKJV). This suggests the theme of a single ‘covenant’ of God—of which three aspects are especially relevant to the songs of Exodus 15 and Revelation 15. In each of these three aspects, Jesus takes on the ‘mantle’ of Moses.

We turn first, then, to a comparison of the song in Exodus 15 with the song in Revelation 15—specifically with regard to how both of these songs share the same world-view.

3. Exodus 15:1–18 and 21 in Relation to Revelation 15:3-7

It is typical of the Apocalypse to use imagery, metaphor, and quotations from the Old Testament (Dummelow 1912:1067). In fact, the Apocalypse makes more allusions to the Old Testament than do the sum of all the other twenty-six books of the New Testament. Richard Bauckham (1993) appropriately entitles one of his books on the Apocalypse, 'The climax of prophecy.'

Thus, the apostle John sets the song of Revelation 15 not only in the context of Exodus 15, but in teleological christological perspective—by which is meant that the Christian is living within the 'end of times' (Heb 1:1–3), and is moving forwards towards the consummation of all prophecy.

As John draws on the 'song of Moses' of Exodus 15, there are three primary areas in which the song of Exodus 15, and the song of Revelation 15, may be compared.

3.1. The context of the battle is similar

Both of the texts refer to battles—and these battles raise several related questions, such as: the reality of Satan, the presence of evil in the world, and God's plan of salvation.

Thus, when Moses and the men of Israel (for the women, cf. v. 20) raise a hymn in response to the LORD's display of sovereignty over Egypt at the Sea—and, by extension, over any power on earth or in heaven that might challenge his sovereignty—it is not merely the destruction of the Egyptian host which they celebrate (Johnstone 2003:88).

The Israelites had mutually co-existed with the Egyptians for a long time when policy suddenly changed (Exod 1:8). The Pharaoh, who did

not know the Israelites, led a move to victimise them (Exod 1). As a result, the Israelites cried out to God for help and deliverance (Exod 2:23–25). Johnstone (2003:88) captures something of the wider significance of the song of Moses when he says, ‘The whole story of God’s saving acts on behalf of his people in time, and true for all time, is included in the hymn’. This helps us understand the significance of the song in the Apocalypse.

Keil (1975:49–57) presents the following outline of the Exodus hymn:

- Chapter 15:1b–5, the first strophe: ‘Jehovah had displayed His superiority to all earthly power by casting horses and riders, the proud army of the haughty Pharaoh, into the sea’.
- Chapter 15:6–10, the second strophe: ‘Jehovah had not only proved Himself to be a true man of war in destroying the Egyptians, but also as the glorious and strong one, who overthrows His enemies at the very moment when they think they are able to destroy His people’.
- Chapter 15:11–18, the third strophe: ‘Jehovah will finish the work of salvation, already begun, fill all the enemies of Israel with terror at the greatness of His arm, bring His people to His holy dwelling-place, and plant them on the mountain of His inheritance’.

The Revelation hymn follows directly on this first hymn, centuries later, as Christians are victimised at the hands of imperial leaders. The Revelation 15 song takes the essence of the Exodus 15 song and re-interprets it in terms of the Christian Church being led in victory by the ‘Lamb’ of God. Whether it is Pharaoh who leads the Egyptians against the sovereign purposes of God, or Caesar, who leads the Roman Empire, or Hitler, who leads Germany, the consequences will be the

same. Since God is the same in all such situations, the existential 'I AM' of God (Exod 3:14) applies to the life experience of God's people. Singing or weeping, the Christian lives in the presence of God Almighty.

The Revelation 15 song is a statement about God in action. 'The deeds' referred to are far more than the 'Red Sea' event of Exodus 15, but refer to all of God's deeds observed by the nations—before the Exodus, during the crossing of the Red Sea, and everything which follows (Stuckenbruck 2003:1559). In New Testament perspective, this would now include great events, such as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, followed by the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when numerous people of the nations of the then known world reported 'the wonders of God in our own tongues' (Acts 2:11).

In the book of Revelation, God's deeds are also said to be 'great and marvellous', 'just and true', 'for your righteous acts have been revealed' (Rev 15:4b). The character of God is clearly stated. The God represented by the 'Lamb' is the 'Lord God Almighty'. He is 'King of the ages' and 'holy'. Stuckenbruck (2003:1559) observes: 'The hymn (vv. 3b–4) does not allude directly to Exodus 15, but rather, stresses the universal dimension of God's rule among the nations' (Isa 12:4; Ps 86:8–10; Jer 10:6–7).

Thus, the song of Revelation 15 provides a vivid picture of hope for God's suffering people, whom he vindicates through the 'Lamb'. Barton (1995:2310) notes: 'Whereas the song of Moses celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Exod 15), the song of the Lamb celebrates the ultimate deliverance of God's people from the power of Satan (Rev 15)'.

Both the song of Exodus 15, and the song of Revelation 15, further refers to morality as it is understood in the context of God's holiness.

3.2. The context of morality is similar

Both songs exclaim the holiness of God: 'Who is like you—majestic in holiness?' (Exod 15:11)—and, 'For you alone are holy' (Rev 15:4, NIV). Whatever secular opinion may express on the subject, the God of the Bible is a holy God (Packer 2000:277).

The songs in Exodus and Revelation explain God in terms of two complementary attributes: Firstly, in terms of God being a moral God, as expressed in his Law (Exod 20), and, secondly, in terms of God being distinct from his creation. These ideas are contained in the Hebrew word, *qâdôsh*, and the Greek translation of this word, *hagios*. This holiness describes the very essence of God (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:16). He is 'holy love', 'holy mercy', 'holy justice'—God is holiness itself. Isaiah heard the seraphs exclaiming: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isa 6:3).

Therefore, God, by his very nature, cannot entertain sin in any form (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:16). 'By his very nature, God has to react to eliminate evil (Rom 1:18)' (Pohlmann 1997:171). God is aware of the 'sin stance' of the human race, as well as the 'sins' that people engage in personally, corporately, and globally (Scarborough 2012:148). Once the early warning of the 'wages of sin' (Rom 6:23) is not heeded, God will act against sinful people.

The first stage of sin is what I call the 'passive' stage, when the laws of God are disobeyed (Rom 1:18). For example: a person participates in illicit sex outside of a safe monogamous marriage and encounters the

HIV virus as the natural outcome of sin (Rom 1:27). On the other hand, if a community of people actively flaunts the laws of God—as an example, oppressing the poor or disenfranchising them—the stage may be reached when God acts against the offending parties beyond the 'passive' stage, in an engaging stage (Acts 5:3–6; Heb 13:4).

This is seen in both Exodus 15 and Revelation 15. In both of these texts, something of God's action can be traced in his response to moral decadence among those who follow the contrary movement of the Beast—represented by Egypt under Pharaoh, or, in the New Testament, as the evil system of the Apocalypse (Rev 11:7–8).

Yet, not only do both Exodus 15 and Revelation 15 relate to morality, but both texts further reveal the spiritual allegiances of those involved in the narratives. These allegiances will underlie any given morality.

3.3. The competition for the allegiance of human lives is similar

In both the song of Exodus 15 and the song of Revelation 15, it is the victimised alienated people of God who are vindicated, while 'those who opposed [the LORD]' (Exod 15:7) and followed 'the beast and his image' (Rev 15:2), are overthrown. This casts the struggle in terms of spiritual allegiances, as well as a struggle of competition for those allegiances.

In the case of Exodus 15, the faithful praying Israelites are vindicated: 'In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling' (Exod 15:13). In the setting of Revelation 15, it is those 'standing beside the sea, who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name' (Rev 15:2) who are vindicated.

The obvious jubilation within the songs is that of utter surprise. Nobody expected it possible for God's people to overcome the obstacle of the Red Sea or the anti-Christian system so perfectly designed to humiliate every Christian on earth. Yet, in both instances, believers either are rescued or vindicated, in this world or, alternatively, in eternity—and this is finally based on their spiritual allegiance.

This, then, ultimately points to God's sovereign purposes in this world. With this, we now turn to the theological term, '*heilsgeschichte* of God', which refers to the combined past and present history of humanity as interpreted in the light of an anticipated salvation as God's purposes are fulfilled through the 'Lamb'.

4. Discussion around *Historie* and *Heilsgeschichte*

The subject of history is surrounded by fundamental questions such as, is history just a reporting of historical events (*historie*), or is it an interpretation of historical events (*geschichte*)? (Grenz 2000:394). Is it a biological, evolutionary selection of the stronger succeeding over the weaker (Freedman 1999:293)? Or, is there a message in history with a meaningful purpose—guided by the sovereign God of the Bible (Niebuhr 1949:107)?

In the early eighteenth-century, Bengel first made the distinction between *geschichte* ('history') and *heilsgeschichte* ('salvation history') within the biblical narrative (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling 1999:58)—a distinction whose best-known advocate today is Pannenberg. Pannenberg alludes to these terms in all three of his volumes of systematic theology (Pannenberg 1991; 1994; 1998).

As the apostle John draws on the 'song of Moses' of Exodus 15, there are three primary areas in which *heilsgeschichte* is revealed, both in the song of Exodus 15, and in the song of Revelation 15.

4.1. God's covenant people as participators in *heilsgeschichte*

It is clear in scripture that God created the world and everything in it. This is an assumed doctrine of scripture from Genesis 1:1 onwards (Isa 42:5; Mark 13:9). Further, this creator God continues to 'care for' (providence) the entire world, and its entire people. Erickson (1998:412) says: 'While creation is God's 'origination' work with respect to the universe, providence is his continuing relationship to it'.

The problem is that, not all people are prepared to acknowledge the latter, and therefore, they are not prepared to participate in the plans of God. As a result, a school of thinking since Bengel developed two mutually complementary terms, namely *historie* (referring to all of history in general, which is empirically verifiable) and *heilsgeschichte* (a term used to identify specific moments when God's overall, sovereign hand is actually identified by believers who follow him, whether verifiable or not).

In the instance of the hymns of Exodus 15 (see vv. 1–7) and Revelation 15 (v. 3), the covenant people of God clearly testify to having been the objects of God's gracious rescue, and co-operate with God. The enemies of God, on the other hand, deliberately try to counter God's plans. As difficult as it may be to distinguish between the two—and as difficult as it may be to acknowledge the two at times—the narratives reveal that there are times when it is possible to do so. In the providence of God, there are 'phenomenal moments' when people of faith attribute certain events to God, because they know the character of God and can discern the 'hand' of God (Dray 1964:112).

However, not only are God's own people involved in his *heilgeschichte*, but so, too, are the nations of the world.

4.2. The nations of the world as prospects of Heilsgeschichte

The goal of God's plan is to reach all the nations of the world with the Good News of his love for them. Exodus 15:14 proclaims: 'The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia', and Revelation 15:4 'All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed'.

These are not statements of the 'conversion' of all nations, but an acknowledgement by all nations that God has acted, and that this is deserving of respect. 'The theological focus here is to demonstrate that, although Satan will appear to be successful in thwarting the plan and purpose of God, the nations will be reached through a suffering Church' (Pohlmann 1997:171).

God loves the world (John 3:16), and God demonstrated this through Jesus Christ, and continues to do so through the church. In the case of South Africa, there has been wide international acknowledgement from many nations that something of a historical miracle occurred in 1994, which is worth attributing to God. The conjunction 'for' in Revelation 15:4—'for your righteous acts have been revealed'—most strikingly links the acknowledgement of God by the nations with the righteous acts of God.

Yet, not only is it people—both God's covenant people and the nations of the world—who are the objects of God's *heilsgeschichte*. God himself, and his sovereign purpose, stand at the core of *heilsgeschichte*.

4.3. God's sovereign purpose as the core of *heilsgeschichte*

Both songs are punctuated with celebratory verses of God's sovereignty: 'Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power' (Exod 15:6). 'In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you' (v. 7). 'The LORD will reign for ever and ever' (v. 18). The greatest title of all is used for God (among the gods) in Revelation 15:3—'the Lord God Almighty.'

The sovereign purposes of God, which are written in the scroll of Revelation 5, will be fulfilled. God has determined that the nations of the world will be reached through a suffering, yet triumphant church. Inexplicably, the nations of the world will 'acknowledge' Christ through this extra-ordinary witness (see Exod 15:14–17 and Rev 15:4b). 'This theme should not, however, be confused with the notion that all humanity will one day become the people of God' (Stuckenbruck 2003:1559).

Having now compared the song in Exodus 15 with the song in Revelation 15, and having explored the '*heilsgeschichte* of God', in the following segments I seek to demonstrate how God's purpose is ultimately achieved through the 'Lamb'.

5. God's Purpose is Achieved Through the 'Lamb'

The Apocalypse makes a ground-breaking shift in placing the 'mantle' of Moses on the shoulders of the 'Lamb': 'They held harps given them by God and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb' (Rev 15:3). The following question therefore arises for the twenty-first-century Christian: what does this mean?

The reader of these songs needs to appreciate the theme of the single ‘covenant’ of God that runs through both Exodus 15 and Revelation 15—of which three aspects are especially relevant here. Jesus, in each of these three aspects, takes on the ‘mantle’ of Moses.

5.1. The model of the ‘Lamb’

Jesus takes over the ‘mantle’ from Moses by demonstrating, firstly, to a fuller extent than Moses ever did, how God acts or functions, and what, in turn, is expected of his people today.

Jesus came to demonstrate a model that runs counter to most of sinful society. He ‘emptied himself’ (Phil 2:5–11), he washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:1–17), and eventually, he died a substitutionary death on the cross for others. Jesus paved the way for giving (rather than receiving), serving (rather than being served), and offering the other cheek (rather than a violent reaction) (Matt 5:39). His example of offering the other cheek influenced even the lives of significant twentieth-century leaders in their practice of passive resistance (in various forms)—such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. It continues to influence leaders of nations today who take their cue from God’s revelation.

Jesus said: ‘And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:27). Jesus’ teaching on leadership and messiahship is counter-cultural (Budde 1997:14). Jesus came to model the life of God, and invited people to join him in a unique discipleship. Yoder (1978:238) puts it like this: ‘The key to the obedience of God’s people is not their effectiveness but their patience.’

However, not only does the Lamb provide a model for godly living, but also a model of God's victory in the life of those who are obedient to him.

5.2. Following the 'Lamb' in triumphant suffering

Jesus takes over the mantle of Moses in providing the ultimate example of how his people should face a 'Red Sea' or 'Egyptian' army, and so, live life in the context of hostile forces.

The readers of the Apocalypse had hoped for more material benefits in following Jesus Christ. Instead, many were alienated from ordinary social life in Roman society—in terms of trade, cultural activities, and business opportunities (Livingstone 2000:442). Worse still, some lost their lives—an example being Antipas (Rev 2:13). The martyrs 'under the altar' (Rev 6:9), in the Apocalypse, cry out in the heavenly vision; 'How long?' (Rev 6:10). In Revelation 20:4, there is additional mention of Christians being beheaded for the sake of the gospel. Yoder (1998:244) puts it like this: 'It is rather that our readiness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb'.

Revelation 11 provides a valuable insight into the 'counter-culture' of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The 'two witnesses' are killed to the delight of their enemies. When the issue is thought to be settled and the nations are celebrating their demise, the 'two witnesses' surprisingly rise from the dead. This is a distinctively Christian message. It is a message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as it affects those who follow him.

However, not only does Jesus take over the ‘mantle’ of Moses with regard to his own person; he takes over this mantle with regard to the ‘holy nation’ which he leads (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9).

5.3. Reaching the nations

Thirdly, Jesus takes over the ‘mantle’ of Moses, in that he provides us with an ultimate goal, which has universal scope, namely ‘every tribe and language and people and nation’ (Rev 5:9), while Moses’ goal was confined to leading and shaping a definitive group of people. In the song of Exodus 15, it is Israel, ‘the people you have redeemed’, who sing the song (Exod 15:15), while in Revelation 15, it is ‘the saints’ of the whole world (Rev 14:11–12; 15:2).

While it is true that Jesus came as a Jewish male and commenced his ministry in Israel, it is equally true that this was a necessary accommodation only in order to launch his objective of global missions. Jesus accomplished this progressively, by reaching women with the good news, sending out the ‘seventy’, going to the Samaritan people, reaching out to the Gentiles north of Galilee, and finally, commissioning his disciples to go into all the world, to every nation and to every creature (Matt 28:18–20).

Part of this task is world evangelism. Evangelism is simply a declaration of the good news (*kerussō*). There is no guarantee that anyone will either believe it or respond to the message of Jesus Christ. The task of the church is the evangelisation of all the nations of the world.

On the other hand, there is another dimension called ‘Christianisation’. This refers to the impact of the gospel on the nations even when people

are not necessarily converted. They are, however, influenced by the gospel and enjoy the more humane policies that benefit the entire community. An example of this is the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine during the fourth-century. Not everyone was converted to Christianity. However, many policies were introduced that ended most of the persecution of the church. This period was a very controversial one in Christendom (Hall 2002:1). Nevertheless, the reduction in Christian persecution was a very meaningful development.

Further, within the twentieth-century, there is the case of Martin Luther King. What he preached to a converted community within the walls of his church, they took out into the world as a message of human rights for all.

6. Application and Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to investigate not only the covenant God of Exodus 15 and Revelation 15, but also, the moral dimension of God in these texts.

This is important for the reason that, more recent evolutionary thinking in particular, sees no value in the morality of God as spoken of in the Bible. Dawkins (2007:135) is emphatic that, while 'many religious people find it hard to imagine how, without religion, one can be good, or would even want to be good ... goodness is no part of the definition of the God Hypothesis, merely a desirable add-on.'

MacGrath (2009:xxi) has found this 'secular' influence to have invaded sections of the Christian community. So the reader needs to be aware of the offensives from outside of Christianity, and of the more subtle offensives from within. Colossians 2:8 warns its readers in this regard: 'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive

philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.’ Examples of such are ‘demythology’, which renounces anything miraculous in scripture—and postmodernism, which denies the existence of any fixed meaning, not least in history (Pohlmann 2010:116–124).

By way of contrast, the songs of Exodus 15 and Revelation 15 declare that the plans and purposes of God will be implemented and achieved, on the basis both of God’s covenant, and of his moral attributes. The population of the earth has to contend with the living creator God: ‘For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse’ (Rom 1:20).

With such confidence in God, the people of God are able to rejoice in him who is ‘my strength and my song’ (Exod 15:2), and are able to ‘bring glory to [his] name’ (Rev 15:4). With this in mind, Yancey (1978:237) notes: ‘It is worth weeping, as the seer does, if we do not know the meaning of human life and suffering.’

Jesus Christ, as the ‘Lamb’, will lead the Church victoriously, but not without casualties. scripture does not support the notion that the church will avoid times of great tribulation (or ‘The’ great tribulation, as some teach it). The entire message of the Apocalypse, illustrated in the ‘song of Moses and the Lamb’ in chapter 15, is that we can continue to expect having a suffering, yet victorious church. The apocalyptic vision of a distinctive world-view is the truth, the real world. This is the world of our God and Father. We should live in obedience to God, face the abuse which is meted out to us, and proceed on the road of victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reference List

- Barton BB 1995. *Life application Bible commentary*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Baukham R 1993a. *The climax of prophecy: studies in the book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark.
- _____ 1993b *New Testament theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Budde M 1997. *The (magic) kingdom of God*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Dawkins R [2006] 2007. *The God delusion*. London: Black Swan.
- Dray WH 1964. *Philosophy of history*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Dummelow JR [1909] 1912. *A commentary on the holy Bible*. London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd.
- Erickson MJ [1983] 1998. *Christian theology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Freedman M [1977] 1999. Evolution, social and cultural. In A Bullock and S Trombley (eds.), *The new Fontana dictionary of modern thought*. London: HarperCollins.
- Grenz SJ [1994] 2000. *Theology for the community of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Grenz SJ, Guretzki D, and Nordling CF 1999. *Pocket dictionary of theological terms*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Hall DJ 2002. *The end of Christendom and the future of Christianity*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
- Johnstone WD 2003. Exodus. In JDG Dunn and JW Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans commentary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Keil CF 1975. *The Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- König A 1989. *The eclipse of Christ in eschatology*. London: Marshall.
- Livingstone EA [1977] 2000. *Oxford concise dictionary of the Christian church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Manson PD [1988] 2005. Worship. In SB Ferguson and DF Wright (eds.), *New dictionary of theology*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- McGrath A 2004. *The twilight of atheism: the rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world*. London: Rider.
- _____ 2009. *Theology: the basic readings*. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing.
- Niebuhr R 1949. *Faith and history*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Packer JI [1998] 2005. God. In SB Ferguson and DF Wright (eds.), *New dictionary of theology*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Pannenberg W [1988] 1991. *Systematic theology* (vol. 1). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ [1991] 1994. *Systematic theology* (vol. 2). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- _____ 1998. *Systematic theology* (vol. 3). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Peterson EH 1991. *Reversed thunder: the Revelation of John and the praying imagination*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Pohlmann MH 1997. *The influence of the Weltanschauung on the theological thrust of the Apocalypse of John*. D.Litt. et Phil dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- _____ 1999. Re-visioning missions through Apocalyptic literature. *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 8:24–28.
- _____ 2001. Re-visioning prayer through the Apocalypse of John. *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 10:45–51.
- _____ 2002. Re-visioning missions through the Apocalypse of John. *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 11:55–59.

- _____ 2008. *From above, for below: the influence of the Weltanschauung on the theological thrust of the Apocalypse*. Benoni: Hebron.
- _____ 2010. Trust the Gospel: how to deal with a postmodern era within the church. *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 19:116–124.
- Scarborough TO 2012. Reconciling the personal and social dimensions of the gospel. *Conspectus* 13:137–155.
- Stuckenbruck LT 2003. Revelation. In JDG Dunn and JW Rogerson (eds.), *Commentary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Uttley B 2010. *Revelation*. Verse by verse computer Bible study library.

A Strategy for Developing a Sustainable Sports Ministry through Soccer Evangelism in the Local Churches in Tshwane Using Browning's Multidisciplinary Model

Tim Tucker and Noel Woodbridge¹

Abstract

Due to the recent participation of numerous South African churches in various outreach programmes during the 2010 FIFA World Cup™, there has been renewed focus on the opportunities available for sports ministries in local churches today. The aim of this article is to present a strategy for developing a sustainable sports ministry through soccer evangelism in the local churches in Tshwane, using Browning's multidisciplinary model with its four sub-movements: descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology.

Introduction

South African churches remain largely disengaged from sport. However, in the past thirty years, there has been a gradual re-engagement between Christians and sport in South Africa. However, this has been largely led by para-church and mission organisations, such as Sport for Christ Action South Africa (SCAS), and Athletes in Action

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

(AIA). Both of these organisations (formed in the 1980s), and others like them, largely worked within the world of student and professional sports, rather than through local churches. Some churches have formed sports teams and play within so-called 'Christian Leagues', while other churches provide opportunities for recreational sport. However, it is still quite rare today to find a church with a specialised sports ministry department.

The aim of this article is to present a strategy for developing a sustainable sports ministry through soccer evangelism in the local churches in Tshwane, using Browning's multidisciplinary model.

1. The Current Situation (Descriptive Theology)

The first sub-movement in Browning's model is what he calls 'descriptive theology'. In terms of this sub-movement, all of the practices of a religious community are 'theory-laden' (Browning 1991:6). Descriptive theology involves an in-depth description of these practices in order to uncover the various meanings present in the current situation. It asks the basic question: how do we understand this concrete situation in which we must act? (Browning 1991:55).

The question arises: what is the current situation of sports ministry in South African churches? Due to the recent focus on the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ in South Africa, a re-engagement between church and sport is occurring as more and more churches are developing sports outreach programmes. For this reason, it is vital that a theological framework for the re-engagement of the church with sport should be developed in order to ensure that there is a lasting Christian presence and influence within the world of sport in South Africa.

Tim Tucker (2011:128–149) conducted an empirical survey (using questionnaires) amongst selected church leaders in Tshwane, South Africa, to ascertain their perceptions regarding sports ministry. The survey indicated a fairly low level of engagement between churches in Tshwane, and sport.

A total of thirty-two church leaders from a wide variety of denominational and cultural backgrounds participated in the survey. Of the thirty-two respondents, twelve indicated that they had an existing sports ministry in their church. However, of these twelve, eight had begun their sports ministry in the past two years. Therefore, only four of the thirty-two church leaders had, what may be considered as, an established sports ministry. This finding supports the view that churches are re-engaging in sports ministry, and that the FIFA World Cup™ was a factor in this renewed re-engagement with sport. This is confirmed by the fact that twenty-three of the thirty-two church leaders indicated that they intended to participate in some form of outreach during the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ itself.

In the survey, the church leaders indicated that the main hindrance to getting involved in sports ministry was the pressure to participate on a Sunday. They expressed their concern for the protection of the ‘Sabbath’, and the paramount importance of attending Sunday worship services. The second main concern was the threat that football could become an idol in the life of the participant. Of the twenty churches without a sports ministry, thirteen of the leaders highlighted a lack of resources (volunteers, time, facilities, and training) as being a significant factor that was preventing them from pursuing sports ministry.

The survey also provided insight into the main reasons why churches develop a sports ministry—based upon the work of Rodger Oswald

(2002:2). Of the ten listed reasons (motivations) for developing a sports ministry, the church leaders selected the following as being the most important:

- Sports ministry can assist the church in fulfilling the Great Commission.
- Sports ministry can help churches to cross cultural barriers, thereby extending greater influence in their community and engaging in mission.

Both of these motives are highly evangelistic in nature and, therefore, demonstrate that the church leaders believe that sports ministry is essentially evangelistic and missional in nature.

2. An Examination of the Historical Relationship between Christianity and Sport in the West (Historical Theology)

The second sub-movement in Browning's model is 'historical theology.' It examines the texts of given communities and means putting 'theory-laden questions that emerge from contemporary practices to the great religious monuments of the religious tradition' (Browning 1991:175). It asks the basic question: what do the normative texts that are already part of our effective history really imply for our praxis when they are confronted as honestly as possible? (Browning 1991:49)

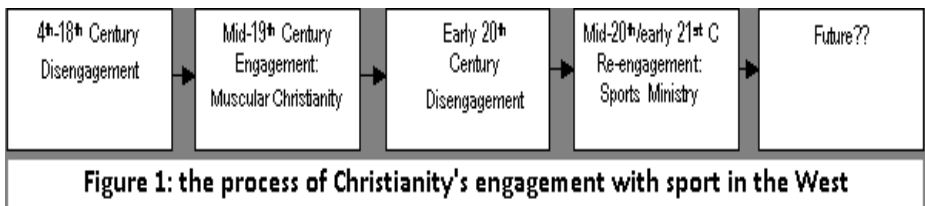
In the context of sports ministry: what is the historical relationship between the church and sport in the West? In their comprehensive study of the Muscular Christianity movement, Ladd and Mathisen (1999:20) indicate that, in the West, trends fluctuating between engagement and

disengagement can be detected in the relationship between the church and sport. According to Ladd and Mathisen (1999:20):

- The term ‘engagement’ is a term used to define a period in history when the church, in a particular country or culture, was actively supportive of Christian involvement in, and interaction with, the world of sport.
- The term ‘disengagement’ is used to define a period in history, when the church, in a particular country or culture, was not supportive of Christian involvement in, and interaction with, the world of sport.

In each period of engagement and disengagement different theological emphases can be discerned that influenced the church’s interaction with sport. Doctrines, such as dualism, have been documented as being an underlying influence during periods of disengagement.

The historical relationship between Christianity and sport in the West can be illustrated as follows:



2.1. Early Church: from engagement to disengagement

The history of the relationship between Christianity and sport goes back to the early church. Sport played an important role in both Greek and Roman cultures, with the Apostle Paul drawing analogies from the world of sport to illustrate Christian principles. However, as Roman

sport began to become more gruesome, and the Coliseum became a venue for sporting atrocities, the church understandably distanced itself from sport (Garner 2003:39).

2.2. Middle Ages: disengagement

The church remained largely disengaged from the world of sport throughout the time of the early church and into the Middle Ages. In Britain, the role of sport in society was largely controlled by the preferences of the monarchy, although the church attempted to control leisure practices that were deemed unacceptable on holy days (Tyndall 2004:10). The majority of clergy considered sport a distraction that took people's mind and attention away from the things of God (Garner 2003:39).

2.3. The Reformation: disengagement, but changing attitudes

It was through the Reformation that the door opened for Christians to return to a more biblical view of the relationship between the body, mind, and spirit. Luther was a leading light in this regard (Garner 2003:40). Ultimately, this would lead to the establishment of a biblical foundation for the church to re-engage in sport. As the Puritans were persecuted in England and made their way to the United States, their doctrines greatly influenced the Founding Fathers, who saw little value in sports (Price 2001:15). Despite the emergence of a more holistic theology during this period, the church, as a whole, remained disengaged from sport.

2.4. Nineteenth-century: engagement through Muscular Christianity

The attitude of the church towards sport changed drastically in the nineteenth-century. Putney gives a very succinct definition of muscular Christianity, as simply being ‘a Christian commitment to health and manliness’ (Putney 2003:11). After many centuries of Christians being disassociated from and disinterested in sport (Garner 2003:39), the doctrine of Muscular Christianity brought about a new era of engagement between Christianity and sport. The Muscular Christianity movement, in turn, greatly influenced world mission, and Muscular Missionaries travelled to Africa and beyond with a Bible in one hand, and a ball in the other (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2004:8).

2.5. Early twentieth-century: from engagement to disengagement

At the end of the nineteenth-century, sports ministry was growing and playing a vital and vibrant role in churches in Western countries, and through missionaries entering into foreign nations. However, the momentum slowed down and Christians began to turn their backs on sports ministry—even becoming overtly critical of Christians participating in sport. As the twentieth-century dawned, sport became even more popular and powerful. As sports stars gained fame and fortune, the church began to turn its back on what it had previously embraced. The church viewed its embracing of sport as having backfired. Sport was becoming popular at the expense of faith, with sport becoming a religion in and of itself (Connor 2003:4, 32).

2.6. Mid-twentieth-century to current: re-engagement through sports ministry

In the mid-twentieth-century, with the U.S.A. leading the way, the church started to re-engage with the world of sport, recognising the potential of impacting the world for Christ through sports outreach. This rebirth gave rise to the term 'Sports Ministry' (Mason 2003:20). Factors that led to this re-engagement include the following: church-based sports and recreation ministries, celebrity sports people being used to attract a crowd at crusades, sports mission teams travelling from the U.S.A. to other countries, specialised sports ministries being established to reach sports people with the gospel, and outreach taking place at major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cups.

In Africa, the re-engagement process is presently underway, as full-time sports ministries view the sports field as an opportunity to reap a harvest of souls. Although 'para-church' ministries are taking the lead in this re-engagement, many churches are re-evaluating ways in which to influence the world of sport for Christ.

3. Biblical Themes in Sports Ministry (Systematic Theology)

The third sub-movement in Browning's model is 'systematic theology.' It is the task of systematic theology to identify these 'common issues', and then, to search the normative Christian texts for 'general themes' that will address these practical issues and questions of the culture. It asks the basic question: how do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation? (Browning 1991:51, 52–53)

The question arises: what normative Christian texts can be used to address the practical issues relating to sports ministry in the South African context? A growing number of sports ministry practitioners are presenting theological models as a framework for sports ministry. In this section, three of these models will be examined; key components of each will be highlighted. These models are all presented in books that have been written for the general Christian market and, therefore, they are perhaps not fully developed. However, they nevertheless provide very useful frameworks for the development of a theological basis for sports evangelism and ministry.

3.1. Steve Connor

Steve Connor (2003:49) proposes five ‘unique but interrelated’ principles as a theological basis for sports ministry. From these foundational principles, he proposes a methodology for fulfilling the Great Commission of ‘making disciples’:

Proclamation: Connor’s foundational verse for his principle of proclamation is Romans 10:14–15. He believes that ‘verbalisation of the truth’ (2003:53) is an essential component of evangelism, which is the core of sports ministry. The ‘transmission of truth’ is vital in the Christian’s evangelistic task.

Demonstration: For Connor, demonstration entails the ‘visualisation of truth’; the physical embodiment of Christ’s command to love God and love people. A key verse is Romans 5:8 (Connor 2002:65).

Maturation: Connor proposes the following formula: incubation + education + application = maturation (Connor 2003:74). The process of maturation involves the cultivation of truth in the life of believers until

they, 'become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (Eph 4:1).

Reproduction: 2 Timothy 2:2 is Connor's key verse in his emphasis of the need to 'reproduce reproducers.' Here, Paul instructs Timothy to entrust his teachings to 'reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.' Connor advocates a strategic approach of 'training others to reproduce.' He believes that, 'the key to cohesive sports ministry in the local church is leadership training' (Connor 2003:85, 87, 88).

Sportsmanship: The final principle in Connor's model is sportsmanship; encouraging a Christian sports culture. Connor recognises that the world of sport itself needs to be influenced and transformed by the way Christians compete (Connor 2003:93, 94). Titus 2:6–8 gives a mandate to Christian sports people to be 'self-controlled' and to set a 'good example'.

3.2. Rodger Oswald

Rodger Oswald has written a number of publications on a theological and biblical framework for sports ministry. His target audience is principally the church. His main theological emphasis centres on the mandate, means, and methodology for sports evangelism. Using these three pillars of sports ministry, he exhorts the church to consider sport as a key field of evangelism in the world today.

The mandate: Rodger Oswald's launching point for his theological framework for sports ministry is the general biblical mandate for evangelism. 'The mandate is clear: Jesus is to be proclaimed. Jesus is to be preached. Christians are to have a testimony. We are to be witnesses of Jesus Christ into the entire world' (Garner 2003:27). He underlines that it is a contradiction to be a follower of Christ and not make his

message known to others; therefore, the mandate of Christ is applicable to all believers in all walks of life, including the world of sport (Oswald 2002:9).

The means: Oswald indicates that the means through which God will reach sports people with the gospel would be through Christian sports people with a specific call to utilise their sporting gift and passion in the service of Christ (Garner 2003:29). Oswald (2002:9) elaborates:

As one who serves the Lord and the gospel message, we often find that we have a special gift, ability or even the uniqueness of where we are born and the things we have accomplished that makes our proclamation more poignant ... perhaps even the distinctive of being an athlete or athletically inclined for the sake of the gospel.

The methodology: Oswald underlines the importance of the following: any culturally relevant method of evangelism should be tested against scripture, ‘to determine a biblical pattern for carrying out the mandate.’ In his writings, Oswald provides scriptural principles, which he believes ‘create an apologetic that endorses, liberates, and compels one to consider where this unique ministry ought to fit into one’s life or into the ministry life of the church’ (Garner 2003:30). He believes that these biblical principles provide ‘clear latitude for the employment of methodology (even in sports ministry) for the sake of the gospel’ (Oswald 2002:10).

3.3. Graham Daniels and Stuart Weir

Graham Daniels and Stuart Weir have written a number of articles and books geared towards mobilising Christian sports people towards evangelism. Through the ministry of Christians in Sport in the U.K., Daniels and Weir have developed a practical theological framework for

sports evangelism based upon Colossians 4:2–6. They state that, 'It can be argued that the mission of the Christian in the world of sport is summed up by the three words pray, play and say' (Daniels and Weir 2008:§2¶7). The following is a summary of the key points of their model.

Pray: Paul writes in Colossians 4:2–3, 'Devote yourselves to prayer ... And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message.' For Paul, it is critical that believers pray both for openings to explain the good news of Jesus Christ, and to clarify the explanation when that opportunity arises (Daniels and Weir 2005:8). The challenge to Christians in the world of sport is to pray for those with whom they interact on the sports field, so that opportunities to share Christ's love might emerge.

Play: Daniels and Weir contend that opportunities to share Christ's love will emerge only in proportion to how Christians demonstrate Christ's love through their sporting participations. They elaborate as follows: 'It's the way we play, both on and off the field that will earn us the right to speak of Christ'. Christian sports people should always be aware of the fact that they are always 'Christ's ambassadors' (2 Cor 5:20). Those who have sporting gifts need to recognise that they are living out their faith in a public arena, and that the effectiveness of their testimony is directly linked to the way they play. Christian sports people need to be actively seeking opportunities to impact the culture of sport with the gospel as they seek 'greater opportunities to represent Christ in word and deed' (Daniels and Weir 2005:9, 10).

Say: In this regard, the Apostle Paul says: 'Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone' (Col 4:5b–6). Daniels and Weir contend that as Christians pray for opportunities to

share their faith, and as they live lives which actively demonstrate the love of Christ, so opportunities to verbally proclaim the gospel will transpire. This principle can be summarised as follows: ‘Those who pray are more likely to get to say!’ Through active participation in a godly manner, friendships can be formed, which can lead to openings to share the gospel with other sports people (Daniels and Weir 2005:10, 11).

4. A Strategy for Developing a Sustainable Sports Ministry using the PRIOR Model (Strategic Practical Theology)

The fourth sub-movement of theology, ‘strategic practical theology’, is a microcosm of the greater four sub-movement paradigm of ‘fundamental practical theology’. The first three sub-movements of a fundamental practical theology prepare the researcher for a discussion of the structure and methods of a strategic practical theology (Browning 1991:54). It asks the following basic questions: what should be our praxis in this concrete situation? What means, strategies, and rhetorics should one use in this concrete situation? (Browning 1991:55, 56).

The basic question in the context of sports ministry in South Africa is: what strategy should be used in South Africa for developing a sustainable sports ministry in local churches? The authors propose a strategy for a sustainable sports ministry in the form of five basic principles of evangelism through sports ministry. These principles have been derived from the previous three sub-movements of Browning’s multidisciplinary model, especially the third sub-movement relating to the biblical themes of sports ministry. The researchers have joined together these five basic principles to form the PRIOR model:

Proclamation, Reconciliation, Incarnation, Organisation, and Reproduction.

4.1. Proclamation: the message

Evangelism, by definition, requires the public proclamation of the gospel; 'evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God' (Taken from the Lausanne Covenant 1974, quoted in Elwell 1993:166).

Jesus himself commissioned his disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:18–20), and the New Testament consistently teaches that the followers of Christ are to proclaim the message (e.g. 2 Tim 4:2–5). Within today's sports-mad society, the challenge of the church is to find effective means to proclaim the unchanging message in a relevant way within the world of sport. The focus of proclamation is to accurately share the gospel message as revealed in scripture. Connor (2003:55) contends that the message should not be changed or compromised, even if the methods of evangelism are adapted for the sporting context.

4.2. Reconciliation: the motive

Reconciliation is a key biblical principle and serves as the motive for evangelism through sports ministry. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, the Apostle Paul states that we have been given the 'ministry of reconciliation' by Christ.

In a divided world, sport provides a practical medium through which to proclaim the message of reconciliation. In particular, the continent of Africa has found a shared identity through the game of football

(Hawkey 2009:5). This message of reconciliation provides a powerful metaphor for sports ministers to utilise when sharing the gospel. It has also helped them to sensitise football players in Africa to the concept of reconciliation.

In South Africa, the general public is very aware of the concept of reconciliation, and the power that sport can play in facilitating reconciliation between peoples of different races and backgrounds. This was clearly demonstrated during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, which was hosted in South Africa, when the process of reconciliation was spurred on by the person of Nelson Mandela (Carlin 2008:203). More recently, the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ contributed greatly towards the process of national reconciliation and the concept of nation building.

4.3. Incarnation: the means

An incarnational approach to ministry is the means through which the gospel message should be proclaimed in the world of sport. The Lausanne Covenant clearly stated that, ‘Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand’ (Taken from the Lausanne Covenant 1974 quoted in Elwell 1993:166). Mason (2003:42) argues that, ‘For society to be transformed by the Word of God it has to be first of all penetrated by the people of God.’ The doctrine of the incarnation of Christ is central to Christian belief, and is therefore a powerful model for ministry (Weir 2000:105). Tredway (2006:62) elaborates: ‘The incarnational strategy in soccer [or sport] is simple as it only requires the Christian soccer persons to be themselves.’

An incarnational approach to ministry is modelled on Christ who, being God himself, took on the nature of a servant in human form (Phil 2:6–8)

in order to practically demonstrate the love of God to mankind. The Apostle Paul also used the incarnational strategy in his evangelism. In 1 Corinthians 9:21, he states emphatically, 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I may save some.' This means that he became like those he was trying to reach in order to more effectively connect and share the gospel with them. It can therefore be argued that, in order to reach sports people for Christ, one should actively participate in sport, so as to build a bridge for the gospel message. In the language of Daniels and Weir (2005:10), it is through actively playing alongside non-believers that will earn Christians the right to 'say' the message.

4.4. Organisation: the medium

Since the 1950s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of registered sports ministries. This has been termed as the 'institutionalisation of muscular Christianity' (Ladd and Mathisen 1999:160). However, the researchers are not here referring to the Organisations (capital 'O'), but rather, to the strategic organisation (small 'o') of evangelism through sport that needs to occur for the ultimate effectiveness of sports ministry (in which Organisations may play a part).

The Apostle Paul was clearly led by the Holy Spirit in his life, calling and ministry (e.g. Acts 13:1–3 and 16:6–10). However, this did not mean that he was haphazard and spontaneous in his ministry. Rather, he was both intentional and strategic in his evangelism (Rom 15:17–21). In the same way, today's sports ministry and evangelism through sport need to be intentional and organised. Hence, in order to increase the impact of the church in the world of sport, effective organisation needs to occur. This organisation is part of what John Garner (2003:69) terms

‘Kingdom planning’, and applies to all individuals, churches and other institutions seeking to engage in evangelism through sport.

Organisation is a means to effective sports ministry and it can look different in different contexts. However, intentional sports ministry involves strategic planning and a solid structure, all in submission to the Holy Spirit’s leading in order to be fruitful and effective. Yet organisation within sports needs to spark creativity, rather than simply seek to dictate programmes (Garner 2003:121).

4.5. Reproduction: the maturation

Jesus reproduced his ministry through his disciples, who served as his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). His command to the Twelve was to ‘make disciples’ (Matt 28:19), not to merely proclaim the message. The Apostle Paul recognised the importance of reproducing himself in others, as he did with Timothy, and instructed Timothy to do likewise (2 Tim 2). Reproduction demonstrates maturity.

If the church is to continue to be engaged with the world of sport in South Africa and elsewhere, then, there should be a process whereby those involved in sports ministry can reproduce themselves in others. According to Connor (2003:88), this involves the processes of discipleship and leadership training.

The challenge to make disciples is extremely relevant within the South African and African context, where much emphasis is given to evangelism through proclamation, but much less emphasis on discipleship. A true understanding of evangelism will always include discipleship (1 Cor 3:6–9). Rick Warren (1995:107) states that, ‘Discipleship is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This process begins when a

person is born again and continues throughout the rest of his life.' In making disciples, the fruitfulness of ministry is multiplied because reproducers are being reproduced.

Conclusion

This article examined the challenges and opportunities facing sports ministry in South African churches today in the aftermath of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™, with special reference to the local churches in Tshwane. The research methodology was based on Browning's multidisciplinary theological research model. From the research findings obtained from the first three sub-movements of Browning's model, the researchers presented the PRIOR model, as a strategy for developing a sustainable sports ministry through soccer evangelism in the local churches in Tshwane today. This strategy could very well be applied to other local churches in South Africa.

The PRIOR model integrates the material derived from Browning's first three sub-movements, drawing extensively from the models of other sports ministry practitioners. It is hoped that the PRIOR model, when implemented, will go a long way towards helping the local churches in South Africa, especially in Tshwane, to develop a sustainable sports ministry through soccer evangelism. If successfully applied, the lessons learned by South African churches, as a result of their participation in outreach programmes during the 2010 FIFA World Cup™, would culminate in a more effective sports ministry in the context of the local church.

Reference List

- Armstrong G and Giulianotti R (eds.) 2004. *Football in Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Browning DS 1991. *A fundamental practical theology: descriptive and strategic proposals*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Carlin J 2008. *Playing the enemy*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Connor S 2003. *Sports outreach: principles and practice for successful sports ministry*. Ross-shire: QUE.
- Daniels G and Weir JS 2005. *Sports stadium*. Bicester: Frampton House.
- Daniels G and Weir W 2008. *Church and sport*. Online article. Accessed from www.veritesport.org, 29/04/2009.
- Elwell W (ed.) 1993. *The concise evangelical dictionary of theology*. Great Britain: Marshall Pickering.
- Garner J (ed.) 2003. *Recreation and sports ministry: impacting postmodern culture*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Hawkey I 2009. *Feet of the chameleon*. London: Portico Books.
- Kinast RL 2000. *What are they saying about theological reflection?* New York: Paulist Press.
- Ladd T and Mathisen JA 1999. *Muscular Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Mason B 2003. *Into the stadium*. Milton Keys: Spring Harvest Publishing Division.
- Oswald R 2002. *Sports ministry and the church*. Unpublished article, Church Sports International.
- Price JL (ed.) 2001. *From season to season*. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Putney C 2003. *Muscular Christianity: manhood and sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

- Tucker T 2011. *A strategy for the development of a sustainable sports ministry using mission outreach through soccer in selected churches in Tshwane*. MTh thesis in practical theology, South African Theological Seminary. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Tyndall DB 2004. *Evangelicalism, sport and the Australian Olympics*. Doctoral Thesis, Macquire University. Australia.
- Tredway AM 2006. *Professional soccer ministries: The deconstruction of secularisation through the globalisation of soccer in conjunction with a Biblical worldview*. Doctoral Thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. Ohio: U.S.A.
- Weir JS 2000. *What the Book says about sport*. Oxford: BRF.

Review of Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move: What 1000 Churches REVEAL about Spiritual Growth*

Annang Asumang¹

Hawkins GL and Parkinson C 2011. *Move: What 1000 Churches REVEAL about Spiritual Growth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Introduction

One of the positive trends in contemporary conservative Christian circles is the renewed focus on discipleship and spiritual formation. Like the rest of the society in which it witnesses, the church is coming round to once again appreciate that quality is as important as quantity. So, it is now widely reaffirmed that the number of people attending church services or involved in Christian activities are on their own unreliable for gauging the spiritual health of the church. The quality of spiritual development, at both individual and congregational levels, is even more important.

This focus on spiritual formation of Christians is really not new. The historical landscape of Christianity is strewn with peaks and troughs of alternating emphases on evangelism at certain periods, followed by consolidating periods of emphases on discipleship. What is, however, new in the current wave of emphases on discipleship is, the concerted effort to also quantify spiritual growth itself. By and large, the tendency

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

in previous eras was to focus on exhorting believers towards spiritual growth, providing them with resources to help in that direction, and organising discipleship activities and church programmes to ensure sustained growth of individuals and congregations (e.g. Gumbel 1993; Tice and Cooper 2002; Warren 2002).²

In contrast, the latest trend seeks to actually quantify how spiritual growth manifests itself in individuals and churches; this appears to be inspiring a wave of interest in academic as well as popular arenas (e.g. Barna 2012; Gallagher 2009:232–261; Willard 2010:29).

Several impetuses are behind this most recent emphasis on quantifying a largely qualitative idea as spiritual growth. Firstly, society itself has moved in this direction of seeking ways to measure qualitative parameters. Even nebulous subjective ideas such as beauty, health, happiness, personal well-being, and quality of life are being quantified and indexed by researchers and government policy makers (Abdel-Khalek 2006:139–150; Arnesen and Norhelm 2003:81–86). The church seems to have taken its cue from this sociological trend.

Secondly, many churches are coming to grips with the sad reality of the marked mismatch between increased Christian activities and attendances at seeker-sensitive church services, and the diminishing degree of Christian identity and influence in society at large. It is not surprising, therefore, that many concerned churchmen have thrown an introspective searchlight on evaluating what exactly may be going wrong with our church programmes. Seeking to index personal and congregational transformation is an imperative component of this

² An exception to this is the Engel Scale proposed in 1977 for identifying twelve levels of spiritual growth (Engel 1977; cf. Erickson 1978). But such attempts were far and few between, relied too much on psycho-analytic concepts of maturation, and ultimately failed to capture the popular imagination.

introspection (Carlson and Lueken 2011; Hawkins, Parkinsons and Amson 2007).

Thirdly, the phenomenal successes of industries which have introduced statistical measures for quantifying, auditing, and improving various stages of production lines have made quantification of qualitative concepts very attractive to all sectors of the society. This phenomenon has been termed ‘MacDonaldization of Society’, a phrase coined by sociologist George Ritzer to describe a society ‘which emphasizes efficiency, predictability, calculability, substitution of nonhuman for human technology, and control over uncertainty’ (1983:101). In this social context, it seems reasonable for Christians also to seek to establish methods and measures of assessing the efficacy and efficiency of church activities, Christian resources, and discipleship programmes designed to support spiritual growth.

It is on the back of these societal trends that the Willow Creek Association, based in Illinois, U.S.A., organised an extensive cross-sectional study with the aim of establishing ‘ways to know whether the people in our congregations are truly growing more in love with God and extending that love to other people’ (p. 14). *Move: what 1000 churches reveal about spiritual growth* reports what the authors claim is the ‘astounding, paradigm bursting’ (p. 14) results of the study. The book also provides commentaries and plentiful ideas for church leaders to implement in order to ensure spiritual growth in their congregations. The following extended review summarises the contents of the book, and evaluates some of the merits of the study’s methodology and conclusions.

1. Summary of the Book

1.1. General comments

At almost three hundred pages, with helpful illustrative charts, regular bullet-pointed summaries, and periodic ‘real-life’ practical examples to elucidate various conclusions, *Move* is a very attractively compiled report of the study. The book is divided into three parts. The first part describes characteristics of four stages of Christian development, termed ‘the Spiritual continuum’. The second part addresses the various ‘catalysts’ which enable growth, or ‘movement’ of people between each stage of the spiritual continuum. The third part introduces a statistical index for identifying the ‘best’ churches. This index, called ‘the Spiritual Vitality Index’ is then used to address how church leaders could enable growth in their congregations. I shall first recap the methodology of the study, and then, summarise each of the three parts of the book, before providing my evaluation.

1.2. Methodology of the study

REVEAL was a four-year cross-sectional survey of the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of church attendants, together with issues related to their degree of satisfaction with their personal and congregational growth parameters. A web-based questionnaire’, dubbed ‘the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey’, was administered to 250,000 volunteer church attenders from over one thousand diverse protestant congregations from nineteen countries.

The details of the instrumental questionnaire itself remain patented and not publicly available for independent assessment. Judging by the results and information on the project website however, this was an extensive self-administered questionnaire requiring respondents to

evaluate various issues, as well as providing answers to hundreds of other questions. Important characteristics of the participating churches were also collected, matched with the answers of respondents who attended those churches and factored into the analysis of the data.

The key assumption of the study is its definition of spiritual growth as ‘increasing love of God and increasing love of others’ (p. 18). The questions and results are essentially shaped by this fundamental definition. The researchers admit that spiritual growth is complex, non-linear, and unpredictable. However, they quite reasonably argue that there is a generally observable progression of some indicators to enable assessment of this growth, at least for a group of believers.

1.3. Summary of part 1

The first part of *Move* describes ‘the Spiritual continuum’ by setting out the characteristics of the four different stages or categories of church attenders, namely, exploring Christ, growing in Christ, close to Christ, and Christ-centred.

The *exploring Christ* attenders, some passively, and other actively exploring becoming devoted Christians, have not yet made definite commitment to Christ, even though they are interested in things about God and the social fellowship that attending church provides. With appropriate targeting by church leadership, some of these attenders could progress to the next level of the continuum. Moreover, the ‘longer a person exploring Christ attends a church, the less likely they are to follow Christ’, five years being the apparent cut-off point (p. 37). Thus, identifying and ensuring all is done to address the spiritual needs of this group is paramount.

The *growing in Christ* attenders constitutes the largest sub-group of respondents of the study (38 percent) and the most active participants in church activities. Despite their participation, they are ‘somewhat less sure of their belief in salvation by grace, and the authority of the Bible, but their level of certainty on these key beliefs is almost double that of the *exploring Christ* segment’ (p. 57). Of key importance to this group is the fact that the passion and spiritual zest of the church leadership is extremely influential in catalysing the growth of this group.

The *close to Christ* group has a greater level of self-assurance as Christ followers, take ownership for their own spiritual growth, and are committed to personal spiritual practices, such as prayer and Bible reading. Members of this group also love to share their faith and invest a fair amount of their time and effort into doing so.

The Christ-centred believers are marked out by their leadership potential, qualities, and activities in the church’s life. They live a surrendered life to Christ and are keen to serve him in the church and the wider community. Even so, they still have areas needing improvement, especially in their financial giving and serving. Also of interest is the fact that the members of this category appear to be the least catered for and motivated by the church’s programmes.

1.4. Summary of part 2

The second part of *Move* describes the various ‘catalysts’ which enhance growth between the stages of the spiritual continuum. The authors define these catalysts as ‘twenty-five decisions that are critical to helping people stay on a path toward full devotion to Christ’ (p. 106). The catalysts are categorised into four classes, namely, (a) spiritual beliefs and attitudes, (b) organised church activities, (c) personal spiritual practices, and (d) spiritual activities with others. Depending on

the stage of the spiritual continuum to which a person belongs, some of these catalysts may be more important than others.

So, for example, the authors found that organised church activities tend to be more helpful in catalysing the two movements between the first three stages of the continuum. Church activities are not as important in moving people from the *close to Christ* stage to Christ-centred level. According to the authors, that was an unexpected finding.

Even more surprising to the authors is the finding that ‘the activity that commands most of the church’s resources—weekend services—shows up as only moderately important’ for enhancing spiritual growth beyond the first movement from ‘exploring Christ’ to ‘growing in Christ’ (p. 113). However, an important caveat to this particular finding is the fact that a significant proportion of the churches in this group, forty-three percent, did not have seeker-sensitive church services (p. 113 n.1). So, it may well be that this ‘surprising’ finding is a reflection of how ineffective the weekend services were in catalysing growth, rather than the conclusion made by the authors that weekend services were only moderately important in moving believers on, from the second to the higher levels of growth.

Also of interest is the finding that the most influential activity that catalyses movement from *growing in Christ* to *close to Christ* stage of growth is ‘serving those in need through the church’ (p. 144). Serving other people is indeed an interesting parameter in this study. On the one hand, it catalyses growth; yet, on the other hand, it evidences growth. This circular association between service and growth clearly makes predictions of causality between the two parameters difficult, even though that problem is not addressed by the book.

Another key element of the analysis is the category labelled as ‘stalled’ growth; thirteen percent of the quarter of a million respondents choosing this category to describe their self-assessment. This category represents respondents who were not satisfied with the progress they were making in their spiritual growth at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Indeed, on average, twenty-six percent of the respondents ‘are either stalled, dissatisfied with the church, or both’ (p. 171). This rather high proportion of respondents, who are stalled or disaffected within the church, understandably draws some anxious comments from the authors. However, and as I shall shortly observe, caution is needed when interpreting the exact meaning of ‘stalling’ in relation to spiritual growth. All the same, it is interesting to note that the ‘stalled’ group tend to be characterised by indiscipline regarding personal spiritual practices often due to the overwhelming demands of everyday life. They are ‘boxed in and trapped by their schedules and commitments’ (p. 180).

1.5. Summary of part 3

The third part of *Move* focuses on how church leaders could help in the growth of individuals and their congregations. It begins by describing a statistical index called the Spiritual Vitality Index (SVI), a percentage point indicating ‘how a church’s congregation compares to the rest of the churches in the REVEAL database’ (p. 196).

The exact statistical equation and method of computation of this index have not been published, and so, cannot be evaluated. However, the parameters used to compute the index are derived from the participants’ self-assessment of the degree of satisfaction regarding the role of the church, the personal spiritual practices of the respondents themselves,

and the activities which demonstrate faith in action. These self-assessments were then used to identify the key characteristics and best practices of congregations with the highest SVIs.

In so doing, the study identifies some of the actionable measures that congregations can take to enhance their SVIs, and hence, improve the growth of their churches. Spiritual Vitality Index ‘gives church leaders a current spiritual health snapshot of their congregation that is much broader than a measure of their experience with the church’ (p. 199).

Using the SVI, the authors identified four patterns of church effectiveness, namely, (a) the apathetic church with SVI less than 60, (b) the introverted church with SVI in the high 60s, (c) the average church with SVI in the 70s, and (d) the high-energy church with SVI 85 and above.

Based on these, the authors then recommend several ‘best practices’ for church leaders to adopt, implement, and monitor as a way of improving the SVI of their congregations. Examples of best practices are making biblical teaching prominent, ensuring ownership of growth by the congregation, enriching community-serving activities which provide avenues for congregants to share their faith, and continual stress on the imperative for spiritual growth in the congregation.

The book closes with a chapter on key leadership principles, and appendices detailing some of the features and identities of the participating churches. I shall now evaluate the study’s methodology and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the book.

2. Evaluation of the Study

2.1. General strengths of the study and report

The authors are to be highly commended for this study and its immense achievements. They quite rightly admit that some may question the rationale behind seeking to measure a qualitative concept such as spiritual growth. However, if anything, the study confronts a not uncommon complacent attitude in certain conservative Christian circles towards application of research methods to examine church dynamics in general.

The fact is, it is not good enough for churches and church leaders to provide exhortations and organize activities for spiritual growth, and merely hope that these are adequate in enhancing growth. Ways of assessing the efficacy of these programmes will, at least, help church leaders know where changes are necessary. As one of the advertising blurbs on the study website puts it, REVEAL ‘takes the guesswork out of church work’.³

A few reviewers have also, unfairly I believe, criticised the study as an exercise in legalism (Anonymous 2009; Ortberg 2012; Welborn 2007). I think this criticism is unfounded. It is true that spiritual growth is a result of God’s work in the human soul; indeed, I shall shortly have something to say about how the lack of prominence given to the work of the Spirit in the study may well be one of its weaknesses. However, that said, it is not immaterial that God has chosen to use humans as his agents to effect transformation in his children. Application of measures and methods suited for evaluating and enhancing the contributions of

³ Online article. Accessed from www.revealnow.com/.

the human agents in spiritual growth are therefore necessary and defensible.

Moreover, conservatives cannot ignore the following fundamental question: is what ‘their’ churches do really make a difference by increasing spiritual growth? Neither can ‘conservatives’ assume that merely choosing to do anything, even if well thought out, will naturally lead to spiritual growth. In attempting to grapple with this elemental issue of spiritual efficiency, the authors have at least asked the key question that must be answered in the present wave of emphases on discipleship.

The report itself must also be commended for its clarity of presentation, its numerous illustrative charts, and its simplicity of language. (I will have more to say about some of the weaknesses of the report shortly.) However, the idea of presenting the report of the study through a popular medium is, essentially, brilliant. This medium has at least ensured that the findings of such a vital study are accessible to the ordinary church attenders of whom, and for whom, the study was geared. I shall now make some specific comments on the strengths of the methodology.

2.2. Strengths of the methodology of study

A major incontestable strength of the study is its sheer statistical power. Surveying over 250,000 church attenders from 1007 protestant churches widely spread across the length and breadth of the U.S.A. and abroad, including denominations of different stripes, representing all ethnic groups, and comprising the widest variation of professional diversity, must have been an enormous undertaking. The dividends from the sample size are equally colossal. At least the sample size heightens the probability that the conclusions are reliable. The scale of the study is a

notable achievement and rightly deserves the widespread praise it has received.

Another positive feature of the study is the simplicity of the adopted definition of spiritual growth. By focusing on indices which enable the assessment of increasing love for God, and love of others, the authors were able to help the individual respondents to assess their own growth in Christ. As I shall shortly comment, this simplicity may well serve also as a weakness of the study in some respect. Nevertheless, there are some advantages in adopting a simple surrogate marker for measuring a complex phenomenon such as spiritual growth. Also commendable is the effective use of spatial metaphors for characterising and measuring spiritual growth.

The idea of the Spiritual Vitality Index is also a noteworthy achievement of the study. Even though the statistical underpinnings of the index need to be published and validated by independent parties, the general idea of establishing a measure through which congregations may assess if and whether they are serving their Christ-mandated task of enhancing spiritual growth of their members is an excellent one. Certainly, participating churches should find the assessment process extremely rewarding for directing how and in which areas they need to concentrate their resources for further improvements.

2.3. General weaknesses of the study and report

Two key caveats must be stated as preliminary to critiquing the study and the report. Firstly, the authors insist that this was never designed to be an ‘academic’ study. Thus, it would be wrong to expect a high degree of academic rigour in terms of research methodology. While this pragmatic approach is understandable, its effects cut both ways. On the one hand, it led to a much-simplified methodology and has yielded

several key items of information of likely benefit to the church. However, on the other hand, the lack of methodological rigour means that many of the conclusions must be taken with guarded tentativeness and, at least, some degree of reserve.

So, for example, though the book claims to have yielded ‘a new lens through which to view spiritual growth’ (p. 18), it is extremely doubtful if a single cross-sectional self-administered survey can indeed yield data suited for making conclusions on growth. The idea of growth always involves changes over time. Thus, the only way of determining if growth has indeed occurred is through a longitudinal study.

More will be said on this shortly. But, it is unsurprising that the ‘spiritual continuum’, which is suggested as representing the stages of spiritual growth, actually appears to categorise members of churches according to their spiritual needs. This methodological flaw may well weaken some of the conclusions of the study.

A second caveat regards the nature of the questionnaire itself and its unavailability to the general public. It is a matter of regret that non-interested parties cannot independently validate a study whose results are claimed to be ‘paradigm bursting’. Put another way, since the questionnaire remains patented, non-participating independent evaluators of the study cannot provide useful commentaries on the suitability and rigour of the questions. The present evaluation of the study may, therefore, not be complete and, even worse; some of the criticisms may turn out to be unfounded.

It is appreciated that there are significant costs involved in putting such a study together. However, conversely, it is also possible that any benefits from keeping the instruments out of the public domain may

ultimately be weakened by the lack of independent access to the questionnaire.

2.4. Weaknesses of the methodology

My major quibbles with the methodology lie in two areas, namely (a) its use of a cross-sectional survey for measuring a time-dependent parameter, and (b) its narrow definition of spiritual growth, which does not give enough attention to spiritual, psychological, and ethical elements of growth. I shall briefly expand on these two criticisms.

Spiritual growth occurs over time. Thus, a single snapshot cross-sectional study is definitely insufficient for measuring whether growth has occurred at all. Individuals can assess their own growth over time. But, assessment of a person's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours at one point in time cannot be reliably used to estimate their growth. It would, therefore, have been better to label the measured outcome as the 'Spiritual health' of the respondents at the time of administering the questionnaire, rather than their growth. Certainly, the least that would be expected of a study to measure growth is a longitudinal research method in which sets of observations are repeated on the same subject over a period of time and compared.

The difficulties with the category 'stalled growth' illustrate why this quibble is important. Spiritual growth does not proceed as a linear graph. There are intermittent periods of stunting, temptations, doubts, even spiritual retrogressing, followed sometimes by accelerated periods of growth in insight and love for Christ. It is therefore an open question whether it can be categorically said that all periods of slow growth, stunting, temptations, or doubts are abnormal. It is even possible that respondents who indicated their dissatisfaction with their own spiritual growth or with their church at the time of the survey were merely

reporting their evaluation of their spiritual health in relation to an unrealistic ideal. They may have, indeed, stopped growing; but, it is also possible that they were, at the time, having a normal dry' experience of spiritual growth.

Accordingly, while it is possible that many of those who had stalled in their growth may be experiencing abnormal negative growth, it may not be so for all who self-report themselves to be in this category. The only way to establish if 'stalling' amounted to abnormal growth was to repeat the study after some time has elapsed. Stalling of growth over a prolonged period of time would certainly be an abnormal phenomenon.

The complexity of spiritual growth continues to make the phenomenon resistant to a full definition and thorough research. Even so, the choice of the pragmatically simple definition for spiritual growth appears to have resulted in the neglect of its other dimensions. It is, for example, well acknowledged that there is a psychological element of spiritual growth which exhibits itself in the individual's mental maturation, self-awareness, and appropriate emotional and empathic relationship with others. Excluding such parameters may well have weakened the study.

The authors may well respond that these psychological indices of development can be assessed through practical actions of love for others. However, the measures used by the survey to assess this element are liable to be muddied by other factors, making an assessment of the psychological element of growth difficult to ascertain.

The key role of personal numinous or miraculous experiences in spiritual growth is also well recognised. It is no small thing that Paul describes spiritual growth in terms of Christ being formed in believers (Gal 4:19). Exactly how this can be measured is open to question, but at least, self-reports of an individual's experiences of the grace and

numinous presence of God's Spirit could have been a key parameter to include.

Again, the authors may quite understandably argue that such miraculous experiences of increasing growth are inherent in the 'love for God' category in their definition. However, the love for God category is anthropocentric, and does not reflect the Christo-pneumatological nature of Christian existence and growth. Moreover, the lack of emphases on the miraculous nature of spiritual growth results in the loss of the organic nature of the phenomenon.

It is also unclear why the authors have not highlighted the ethical element of spiritual growth in the study and its report. One of the key images of spiritual growth is the bearing of the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22). Increased growth in Christian moral and virtue ethics is certainly one of the fundamental emphases of the New Testament, even more so in Jesus' teaching (e.g. Matt 7). The authors may well argue that love for others adequately summarises these elements. But the reductionism in such an answer leaves it unsatisfactory.

2.5. Other weaknesses

One weakness of the report, which has already been alluded to, but needs reiterating, is the authors' occasional resort to using 'hyped' claims. Some of the findings may have been surprising; but can we really call them 'astounding, paradigm bursting'? Another example is in order. Initially, the 'shocking' claim is made that 'Increased participation in church activities by themselves *barely moved* our people to love God' (p. 17). Yet, further in the book, it becomes apparent that church participation plays even a 'moderate' role in catalysing growth in those at the advanced end of the continuum. Given

the methodological problems highlighted above, some of these conclusions could have been made with some reticence. Certainly, some modesty in the claims of the book would have been preferable.

Conclusion

REVEAL was indeed a needed study. Its main achievement is drawing our attention to the significant shortfall between spiritual growth and church activities, which were designed to enhance that growth in the first place. *Move*, the report of the study, further makes significant contributions to our understanding of the situation in a proportion of conservative churches in America and beyond. I highly recommend this book to church leaders keen to understand some of the dynamics of spiritual growth among their members.

There are weaknesses to the methodology and the presentation of the findings. However, the least of its achievements is offering a basis upon which to build more sophisticated, but nuanced, web-based studies to quantify and describe spiritual growth.

Reference List

- Abdel-Khalek AM 2006. Measuring happiness with a single item scale. *Social Behaviour and Personality: an International Journal* 34(2):139–150.
- Anonymous 2009. *Legalism and church growth*. Online article. Accessed from <http://legalismandchurchgrowth.blogspot.co.uk/>, 02/7/2012.
- Arnesen TM and Norhelm OF 2003. Quantifying quality of life for economic analysis: time out for time trade off. *Medical Humanities* 29:81–86.

- Barna G 2012. *Barna Group and Life-Way research*. 2012. Ine article. Accessed from www.barna.org/, 29/06/ 2012.
- Carlson K and Lueken M 2011. *Renovation of the Church: what happens when a seeker church discovers spiritual formation*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Engel J 1977. *How can I get them to listen?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Erickson EH 1978. *Dimensions of a new identity*. New York: Norton.
- Gallagher SK and Newton C 2009. Defining spiritual growth: congregations, community and connectedness. *Sociology of Religion* 70(3):232–261.
- Gumbel N 1993. *Alpha questions of life: an opportunity to explore the meaning of life*. Eastbourne: Kingsway Communications Ltd.
- Hawkins GL, Parkinsons C, and Amson E 2007. *Reveal: where are you?* Illinois: Willow Creek Resources.
- Ortberg N 2012. *Extreme discipleship: the lure of legalism, Part 7*. Online article. Accessed from www.willowcreek.com/gls/downloads/leading_people_to_the_prodigal_god/spiritual_deadness/Extreme_Discipleship_-_The_Lure_of_Legalism_WC_CC_Message_Transcript.pdf, 01/07/2012.
- Ritzer G 1983. The McDonalidization of society. *Journal of American Culture* 6(1):100–107.
- Tice, R and Cooper, B. 2002. *Christianity explored*. New Malden: The Good Book Company.
- Warren R 2002. *The purpose-driven life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Welborn A 2007. *Rethinking Willow Creek*. Online article. Accessed from <http://amywelborn.wordpress.com/2007/10/25/rethinking-willow-creek/>, 02/07/2012.
- Willard D 2010. How do we assess spiritual growth? A leadership interview with Dallas Willard. *Leadership* 31(2):29.

Review article: Two Contrasting Views on the Historical Authenticity of the Adam Character in the Genesis Creation Narratives

Daniel T. Lioy¹

Collins CJ 2011. *Did Adam and Eve really exist? Who they were and why you should care*. Wheaton: Crossway.

Enns P 2012. *The evolution of Adam: what the Bible does and doesn't say about human origins*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

Abstract

In this review article, a comparison is made between the recent publications authored by C. J. Collins and P. Enns concerning the historical authenticity of the Adam character (and to a lesser extent Eve) in the Genesis creation narratives. The first section introduces and provides the rationale for the essay. Next, in the second and third sections, an overview of each author's respective books is undertaken. Then, the final section concludes by comparing the presuppositions made and deductions put forward by each author. The intent is not to adjudicate whether the exegetical choices and theological positions advocated by either writer have greater or lesser value. Instead, it is to provide concerned readers with a fresh perspective of how two representative biblical scholars

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

address a topic that is pertinent to the wider discussion on science and religion.

1. Introduction: the Rationale for this Essay

Within the religious and secular media, there is renewed interest in the academic question of whether the Adam of Genesis 1–3 was a historically authentic character. For example, the June 2011 issue of *Christianity Today* (a widely-read evangelical periodical) contains an article titled 'The search for the historical Adam'. The lead-in states that the 'center of the evolution debate has shifted from asking whether we came from earlier animals, to whether we could have come from one man and one woman' (Ostling 2011). Later, in August 2011, *NPR* (a news and cultural programming media organization) aired a story titled 'Evangelicals question the existence of Adam and Eve'. The lead-in asks, 'Did they exist, and did all humanity descend from that single pair?' (Hagerty 2011).

It goes without saying that the debate over whether there ever was a literal Adam (and Eve) is longstanding within religious academic circles (cf. the extensive, representative bibliography in Lioy 2011). Still, the recent media attention devoted to this issue has helped give rise to two recent scholarly publications, one by C. J. Collins, and the other by P. Enns. On the one hand, Collins (2011) advocates that Adam (along with Eve) really existed, while on the other hand, Enns (2012) maintains there never was a first *homo sapien* from whom all other humans descended. In their respective books, both authors address the same basic issues, examine a similar range of scientific and biblical data, and tend to arrive at opposite conclusions. While Collins devotes some attention to the question of Eve's historicity, Enns focuses specifically on the Adam character. Likewise, this essay mainly deals

with the question of whether a literal Adam ever existed, though it is understood that the position taken on the former issue influences what one affirms about the Eve character.

In the light of the preceding observations, the purpose of this review article is to focus the attention of researchers, theologians and pastors, once more, on the disputed issue of Adam's historical authenticity. With the latter objective in mind, the following sections of this essay undertake an overview of Collins (2011) and Enns (2012). Then, the final section compares the respective presuppositions made and deductions put forward by each author. As a disclaimer, the author of this journal article favours a predominately classical, evangelical, and orthodox interpretive approach to the Judeo-Christian scriptures (cf. Lioy 2011:4–5). That said, the intent of this essay is not to adjudicate whether the exegetical choices and theological positions advocated by either Collins or Enns have greater or lesser merit. Instead, it is to provide concerned readers with a fresh perspective of how two representative biblical scholars address a topic that is pertinent to the wider discussion on science and religion. For additional focused, scholarly deliberations concerning the historical authenticity of the Adam character in scripture, cf. Carson (1980) and Pretorius (2011). Also, for recent critical reviews of the two works being compared in this essay, cf. Collins (2012) and Enns (2012).

2. An Overview of Collins (2011), *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?*

2.1. A brief synopsis of the author and the contents of his work

The author, who did his PhD at the University of Liverpool, is professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. In the acknowledgments, he notes that his book grew out of an 'invited paper for the American Scientific Affiliation' (p. 9). The work has the standardised opening (introduction) and closing (conclusions) chapters, along with four intermediary chapters providing an in-depth treatment on a select group of interrelated subjects: the shape of the biblical story (ch. 2); particular texts that speak of Adam and Eve (ch. 3); human uniqueness and dignity (ch. 4); and can science help us pinpoint 'Adam and Eve'? There are three appendices dealing with the following topics: ancient Near Eastern texts and Genesis 1–11; review of James Barr, *The garden of Eden and the hope of immortality*; and the date of Genesis. Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the respective pages where they occur. Finally, the back of the volume includes a bibliography and two indexes (namely, a general index, a scripture index, and an Apocrypha index).

2.2 A detailed synopsis of the individual chapters of the author's work

2.2.1. Introduction (ch. 1)

Collins begins by noting that throughout much of church history, the standardised view was that the 'biblical Adam and Eve were actual persons' (p. 11), that from this first pair of *homo sapiens*, 'all other human beings are descended', and that the couple's 'disobedience to God brought sin into human experience'. The author acknowledges that

‘educated Western Christians’ are dismissive of this ‘historical consensus’, just as they are of other outdated views. The latter includes the notion of the world being created in the ‘recent past over the course of six calendar days’, and the opinion that the ‘earth was the physical center of the universe’. Collins affirms that there is a place for ‘effective revisions’, especially when they originate from a ‘closer reading of the Bible’, and that such alternations in belief do not necessarily ‘change the basic content of Christianity’.

The author is familiar with the various explanations given for abandoning ‘traditional beliefs about Adam and Eve’ (p. 12). Some of the numerous reasons include the following: rejecting the possibility that whatever others might have ‘done long ago’ could now impact modern humans at their ‘deepest level’; contending that since the Genesis creation account is comparable to ‘stories from other ancient Near Eastern cultures’, the former is likewise ‘mythical’ in its purposes and implications; and observing that ‘recent advancements in biology’ undermine the obsolete notion of an ‘original human couple through whom sin and death came into the world’.

The preceding arguments notwithstanding, Collins sets out to ‘show why’ (p. 13) he thinks it is reasonable to ‘retain a version of the traditional view’. His basis for the latter thesis is that it ‘does the best job of accounting not only for the biblical materials, but also, for our everyday experience as human beings’. With respect to the ‘material in Genesis’ (p. 16), he maintains that whoever wrote it was ‘talking about what he thought were actual events’. Also, this person used ‘rhetorical and literary techniques to shape the readers’ attitudes toward those events’.

While Collins is well aware of the scientific data, his firmly held theological convictions lead him to adopt interpretations that agree with what he finds being taught in other portions of the Bible, along with information arising from 'Second Temple Jewish texts' (p. 13), and insights gleaned from 'everyday moral and religious experience'. It is against that backdrop that the author turns his attention to 'some sample scenarios for a scientific understanding of human origins' (p. 14). His goal is to appraise how closely they align with his understanding of the biblical teaching concerning a first human pair. He states that he is not seeking to commend 'any one scenario'; instead, it is to 'explore how the traditional position might relate to questions of paleoanthropology'. The author is overt in requiring that in order for any 'scientific understanding to be good' (p. 15), it has to 'account for the whole range of evidence'. For him, the latter includes the 'deepest intuitions' people have concerning their 'own existence'.

2.2.2. The shape of the biblical story (ch. 2)

The interpretive approach Collins takes in this and the following chapters is connected with several key premises he states in his Introduction (ch. 1). Specifically, he notes that the writers of scripture were 'self-consciously interpreting their world in terms of an overarching worldview story' (p. 19). Moreover, the 'rhetorical and literary techniques' (p. 17) they used were predominately characterised by 'pictorial and symbolic language'. In Collins' view, it would be incorrect to conclude that the 'presence of symbolism means the story is *merely* symbolic' (p. 18). Put differently, he thinks it is sensible to hold that, depending on the context, the 'images' depicted in scripture could convey truth about what is genuinely historical and factual.

In the light of the preceding suppositions, Collins sets out, in chapter 2, to discuss the 'story and worldview' (p. 23) found in the Bible. His

preferred approach in reading biblical narratives includes four predominant literary ‘features’ found in the sacred texts: (p. 1) the ‘narrator ... serves as the voice and perspective of God’ (p. 24); the ‘narration’ puts ‘emphasis on direct action and interaction of the characters’; (p. 3) the ‘narratives ... focus on what is essential for the narrative’; and (p. 4) the presence of ‘elevated diction of a speech is evidence of its significance’. Collins draws upon the findings of research in ‘linguistics’ (p. 25) to stress the importance of using inference to discern what the writers of scripture sought to convey in their narratives. Genesis 3 is cited as an example in which the biblical text ‘never uses any words for sin or disobedience’. Yet, it is maintained that one can straightforwardly deduce from the passage that in the view of the writer, ‘Eve and Adam’ (p. 26) were guilty of ‘sin’.

Collins explores whether the notion of ‘myth’ is the best way to label the types of ‘stories’ found among the ‘Egyptians, Mesopotamians, or even the Hebrews’ (p. 28). He notes that it is common to presume that whatever is regarded as ‘myth’ is thereby ‘untrue’ and ‘unhistorical’. The author takes issue with this premise when it comes to the biblical narratives. He argues that ‘ancient, pre-modern, prescientific cultures’ (p. 29) are not alone in using ‘stories’ to convey actual truths. Likewise, ‘modern Western culture’ employs comparable literary conventions. His broader point is that, even though the biblical writers used the literary convention of ‘stories to convey a worldview’ (p. 31), this does not invalidate the underlying ‘full historical truthfulness’ of the accounts.

A dose of ‘caution’ (p. 33) is advocated by the author when referring to the term ‘history’. Specifically, in contrast to people in the modern world, those in the ancient Near East had a different mind-set when it comes to the way in which they related events they believed actually

occurred. For instance, Collins maintains it would be incorrect to assume that in order for the 'creation story of Genesis' to be historically factual, it must not employ 'figurative elements', and it has to be read in a strictly 'literal' manner. Put differently, he asserts that it is possible to regard the opening chapters of the Judeo-Christian scriptures as using 'imaginative' literary conventions to depict 'events' (p. 34) that 'really happened'. Moreover, he thinks the essential historicity of the biblical texts remains intact, even when what they relate is not 'complete in detail' (p. 35), 'free from ideological bias', or 'told in exact chronological sequence'.

2.2.3. Particular texts that speak of Adam and Eve (ch. 3)

In the first two chapters of his work, Collins establishes the goal (ch. 1) and elaborates the presuppositions (ch. 2) for the remainder of his volume. Specifically, his objective is to 'show why' (p. 13) it is important to 'retain a version of the traditional view' of Adam and Eve. Also, he emphasises that it is crucial to be aware of the 'overarching worldview-shaping story' (p. 26) that dominates scripture, including the creation narratives found in the opening chapters of Genesis. In chapter 3, the author turns his attention to 'specific Biblical texts about Adam and Eve' (p. 51). This includes 'references' that are 'clear', along with those that are 'disputed' (p. 52). Also included is information 'from the Apocrypha' (p. 52), since 'these texts illustrate the world of Second Temple Judaism'. His intent is to 'see how' (p. 51) the data links to the 'larger picture' (p. 51) set forth in God's Word.

Collins first examines Genesis 1–5, beginning with the relationship between the 'two different creation accounts' (p. 52), namely, 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25. He acknowledges the prevailing scholarly consensus, which regards these two texts as being 'difficult to reconcile with each other'. Nonetheless, based on his 'own literary and linguistic studies'

(p. 53), he regards the two passages as being characterised by ‘coherence’. In particular, he sees the first text providing an ‘overall account of the creation and preparation of the earth as a suitable place for humans to live’. The second text, then, is an ‘elaboration of the events of the sixth day of Genesis 1’, especially God’s bringing into existence the ‘human couple that we know as Adam and Eve’ (p. 54). The author affirms that there was a first man named ‘Adam’ (p. 56), and his ‘actions are in some sense representative of all mankind’. For instance, from him, ‘we learn something about how temptation works’ (p. 57).

Collins holds that the presence of ‘figurative elements and literary conventions’ (p. 58) precludes any ‘reading’ of the biblical text that is overly ‘literalistic’. For all that, he thinks ‘real events form the backbone of [the] story’. In line with other specialists, Collins refers to the information in the opening chapters of Genesis as ‘prehistory’ (p. 57) and ‘protohistory’. By ‘prehistory’, he means the ‘period of human existence before there are any secure written records’. He defines ‘protohistory’ as narratives of events concerning the ‘earliest stages for which there are records’. The author acknowledges that the biblical account ‘bears a relationship with the narratives of prehistory found in Mesopotamia’. In his view, though, ‘Genesis aims to tell the true story of origins’ (p. 58). He argues that the substantial dissimilarities between the Mesopotamian and Genesis versions have to ‘do with the radically differing ideologies’ (p. 59) of their respective ‘prehistories’.

Next, Collins shifts his focus to other portions of the Old Testament. His objective is to ‘show how the themes of Genesis 1–5 are played out in the rest of the Hebrew’ (p. 67) sacred writings. He begins by questioning the validity of the common assertion, that ‘references’ to Adam and Eve and the ‘fall story’ are either ‘rare’ or ‘nonexistent’ in

other portions of the Tanakh. For instance, the author notes that the 'genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 connect the primal pair to subsequent generations' (p. 68), especially to 'Abraham'. Likewise, the text 'presents Noah ... as a kind of new Adam' (cf. 6:18–19; 9:1, 8–17). Additionally, 'God's blessing on the original human pair' (cf. 1:28) is reflected in the 'call of Abraham' (cf. 12:2–3; 17:20; 22:17–18; 26:3–4, 24; 28:3, 14). Furthermore, there is a strong thematic link between Adam and Eve's 'offspring' (cf. Gen 3:15; 4:25; 1 Chro 1:1) and that of the patriarchs and their descendants (cf. Gen 12:7; 13:15–16; 15:3, 5; 17:7–9, 19; 22:17–18; 24:60; 26:3–4; 48:4; Ps 72:17; Gal 3:16).

Collins regards Ecclesiastes 7:20 and 29, with their focus on rectitude and transgression, as echoing the 'fall story' (p. 70) of Genesis 3. Similarly, the expression 'return to dust' in Ecclesiastes 3:20 and 12:7 bring to mind Genesis 3:19. The author draws attention to Hosea 6:7 and advocates rendering the 'hotly disputed' verse as 'like Adam'. Because he considers the latter to be the 'simplest interpretation of the Hebrew words' (p. 71), he does not favour two other alternatives, namely, either 'at (the place called) Adam' (p. 70), or 'like any human beings'. Collins also cites Job 31:33, in which it is possible to translate the original to read 'as Adam did' (p. 71). In terms of the latter verse, the author leaves as an 'open question' whether it is actually referring to the first man God created.

Next, Second Temple Jewish literature receives consideration. Because of the uneven literary and theological quality of this material, Collins is more selective and abbreviated in his discussion. He mentions Tobit 8:6, which provides an 'historical recital' (p. 73) of God's creation of Adam and Eve. Likewise, the author cites the Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24 (cf. 7:1; 10:1), which treats the account of the Fall recorded in Genesis 3 as an 'historical event' (p. 74). Collins notes various passages in Sirach that take the 'creation' and 'fall' of humankind as 'historical'

(p. 75) events (cf. 14:17; 15:14; 17:1; 25:16–26; 33:10; 40:1). Particularly noteworthy is 49:16, which treats Adam as an ‘historical person’. Moreover, in the writings of Josephus, Adam and Eve are looked upon as ‘actual people’ (p. 76) who existed ‘at the head of the human race’ (cf. *Antiquities* 1.2.3, line 67; 4.8.2, line 180).

From there, Collins deals with the gospels. For example, Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6 record Jesus’ quote from Genesis 1:27, in which he asserted that when God created the world, he brought the first ‘male and female’ into existence. Then, Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7 record Jesus’ quote from Genesis 2:24, in which he upheld the sanctity of marriage. The author observes that Jesus’ statements about the creation and fall of humankind are premised on his regard for the literary interdependence of Genesis 1 and 2, and the historical authenticity of Adam and Eve (p. 77). Collins considers the ‘historicity of Adam’ (p. 66) to be ‘assumed’ in the genealogy of Luke 3:38. Furthermore, the author holds Jesus’ statement in John 8:44 to be a ‘passing reference’ (p. 77) to the ‘serpent as the mouthpiece of the Evil One’. The implication is that Jesus understood Adam and Eve to be ‘actual people’ (p. 78), whose ‘disobedience changed things for ... their descendants’.

Collins, then, discusses the Pauline writings. The author includes both the undisputed and ‘disputed’ letters, as well as the Book of Acts. He notes that passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11:7–12, 2 Corinthians 11:3, and 1 Timothy 2:13–14, refer to ‘parts of Genesis 1–3 in passing’. Collins sides with the view that the preceding ‘references share the usual assumption of Second Temple Jews, that Adam and Eve were historical’. The author states that other Pauline texts are more overt in their treatment of the opening chapters of Genesis. For this reason, Collins devotes considerable attention to Acts 17:26, Romans 5:12–19, and 1 Corinthians 15:20–23. His supposition is that Paul accepted the

'narrative about Adam and Eve' to be historical. Indeed, the author maintains that the foundation of Paul's comparison of Adam and Jesus is based on the apostle's conviction that Adam was an 'historical character' (p. 80). Expressed differently, 'Paul's argument does presuppose Adam as an actual character in the [Genesis] narrative' (p. 82) and that all humankind is biologically descended from an 'original pair' (p. 84).

The final portion of chapter 3 overviews 'incidental' (p. 90) references 'elsewhere in the New Testament' to the opening chapters of Genesis. Collins concedes that the evidence is 'inconclusive as to whether the historicity' of Adam and Eve is 'tightly bound up with the New Testament claims'. That said, the author posits Hebrews 11 (especially vv. 4–7) as a 'likely exception'. Based on his analysis of the text, he concludes that the 'author of Hebrews assumes the historicity' (p. 91) of the various 'characters' narrated in Genesis 4–5. Similarly, Collins sees 'no reason to exclude Adam and Eve from the same assumption'.

2.2.4. Human uniqueness and dignity (ch. 4)

In this chapter, Collins deliberates the 'nature of human life and God's expectations for human communities' (p. 93). Collins asserts that the way in which scripture deals with 'these subjects takes for granted some kind of common origin of all human beings in Adam'. Furthermore, the author maintains that the Bible's doctrinal impulses 'actually link up with everyday human experience'. Put another way, the 'biblical picture' does the best job of clarifying this 'experience'.

A case in point is Genesis 1:26–27 and its declaration of humankind being made in the 'image of God'. Collins summarises three common views and affirms the validity of each: (1) people are 'like God' (p. 94) in the realm of their 'intellectual, moral, and aesthetic experience'; (2)

the ‘image of God’ denotes the ‘way that humans are appointed to rule the creation on God’s behalf’; and (3) the divine image is seen when people coexist in ‘community’. The author holds that, in contrast to the rest of the creatures in the world, every ‘human being’ (p. 95) is a ‘body-soul tangle that expresses God’s image’ (cf. Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9). Collins espouses that the ‘proper functioning’ of the divine ‘image’ has been ‘damaged by human sin’. Moreover, he holds that God’s image is being ‘renewed’ in his ‘faithful people’ (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

Collins openly asks how God’s ‘image’ (p. 96) came ‘to be bestowed’ and the manner in which it is ‘transmitted’. Based on the author’s assessment of scripture, he dismisses the notion that the ‘outcome’ was solely due to ‘natural processes’. This necessitates that the ‘first human’ was the ‘result of a special bestowal’. Additionally, based on the author’s study of Genesis, he postulates that the ‘image is transmitted by procreation’ (p. 99). Collins acknowledges that ‘other animals’ (p. 96) possibly display ‘features that are analogous’ to what are found in humans. Even so, the author insists that the ‘total assembly of characteristics’ appearing in people is ‘distinct’, ‘transcends their immediate bodily needs’, and is something far more than a ‘merely natural development of the capacities in other animals’.

The final portion of chapter 4 considers the ‘universal human experiences’ (p. 100) of ‘yearning for justice’ and a ‘need for God’. Collins observes that when Adam and Eve sinned, it ‘corrupted’ their ‘created constitution’. In turn, this led to a tear in the ‘social’ fabric binding humans relationally together, an escalation of injustice, and a rampant ignorance of the creator. The author comments that there is a ‘general human sense of being lost’ (p. 102), which is best accounted for in Genesis (p. 103). Moreover, he regards the opening chapters of Genesis as having the most explanatory power concerning the fallen

human condition when the biblical text is 'read ... as some kind of history'. Collins holds that with the advent of the Messiah and the promise of his future kingdom, there is an 'embracing' (p. 100) among believers of their 'common humanity as heirs of Adam', who have been 'rescued by God's grace'. Collins insists that, even now, it is a 'major goal of all church life to bring this ideal into more and more complete and convincing expression' (p. 101).

2.2.5. Can science help us pinpoint 'Adam and Eve'? (ch. 5)

In keeping with what Collins stated earlier in his work, he asserts in chapter 5 that a 'good theory must account for *all of the data*, and not just the biochemistry' (p. 105, italics are the author's). He begins by assessing the efforts of some to 'coordinate the findings of science with the teachings of Genesis' (i.e. 'concordism', p. 106). To be specific, the author questions the efficacy of a procedure in which 'scientific theories change' from one generation to the next. That said, he disagrees with the claim that there is absolutely no 'connection' (p. 107) between the historical 'subject matter' recorded in scripture and the 'results of other fields of study'. Collins expresses receptivity to the 'view that the proper relationship between science and faith' is characterised by 'complementarity'. However, he challenges a 'strict insistence on science-faith complementarity' (p. 108), since he maintains there are some incidents recounted in scripture that also have both 'natural' and 'supernatural components'. Moreover, he anticipates there will be situations in which, against the backdrop of prevailing scientific assertions, a decision is required concerning whether the 'Bible can actually refer to real persons and events'.

With respect to the creation accounts recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis, Collins thinks it is 'reasonable to expect' (p. 109) that scripture employs 'imaginative description' to relate 'actual events'.

The author remains firm in this view, even after taking into account the ‘literary conventions, rhetorical purpose, and original audience’. He avers, that while Genesis might ‘speak of the phenomena that the sciences study’ (p. 110), it would be misguided to expect scientific precision from what the Bible teaches. The author regards the intent of Genesis not as conveying ‘technical’ details, but rather placing ‘already-known facts into a proper worldview context’. In particular, the ‘world’ operates as it does ‘because it is the good creation of a good and magnificent Creator’. Collins postulates that ‘anachronism’ (p. 113) could be evident in the Genesis narratives. Put another way, the biblical ‘text ... described aspects of the older times’ using literary conventions and vocabulary ‘familiar’ to the original readers. The author argues that the latter need not call into question the essential ‘historicity of the text’, for it ‘still refers to actual events’ (p. 114).

Collins puts forward the following four ‘criteria’ (p. 120) to ‘stay within the bounds of sound thinking’ regarding ‘traditional views of Adam and Eve’: (1) given ‘how distinctive’ is the ‘image of God’, the ‘origin of the human race goes beyond a merely natural process’; (2) the ‘unified experience’ of people across the globe throughout the centuries is best accounted for by regarding ‘Adam and Eve at the headwaters of the human race’; (3) the ‘universal sense of loss’ common to all people offers the most reasonable explanation for the ‘historical’ and ‘moral’ corruption or ‘fall’ of the human race; and (4) at the dawn of the human race, if there existed ‘more human beings than just Adam and Eve’ (p. 121), these should be thought of as a ‘single tribe’. In the latter case, ‘Adam would be the chieftain of this tribe’; also, ‘Eve would be his wife’. Consequently, the entire ‘tribe’ morally transgressed ‘under the leadership’ of their ‘representative’ head. In light of the preceding

criteria, the author's non-negotiable touchstone is 'human uniqueness and unity in both dignity and need' (p. 124).

2.2.6. Conclusions (ch. 6)

Collins begins by clarifying that the intent of his work is not to find a solution to 'every problem' (133) or evaluate 'every possible objection' connected with the opening chapters of Genesis. Instead, in light of a broad range of representative biblical and scientific information, he attempts to establish 'why the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve' merits the believers' 'confidence and adherence'. This includes regarding the pair as the 'first parents' of *homo sapiens* who 'brought sin into human experience'. The author maintains that what he has advocated 'does justice to specific Biblical texts' (e.g. Genesis, the gospels, and the Pauline writings). Likewise, he considers the 'traditional understanding', including its 'notions of representation and covenantal inclusion', to furnish a 'meaningful explanation for everyday experience'. Furthermore, he regards the 'alternatives' to be 'less satisfactory' and potentially 'even disastrous' interpretive options.

3. An Overview of Enns (2011), *The Evolution of Adam*

3.1. A brief synopsis of the author and the contents of his work

The author, who did his PhD at Harvard University, is professor of biblical studies at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. In the acknowledgments section, he notes that his interactions with various Christian professionals who wrestle with 'how their faith and scientific work can coexist' (vii) is one of the reasons for him undertaking this 'project'. The work has the standardised opening (introduction) and closing (conclusion) sections, along with seven intermediary chapters, divided into two parts, providing an in-depth

treatment on a select group of interrelated subjects. Part one: Genesis and the challenges of the nineteenth century (ch. 1); when was Genesis written? (ch. 2); stories of origins from Israel's neighbors (ch. 3); and Israel and primordial time (ch. 4). Part two: Paul's Adam and the Old Testament (ch. 5); Paul as an ancient interpreter of the Old Testament (ch. 6); and Paul's Adam (ch. 7). Finally, the back of the volume includes endnotes, a bibliography, and two indexes (namely, a subject index and a scripture index).

3.2. A detailed synopsis of the individual chapters of the author's work

3.2.1. Introduction

Enns begins by explaining why he wrote his book. He notes the 'relentless, articulate, and popular attacks on Christianity by New Atheists' (ix). According to these proponents, 'evolution has destroyed the possibility of ... a faith like Christianity'. The author also points to the recent 'advances in our understanding of evolution', particularly the conclusive evidence that 'humans and primates share common ancestry'. He observes that 'many Christians' regard 'evolution' as a 'challenge' to the 'story of origins presented in the Bible'. The latter circumstance motivates the author's primary objective in his work, namely, to 'focus solely on how the Bible fits into' the subject of 'human origins'. Enns seeks to 'clear away some misunderstandings' (p. x), as well as offer 'different ways of thinking through some perennial problems'. His hoped-for result is placing 'interested readers on a constructive path' of being able to 'accept evolution, and also value scripture as God's Word' (p. ix).

The author identifies as his 'primary audience' (p. x) those belonging to evangelicalism, especially within an 'American context'. He describes these individuals as having a 'deep, instinctual commitment to Scripture', and the conviction that 'evolution must be taken seriously'. For them, he offers a 'synthesis between a biblically conversant Christian faith and evolution'. The philosophical underpinning of the author's endeavour is the premise that in order to read 'sacred Scripture' (p. xi) appropriately, one must accept that God's Word is a 'product of the times in which it was written' and the 'events' occurring when the texts were originally produced. He draws upon the 'analogy of the incarnation' to affirm that while the Judeo-Christian canon is 'ultimately of divine origin', it likewise is 'thoroughly a product of its time'.

The 'historical approach' (p. xii) Enns adopts in his work is based on three interrelated presuppositions: (1) the way in which interpreters 'understand the Old Testament' (p. xi) is substantially influenced by their 'knowledge of the cultures that surrounded ancient Israel'; (2) God's Word is characterised by 'significant theological diversity', as seen in its 'collection of discrete writings from widely different times and places', which were 'written for diverse purposes'; and (3) the 'New Testament authors' were 'creative' in the way they interacted with the Hebrew sacred writings, and this approach 'reflects the Jewish thought world of the time'. Enns considers the preceding affirmations to be an indication of 'God's great love' (p. xii) to accommodate himself to his 'creation', particularly humanity. Moreover, the author regards his emphasis on the 'historical circumstances' (p. xii) to be a defining characteristic of 'what it means to be a responsible reader of Scripture' in one's own 'time and place'.

Enns argues, that the way in which believers understand the Adam character in scripture 'must now be adjusted' (p. xiii) as a result of two

interconnected factors: (1) ‘scientific evidence supporting evolution’; and (2) ‘literary evidence from the world of the Bible’ that determines the proper way in which to interpret it. The author maintains that taking into account the preceding two influences is a ‘way that respects and honours the authority of the Bible’. Also, in his view, it fosters ‘keeping Scripture and natural science in conversation’ (p. xiv). He regards that interaction as being promoted when it is affirmed that God’s Word has ‘an ancient view of the natural world, not a modern one’, and ‘simply speaks in an ancient idiom’, not a contemporary scientific one.

The author is candid in stating that the findings of evolution are a ‘game changer’. For instance, *homo sapiens* are the ‘end product of a process of trial-and-error adaptation and natural selection’, not the result of a ‘special creative act by God’. Hence, according to Enns, it is implausible to maintain the ‘instantaneous and special creation of humanity’ found in the opening chapters of Genesis (i.e. 1:26–31; 2:7, 22). He also finds to be inadequate all ‘hybrid’ attempts to merge ‘modern and ancient accounts of human origins’ (p. xv). The latter includes any effort to expand the definition of the ‘image of God’, to include such notions as ‘reason, self-consciousness, or consciousness of God’. Based on the author’s understanding of the ‘ancient Near Eastern world’, the *imago dei* only denotes ‘humanity’s role of ruling God’s creation as God’s representative’.

For Enns, then, the unavoidable difficulty is coming to terms with the differences between ‘Genesis and evolution’, with respect to human origins. He claims that part of the reconciliation process includes ‘thinking through the parameters’ of the ‘problem’. Central to this endeavour is achieving some sort of ‘synthesis’ with what is found in the Pauline writings. Enns maintains that while there is a ‘virtual silence in the Old Testament’ (p. xvi) concerning ‘Adam’, he ‘makes a sudden

and unprecedented appearance in two of Paul's Letters' (i.e. Rom 15:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:20–58). Yet, in light of the findings of modern science, the author thinks it is a 'mistake' to affirm the 'dominant Christian view' that 'both Adam and Jesus must have been historical figures'. The author acknowledges the magnitude of the tension, for scripture is dealing with 'questions of who we are and why we do what we do' (p. xvii).

Enns puts forward four options to address the preceding issue: (1) 'accept evolution and reject Christianity'; (2) 'accept Paul's view of Adam as binding and reject evolution'; (3) 'reconcile evolution and Christianity by positing a first human pair (or group) at some point in the evolutionary process'; and (4) 'reevaluate what we have *the right to expect* from Genesis and Paul' (xviii; italics are the author's). Enns maintains that the first three options do an inadequate job to 'properly address Genesis as ancient literature and Paul as an ancient man'. For this reason, he regards the fourth option as the best way to 'think synthetically about how Christianity and evolution can be in dialogue'.

In the author's view, part of the task includes considering 'when Genesis was written and why'. For him, this involves affirming that 'Genesis is an ancient Israelite narrative written to answer pressing ancient Israelite questions'. Likewise, in agreement with 'modern scholarship', Enns considers the first book of the Judeo-Christian canon to be 'Israel's statement of national self-definition in the wake of Babylonian captivity'. This leads him to assert that 'science and Scripture speak two different languages and accomplish quite different things' (p. xix). With respect to the Pauline writings, the author thinks the apostle's 'use of the Adam story serves a vital theological purpose', namely, to elucidate to his 'ancient readers the significance for all humanity of *Christ's death and resurrection*' (italics are the author's). Notwithstanding this, Enns insists that Paul's 'use of the Adam story'

need not deter ‘biblically faithful Christians’ from adopting ‘evolution as the scientific account of human origins’.

3.2.2. Genesis and the challenges of the nineteenth century: science, biblical criticism, and biblical archaeology (ch. 1)

Enns begins by undertaking an overview of the ‘legacy of the nineteenth-century and its lasting impact on Genesis’ (p. 3). He regards what occurred in the past as influencing the ‘nature of the conflict that still exists for some today’. By ‘first looking back’, the author seeks to ‘ease evolution and Christianity toward meaningful dialogue’. One pivotal factor was ‘natural science’s advance’ (p. 4) in establishing the ancient age of the planet. Connected with this was the ‘theory of human origins’ put forward by Darwin, which ‘challenged the biblical view of the origin of life’.

A second factor was the rise of ‘biblical criticism’, especially its emphasis on a ‘historical investigation into the date and authorship of biblical books’. The latter called into question the prevailing opinion that Moses alone was ‘responsible for writing’ the Pentateuch. Instead, the new scholarly consensus was that these ancient sacred texts reached their final form in the ‘postexilic period’ (p. 5) and in ‘response to the Babylonian exile’. Accordingly, Enns observes that the purpose of the ‘Genesis creation narrative’ was not to teach ‘natural science’. Instead, it was to ‘say something of God’s and Israel’s place in the world as God’s chosen people’.

A third factor was the findings of ‘biblical archaeology’. As the author notes, the focus of this was ‘texts and artifacts from the ancient Near Eastern world’ (p. 6). This information clarified the ‘intellectual world in which the Bible was written’, which enabled specialists to ‘compare

and contrast Israel's religious beliefs with those of the surrounding nations'. In turn, this undertaking influenced the way in which 'Israel's primordial stories' were understood, including the most appropriate way to interpret the Genesis account of the Adam and Eve characters. For instance, the Adam and Eve characters in Genesis, along with the entire Pentateuch, were a 'means of declaring the distinctiveness of Israel's own beliefs from those of the surrounding nations'. Enns raises the issue of the 'historical value of Genesis', especially in light of the fact that the 'ancient Israelites', in creating a 'polemic', saw fit to 'freely adapt the themes of the much-older stories of the nations around them'.

3.2.3. When was Genesis written? (ch. 2)

Enns begins by noting that the inquiry of 'modern scholarship' (p. 9) concerning when 'Genesis and the Pentateuch' were 'written' arises directly from the biblical texts. He acknowledges that his discourse is a 'step back from the evolution discussion' (p. 10). His intent in doing so is to 'sketch a bigger picture of what the Old Testament is'. In turn, he considers this rendition as determining what readers 'have the right to expect' from the Hebrew sacred writings. Moreover, the author regards the latter as establishing the 'larger backdrop' to 'any meaningful talk of Adam's place' in deliberations about the 'relationship between evolution and Christianity'.

The author elucidates the 'problem of the Pentateuch' by listing a series of representative 'questions' (p. 11) raised by the 'earliest known biblical interpreters'. He maintains that these and other similar queries call for 'some sort of answer for people who look to the Bible for divine guidance'. He also acknowledges that the task 'requires skill and learning to handle well' (p. 12) the 'ambiguities and inconsistencies' connected with the 'authorship and date' of Genesis. He then notes that

the consensus of ‘modern biblical scholars’ (p. 13) goes against the ‘traditional view that Genesis and the Pentateuch’ were penned by Moses in the ‘second millennium BC’. Enns provides a historical summary of how ‘Jewish and Christian interpreters’ (p. 11) wrestled with the issue and, eventually, arrived at the following two conclusions: (1) ‘parts of the Pentateuch were composed over several centuries’ (p. 20); and (2) the ‘Pentateuch as a whole was not completed until after the Israelites returned from exile’.

More generally, according to the author, the prevailing view is that the ‘Old Testament as a whole owes its existence to the postexilic period’ (p. 26). He states that ‘Israel’s national crisis’ was the ‘driving factor’ (p. 27) behind the literary activity that led to the creation of an ‘official collection of writings’. Enns maintains that the Israelites used this body of edited ‘older works’ (p. 28) and newly created documents to define themselves as ‘God’s chosen people’ (p. 27), and reaffirm their claim of ‘Yahweh’ (p. 28) as their ‘God’. In short, the entire Old Testament is a ‘theological history’ (p. 30) that serves as a ‘response to the exile’. For the author, these conclusions ‘help reorient’ (p. 32) the ‘expectations’ of believers concerning ‘what questions’ the Judeo-Christian scriptures, especially Genesis, are ‘prepared to answer’. He contends that they address ‘ancient questions of self-definition’ (p. 33), rather than ‘contemporary ones of scientific interest’. Likewise, he argues that the ‘New Testament writers’ creatively reimagined ‘Israel’s story’. Expressed differently, in light of the Saviour’s crucifixion and resurrection, a new generation sought to explain what they thought it meant to be the ‘people of God’.

3.2.4. *Stories of origins from Israel's neighbors (ch. 3)*

In this chapter, the author's intent is to place 'Genesis side by side with the primordial tales of other ancient cultures' (p. 35). This includes 'ancient Mesopotamian stories' (p. 37; e.g. the *Enuma Elish*, the *Atrahasis Epic*, and the *Gilgamesh Epic*) that bear close resemblance to the 'first creation story' (Gen 1) and the 'flood' (Gen 6–9). He grants that the endeavour calls into question 'certain traditional Christian notions' (p. 36) about the 'historical and revelatory nature' of the creation narratives. For instance, in what sense do 'Israel's stories refer to fundamentally unique, revealed, historical events?' (p. 37). These points of concern notwithstanding, Enns thinks the effort is worthwhile in providing readers with a 'clearer understanding of the nature of Genesis' (p. 35), as well as 'what ... contemporary readers' can reasonably 'expect' from the biblical text. The author explains that 'Israel's creation stories' were never intended to address issues raised by 'modern scientific or even historical studies' (p. 36). Instead, Genesis uses 'ancient ways of understanding origins' to deal with 'ancient issues'. He contends that it is only when the 'theological' intent of Genesis is fully appreciated that a 'meaningful conversation between evolution and Christianity' can occur.

For instance, Enns points out that there are both 'conceptual' (p. 40) parallels and 'significant differences' between the 'Babylonian and biblical stories'. Also, he states that Genesis 1 was produced after its Mesopotamian counterpart, and 'interacts with the far older Babylonian theology of the dominant culture' (p. 39). Moreover, the author notes that the *Enuma Elish* is not primarily a tale about 'creation' (p. 154). Instead, it is a 'story about the ascendancy of Marduk'. Marduk was the 'patron god of Babylon'. Hence, the *Enuma Elish* promotes its 'main theme' by providing an 'account of cosmic origins'. Enns sees Genesis 1 as offering a sharp theological counterpoint or polemic to the

Babylonian tale. Specifically, the God of Israel is ‘portrayed as truly mighty in that he is solely and fully responsible for forming the cosmos’ (p. 54). Additionally, Yahweh is depicted as being ‘superior to the gods of the surrounding nations’.

The author’s broader observation is that Genesis 1 puts forward an ‘ancient, nonscientific, ahistorical’ (p. 42) approach to conceptualising ‘primordial time’. Likewise, he maintains that the ‘Adam story’ (p. 50) recorded in Genesis 2–3 is neither an ‘historical account’ (p. 51) nor a ‘scientific explanation’. Instead, Enns maintains that ‘Israel’s second creation story’ (p. 50) conveys ‘religious beliefs’ (p. 51) strongly held by God’s people. To make his point, the author details the extensive ‘differences’ between the ‘two creation accounts’ and asserts that these variances should be ‘respected rather than harmonized’. He maintains that from a ‘theological’ (p. 52) perspective, ‘Genesis 1 tells the story of creation as a whole by the one sovereign God’. In contrast, ‘Genesis 2 focuses early and specifically on *Israel’s* story’ (italics are the author’s). Enns provides a detailed comparison of the *Atrahasis Epic* and Genesis 2–8 to stress that the latter, like the former, ‘share a common way of describing the primordial world’ (p. 53). Based on this information, he concludes that the ‘biblical text’ should not be considered a ‘historical’ account.

3.2.5. *Israel and primordial time (ch. 4)*

Enns notes that people in ancient Near Eastern cultures tried to explain the enigmas of their lives by crafting stories about the ‘activities of the gods in primordial time’ (p. 61). Put differently, as a way to make sense of ‘meaning and existence’, these prescientific societies drew upon tales about ‘divine activity in the deep past’. The author likewise states that ‘ancient peoples’ believed that ‘formative primordial divine actions’ in

some way 'intersected with the events of history', including what occurred in 'present earthly reality'. Correspondingly, he maintains that the 'creation stories' of Israel shared this common cultural heritage. So, like the sagas propagated by their 'neighbors' (p. 62), those of Israel put forward their version of how God brought the 'cosmos' into existence and continued to remain actively present in the world.

The author's observations represent a continuation of his assertion in chapter 3, that the opening segments of Genesis, along with other passages in the Old Testament, 'cry out to be read as something other than a historical description of events' (p. 58). For instance, he emphasises that the 'historical evidence' (p. 62), particularly from the findings of archaeological research, calls into question the biblical rendition of 'Israel's presence in Egypt, the exodus, and the conquest of Canaan'. While he concedes the possibility of 'some type of authentic historical memory' (p. 156) being present, he contends these depictions of Israel's past are 'greatly embellished' (p. 62). In his view, the intent of the editors and redactors was not to furnish a 'blow-by-blow' report of 'historical events'. Instead, it was to proclaim that the 'God of the primordial past' likewise remained involved in Israel's 'formation as a nation'.

For Enns, a case in point would be the 'primordial cosmic battle themes' found in 'ancient Near Eastern stories', as well as in the first chapter of Genesis. He observes that the Israelites used a similar literary motif to narrate their 'deliverance from Egypt' and 'departure from Babylon' (p. 65). The line of reasoning is that just as God 'defeated' (p. 62) his 'enemies' in the 'primordial' past, so too, he is the 'victor' over 'Israel's historical enemies' in the present. Expressed differently, God's subjugation of the dark forces of chaos at the dawn of time is 'revisited' (p. 63) and becomes the basis for relating contemporary episodes experienced by the Israelites. The author dismisses the notion that these

‘cosmic-battle overtones’, in which Yahweh is depicted as a divine warrior king, signifies ‘poetic exaggeration for effect’. Instead, Enns primarily regards these sagas as bold ahistorical theological declarations.

In keeping with the preceding observations, the author argues that the ‘Adam story’ (p. 65) is not ‘about universal human origins but Israel’s origin’. For example, just as the primordial tale depicts God creating ‘Adam out of dust’ (p. 66), so too scripture portrays the ‘creation of Israel at the exodus’. The divine ‘command’ prohibiting Adam from eating fruit from a certain ‘tree’ is mirrored in the ‘commandments’ recorded in the ‘law of Moses’. The ‘garden paradise’ corresponds to the ‘land of Canaan’. Finally, the first human couple’s transgression leading to ‘exile’ and ‘death’ is echoed in Israel’s violation of the law and eventual deportation from the Promised Land. In short, the Adam character is not a historical figure (e.g. the first *homo sapien*), but ‘proto-Israel’ or an archetypal ‘preview’ of ‘Israel’s national life’. As Enns sees it, the Adam character was part of the nation’s effort at ‘self-definition’ (p. 69) and thus not germane to the ‘modern question of *human origins*’ (emphasis is the author’s).

3.2.6. Paul’s Adam and the Old Testament (ch. 5)

Enns recaps the preceding chapters by stating that a ‘literal reading of the Genesis creation stories’ (p. 79) is at variance with what is known about the ‘past’. He then directs his attention to Romans 5:12–31 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–58, in which the Adam character is portrayed as the ‘first human being and ancestor of everyone who ever lived’. The author observes how these biblical texts depicted ‘Adam’s disobedience as the cause of universal sin and death’, which in turn became the basis for the redemption of ‘humanity ... through the obedience of Christ’.

Enns proposes that one read the Adam tale as an ahistorical 'wisdom story' (p. 80) from which theological insights can be drawn. The author regards this as the way in which Paul dealt with the Adam character. According to this view, Paul is one example of a 'variety of ancient Jewish interpretations of Adam'. In each case, the intent was to 'grapple with the significance' (p. 81) of the primeval saga for its 'time and place'.

Enns argues that Paul used the 'hermeneutical conventions' of his day—specifically that of 'Second Temple Judaism'—to engage the relevant biblical texts in 'creative' and 'imaginative ways'. In doing so, the apostle reinterpreted the 'ancient stories' (p. 76) to enable them to speak to the 'present, higher reality of the risen Son of God' (p. 81). Enns maintains that Paul had a 'rhetorical reason' for introducing the fictitious Adam character into the theological 'argument' of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Specifically, this ahistorical figure serves as a worthy, archetypal counterpart to the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Enns contends that the historicity of Adam is 'not a *necessary* component' (p. 82) either to Paul's line of reasoning or the redemptive work of Jesus of Nazareth being a 'fully historical solution' to the 'universal plight ... of humanity'.

The author maintains that 'explicit reference' to Adam in the Hebrew sacred writings is 'relatively absent'. Enns concedes that the Adam character is a 'dominant theological motif in the Old Testament'. Moreover, he affirms that these writings depict 'humanity in general and Israel in particular as out of harmony with God' (p. 84). The latter is where the author puts the theological emphasis of the story involving Adam, namely, whether 'Israel' (p. 86) will 'obey and receive blessing, or disobey and suffer consequences?' So, for the author, the implication is that Genesis 2 and 3 narrate an ahistorical incident that is 'Israel-centered rather than universal' (p. 90). This supposition seems even

more ‘compelling’ for him when he approaches these chapters as a ‘wisdom text’ (p. 91), namely, a ‘narrative version of Israel’s failure to follow’ the ‘path of wisdom’ advocated in Proverbs.

Enns asserts that it is difficult to find in the Hebrew sacred writings ‘any indication that Adam’s disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death, and condemnation’ (p. 82). Hence, he thinks it is misguided to ‘extrapolate’ (p. 158) from the Adam character ‘a theology of original sin’. As for the ‘role that Paul assigns to Adam’ (p. 81), Enns surmises that it is not only ‘largely unique’ to the apostle ‘in the ancient world’, but also ‘moves well beyond what Genesis and the Old Testament have to say’. Put another way, ‘what Genesis says about Adam and the consequences of his actions does not seem to line up with the universal picture’ (p. 92) found in the traditional reading of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

3.2.7. Paul as an ancient interpreter of the Old Testament (ch. 6)

Enns maintains that while Paul was ‘guided by the Spirit of God to proclaim his gospel’ (p. 93), nevertheless, the apostle was a ‘first-century Jew’ who expressed his theological views within his own ‘cultural context’. Put another way, according to Enns, Paul typified an ‘ancient way of thinking’ (p. 94) when he made observations about ‘physical reality’, including (for example) a ‘three-tiered cosmos’ (p. 93). In short, the ‘assumptions’ (p. 94) the apostle ‘shared with his contemporaries’ about the ‘nature of physical reality’ point to a ‘faulty ancient cosmology’, especially against the backdrop of insights provided by modern science. Enns extends his line of reasoning to what Paul understood about ‘human origins’ (p. 95), as seen in his remarks concerning ‘Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15’. This includes

whatever the apostle might have 'assumed about Adam as the progenitor of humanity'.

As a continuation of what Enns put forward in chapter 5, he argues that Paul, in keeping with the interpretive conventions of Second Temple Judaism, utilised imaginative and innovative approaches to his reading of the Old Testament, including the Adam character of Genesis 2 and 3. The supposition is that 'what Paul says about Adam' (p. 117) is not 'necessarily what Genesis was written to convey'. Enns surmises that just as the apostle's Jewish peers 'rethought' (p. 96) their 'own history in light of the crisis of the exile', so too, Paul reassessed his understanding of scripture in light of the death, burial, and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. Enns contends that an objective evaluation of how the apostle made use of the Tanakh indicates he was not 'bound by the original meaning of the ... passage' (p. 103) he quoted. In this view, the apostle was following contemporary hermeneutical practice when he retold and reapplied the Adam story in ways that departed from a strictly narrow, literal reading of the biblical text. Enns regards Paul's unique and novel approach as being entirely appropriate, given that the Adam character was an ahistorical archetype of Israel, not the literal first *homo sapien*.

3.2.8. *Paul's Adam (ch. 7)*

In the previous chapter, Enns asserted that Paul, like his contemporary Jewish peers, deliberately moulded biblical texts to fit the apostle's theological argument. In chapter 7, the author contends that in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle, as a 'child of Israel's traditions' (p. 123), utilised the 'theological vocabulary available to him'. Enns concedes that Paul understood Adam to be the 'historical first man' (p. 119) who was 'responsible for universal sin and death'. The author notes that Paul's main intent was not to inform his readers that Adam

was a literal individual. Instead, the apostle's central objective was to use a transformational reading of Genesis to explain the significance of the Christ event. Enns maintains that, in light of the 'scientific evidence ... for human origins' (p. 122), along with the 'literary evidence ... for the nature of ancient stories of origins', 'belief in a first human' is no longer a 'viable option'. For him, this conclusion remains so, despite whatever culturally-conditioned, erroneous views Paul embraced about the Adam character of Genesis 2 and 3.

Enns thinks the core message of the gospel is preserved, even when one sets aside 'Paul's understanding of Adam as a historical person'. According to this line of reasoning, the Adam character was a 'primordial, prehistoric man' (p. 125) who was fabricated through 'hundreds of years of cultural transmission'. In contrast, Jesus was a genuine individual, whose 'resurrection' was a 'present reality for Paul'. The author opines that Adam and Jesus occupy completely different 'historical' (p. 126) categories. For this reason, Enns considers it is possible for one episode recounted in mythic history (e.g. in an ancient garden) to be parallel to another event narrated in real history (e.g. commencing in the garden of Gethsemane) without the point of comparison being weakened or lost. Similarly, the author holds that it is possible for the efficacy of Paul's literary parallel to remain valid even when one of the characters (e.g. Adam) turns out to be symbolic (or metaphorical) and the other (e.g. Jesus) is affirmed to be a real person who actually lived.

3.2.9. Conclusion: Adam today: nine theses

Enns brings his book to a close by articulating the following nine theses, or assertions, that he thinks are central both to valuing 'Scripture as God's Word' (p. 137) and accepting 'evolution as the correct model

for human origins'. (1) 'Literalism is not an option'. By this the author means it is improper to 'read Genesis' as a 'literally accurate description of physical, historical reality'. In his view, to do otherwise disregards 'evidence' arising from 'scientific' research and 'ancient Near Eastern stories of origins'. (2) There is a basic incompatibility between the 'scientific and biblical models of human origins' (138), for these two approaches 'speak a different "language"'. They are not only irreconcilable, but also, 'there is no "Adam" to be found in the evolutionary scheme'. (3) 'The Adam story in Genesis reflects its ancient Near Eastern setting and should be read that way' (p. 140). (4) The 'Adam story' in Genesis is 'probably the older and was subsumed under Genesis 1 after the exile in order to tell Israel's story'. Additionally, the first chapter of Genesis was 'put at the head of Israel's national story' (p. 141) for purposes of 'self-definition' and clarifying the nature of Israel's 'relationship with God'. So, even if the 'Adam story' had the 'world stage as its backdrop' and once possibly 'functioned' as a narrative about 'universal human origins', it eventually took on a 'clearer Israelite-centered focus'. (5) Reading the 'Adam story' (p. 142) in concert with 'Proverbs' demonstrates the 'Israel-centered focus' of the former. Hence, the 'Adam story' is 'not about a fall from perfection', but 'about failing to follow the path of wisdom and reach maturity'. (6) Paul used the 'biblical idiom available to him' to convey the 'deep, foundational plight of the human condition' and disclose 'God's solution through the resurrection of Christ'. The implication is that the apostle was mistaken in his 'assumptions about human origins' (p. 143). Be that as it may, the 'need for a savior does not require a historical Adam'. (7) 'Even the expression of deep and ultimate truth does not escape the limitations of the cultures in which the truth is expressed'. (8) At the heart of the 'conflict for many Christians' (p. 145) is the perceived 'threat' associated with contending that the 'Adam story in Genesis is not a

historical account’, and the way Paul ‘understood’ the narrative, in terms of human origins, is incorrect. Despite the teaching of longstanding theological traditions, maintaining the last two assertions does not subvert the ‘trustworthiness of the Bible’. (9) Making ‘evolution’ (p. 147) an ‘add-on to Christianity’ is deficient. Instead, to foster ‘serious intellectual engagement’, a ‘synthesis’ is required in which ‘one’s own convictions’ are changed ‘in light of new data’.

4. Conclusion: a Comparison of the Respective Presuppositions Made and Deductions Put Forward by Collins and Enns

As was noted in the introduction to this essay, both Collins and Enns address the same basic issues, examine a similar range of scientific and biblical data, and tend to arrive at opposite conclusions. The main issue their respective works explore is the historical authenticity of the Adam character (and to a lesser extent Eve) in the Genesis creation narratives. The secondary issues that they discuss include the following: the findings of modern evolutionary science concerning the origin of the cosmos and life on earth, including *homo sapiens*; the sagas from various ancient Near Eastern accounts and how they compare with the opening chapters of Genesis; and the theological view Paul held concerning the notion of a first human pair through whom he believed sin and death entered the human experience and from whom the apostle declared all other *homo sapiens* to be biologically descended.

Both authors, in their respective ways, are attempting to bridge the gap between evolution and Christianity, and thereby, make it possible for on-going fruitful dialogue to continue on a topic that is pertinent to the wider discussion on science and religion. While Collins and Enns

affirm a high view of the Bible, the amount of importance each places on it is considerably different. In turn, this influences their respective assumptions, arguments, and conclusions. More specifically, Collins gives the Judeo-Christian scriptures pride of place in the debate, while Enns puts greater emphasis on the data external to the Bible. Expressed differently, Collins aligns his hermeneutical decisions to favour the authority of scripture, whereas Enns shifts his views to accommodate the narrative of human origins put forward by modern science.

Accordingly, Collins maintains that any scientific premise concerning the Adam and Eve characters has to account adequately for a broad range of evidence he deems to be important, including information from scripture, the prevailing cultures of the ancient Near East, Second Temple Judaism, and common human experience. His argumentation is influenced by his presupposition that some version of the traditional theological view concerning Adam does the best job of accounting for all the relevant data. Enns also thinks it is important to objectively consider the same assortment of information. His presupposition, though, is that it is no longer possible to affirm the historical authenticity of Adam. Enns reasons that the last view does an inadequate job of accounting for the pertinent findings arising from modern science, archaeological evidence, and how ancient cultures formulated their national tales.

The preceding observations indicate how two specialists in biblical studies can arrive at such dissimilar views about whether Adam ever really existed. In turn, whether greater stress should be placed on science or scripture influences the specific positions Collins and Enns take on a series of interrelated topics. In general, Collins favours options that agree as much as possible with a more traditional view of a literal first *homo sapien*. For Enns, the preference is for alternatives that best correspond to the present-day scholarly consensus about human

origins. That being the case, whereas Collins maintains the opening chapters of Genesis convey truth that is essentially historical and factual, Enns argues that these texts are ancient myths that do not communicate any information that corresponds to historical reality. Whereas Enns contends that Adam is a metaphorical character who never really existed, Collins asserts Adam literally existed in space-time history.

Enns thinks a comparison of the Genesis creation stories with other ancient Near Eastern tales leads to the conclusion that the former is merely symbolic in character. While Collins recognises the presence of symbolism in the opening chapters of Genesis and discusses the literary parallels these texts have with myths appearing in the surrounding culture, he holds that there is an essential historical core in Genesis 1–3. Put differently, for Collins, the literary genre, while being characterised by imaginative written conventions, remains essentially historical in what it recounts. Oppositely, for Enns, the presence of metaphorical elements in the biblical texts, like those found in other ancient tales, is conclusive evidence that readers are dealing with ahistorical information.

Both authors acknowledge the literary differences between the two creation accounts found in Genesis. Yet, while Collins sees them as being characterised by coherence, Enns considers any attempts at harmonisation to be misguided. Furthermore, when Enns compares the opening chapters of Genesis with other Mesopotamian texts, he concludes there are unmistakable resemblances between them that point to the ahistorical nature of Genesis 1–3. In contrast, Collins deduces that there are substantial dissimilarities between the biblical and extra-biblical renditions, which bolster his view that the Genesis version conveys factual information about real events.

Moreover, both authors agree that terms for sin and disobedience do not appear in the Adam story. Yet, whereas Enns reasons this omission undermines the traditional view of original sin, Collins thinks it is reasonable to retain the longstanding doctrine. Both take up the issue of what particular texts in the Old Testament and the writings of Second Temple Judaism have to say about the Adam character. Enns thinks references to Adam in the Old Testament are infrequent, while Collins asserts they are considerably more widespread. Each author is cognizant of the Adam character functioning as a dominant theological motif in the Old Testament. Even so, while Collins regards this as support for his view of the prevalence of Adam in the Hebrew sacred writings, Enns remains unconvinced. Collins regards the treatment of Adam in Second Temple Jewish literature as affirming the historicity of the character. Oppositely, Enns contends that the writers from this period used imaginative approaches to reapply the fictional individual known as Adam to their particular circumstances.

Connected with the preceding observations is the significance each author assigns to the presence of story-like elements in the biblical text. Though Collins acknowledges that pictorial and symbolic elements are present, he does not surmise from this that the underlying information is fabricated. In contrast, Enns infers that what readers are encountering is fictitious. For him, this conclusion is in keeping with what one finds in comparable literature from the ancient Near East. So, according to this line of reasoning, the opening chapters of Genesis are a retelling of similar creation tales found throughout the ancient Near East. Likewise, Enns asserts that the Adam character, as an ahistorical, literary archetype, was taken up in varied ways and reapplied in differing contexts by writers in the Second Temple period. Moreover, he sees the same phenomenon occurring in Paul's use of Adam. Enns surmises that in keeping with the hermeneutical practice of his day, the apostle

departed from the original meaning of the biblical text to reapply the Adam story in ways that were new and novel.

Both authors agree that Paul regarded Adam as an historical person who was the biological progenitor of the human race. Also, both affirm that the apostle thought a real Adam sinned in an actual ancient locale called the Garden of Eden. Moreover, both authors concur that Paul was convinced Adam's single act of disobedience brought original sin, death, and corruption to the human race and the rest of creation. While Collins agrees with what Paul taught in these areas, Enns argues that the apostle was mistaken in his understanding about human origins. Furthermore, whereas Collins advocates retaining the traditional views of Adam, Enns contends it is no longer feasible to do so. Collins thinks the historic teachings of the Church best account for all the pertinent biblical and extra-biblical data. In contrast, Enns asserts that the consensus view of modern science regarding human origins should prevail and lead to a profoundly different understanding of what scripture teaches about Adam, sin, and death.

Reference List

- Carson DA 1980. Adam in the epistles of Paul. In NM de S Cameron (ed.), *In the beginning ... a symposium on the Bible and creation*, 28–43. Glasgow: The Biblical Creation Society.
- Collins CJ 2011. *Did Adam and Eve really exist? Who they were and why you should care*. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Collins CJ 2012. The evolution of Adam. Online review. Accessed from http://thegospelcoalition.org/book-reviews/review/the_evolution_of_adam, 26/04/2012.

- Enns P 2011. Book review: still in the weeds of human origins. Online review. Accessed from www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=7796, 26/04/2012.
- Enns P 2012. *The evolution of Adam: what the Bible does and doesn't say about human origins*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.
- Hagerty BB 2011. Evangelicals question the existence of Adam and Eve. Online article. Accessed from www.npr.org/2011/08/09/138957812/evangelicals-question-the-existence-of-adam-and-eve, 19/04/2012.
- Lioy D 2011. *Evolutionary creation in biblical and theological perspective*. Peter Lang: New York.
- Ostling RN 2011. The search for the historical Adam', *Christianity Today* 55(6):22–27.
- Pretorius M 2012. The creation and fall of Adam: literal, symbolic, or myth? *Conspectus* 12:161–184.