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Fostering Spiritual Formation at a Distance: Review of the Current Debates, and a Biblically Grounded Proposal for Maximizing its Effectiveness as Part of Ministerial Formation

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Abstract

Due to its enormous advantages, especially within the current context of massive technological advances, distance education has globally become a major component of tertiary higher education. Despite this being eminently true of the theological disciplines, controversies rage as to its efficacy for nurturing spiritual and ministerial formation. Doubters view the enterprise in pernicious terms; their main objection being that bodily absence undermines efficacy of formation at a distance, which in itself also lacks sound biblical and theological foundation. Enthusiasts on the other hand, rebuff these criticisms and question whether it is currently viable to foster the formation of theologically effective ministers without adopting the insights, methods, and tools of distance education. This article summarises the contours of these debates, and critically evaluates some of the proposals that have been

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

propounded for its theological underpinnings. It concludes by proposing that the Pastoral Epistles provide the biblical mandate, appropriate models, and pastoral principles for maximising the efficacy and effectiveness of ministerial formation through distance education.

1. Introduction

Distance education, defined by Simonson, Smaldino, and Zvacek (2015: 32) as 'institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive communication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors', has for several decades now had a progressively prominent role in adult higher education. Its enormous advantages are apparent to most dispassionate observers.[2] It offers opportunities for cost-effective, flexible, and student-centred instruction tailored to meet their unique educational needs. It enables broadening of access to the best of education regardless of the student's age, socio-cultural background, and distance from the faculty. It enriches pragmatic integration of theoretical learning with the student's real-life experiences, ensuring a well-balanced graduate at the end of the formal educational process. And it provides the foundations and skills for independent continued life-long learning that is required for fruitful participation in today's complex world. Its main disadvantage[3] is the

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[2] I am self-aware of my personal biases in this review, having obtained my theological training through distance education, and now serving as a senior member of faculty of a distance education institution. These biases notwithstanding, and given my prior experiences of full residential, and now also as a professionally trained educationist and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the UK, I have endeavoured to be as even-handed as possible in evaluating the evidence.

[3] The issue of accessibility of learning resources such as libraries and laboratories may rarely also pose as a disadvantage to distance education, but this depends on the degree of remoteness of the student from these facilities.

potential for reduced opportunities for immediate student-with-student and student-with-faculty interactions, feedback and orientation in the learning community (Brown 2012:9–49; Lei and Gupta 2010:616–631; Moore and Kearsley 2011; Rao and Krishnan 2014; Veletsianos 2010).

Evidently, judging the overall efficacy and efficiency of distance education depends on the weight given to the potential impact of the reduced interactions on achieving the learning outcomes. This impact is definitely offset or at least blunted by the benefits of modern communication technology in aiding these interactions. Even so, in the case of tertiary theological education, the fundamental question is whether the pivotal learning objective of fostering the spiritual formation[4] of students preparing for Christian leadership and general ministry could be wholly achieved through distance education.

Inevitably, different organisations and theological educators make different judgements in answering this question. So, for example, in its most recent publication of standards for regulating the accreditation of registered theological training institutions in the USA and Canada, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS)[5] stipulates the following core standard for accrediting an MDiv programme for ministerial formation:

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[4] For the purpose of this article, I adopt the following definition of 'Spiritual Formation' advocated by the Dallas Theological Seminary: It is 'the process by which God forms Christ's character in believers by the ministry of the Spirit, in the context of community, and in accordance with biblical standards. This process involves the transformation of the whole person in desires, thoughts, behaviours, and styles of relating with God and others. Such life change is manifest in a growing love for God and others—a dying to self and living for Christ' (DTS 2016; cf., Greenman and Kalantzis 2015).

[5] 'The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) is a membership organisation of more than 270 graduate schools that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits the schools and approves the degree programs they offer' (ATS 2015).

> Because MDiv education expects regular and substantive student-faculty interaction to achieve the stipulated learning outcomes, this interaction requires that at least one year of full-time academic study or its equivalent shall be completed at the main campus of the school awarding the degree or at an extension site of the institution that has been approved for MDiv degree-granting status. An exception may be granted if a school can demonstrate how its educational design and delivery system accomplishes the learning outcomes associated with residential theological study [A.3.1.3].

It is evident from this stipulation that the ATS believes that the gold standard for effective ministerial formation is through the full residential mode, for, in its view, residential education provides the ideal and 'substantive student-faculty interaction'. So the ATS offers a concession to distance education, but only on the terms and criteria set by residential education. Accredited institutions will only be approved to offer full distance education for their MDiv programme provided they can demonstrate their ability to meet the presumably higher standards of residential institutions.

The ATS is not alone in taking this tepid stance towards formation at a distance. Its latest decision follows several years of debate within the organisation and in the theological academy in general regarding the efficacy, viability, efficiency and indeed, the place, if any, of distance education in tertiary level ministerial formation. Some objectors were more strident. Kelsey (2002:2−9) for example argued that the lack of bodily presence in formation at a distance undermines its theo-anthropological foundations. Dietterich (2005:96) similarly insisted: 'a key aspect of the seminary experience is to step out of the familiar context, to become a "stranger", to encounter and learn to appreciate different kinds of people and traditions'. Kumalo and Richardson (2010:268) also argue that 'ministers with integrated intelligence and

imagination can be formed only through intensive residential, full-time seminary experience'. And Diekema and Caddell (2001:182) quip: 'is not the incarnation of Jesus Christ ultimately God's rejection of distance learning? If relationship was an unnecessary component, would Christ's physical manifestation have been necessary?'

On the other side of the divide are theological educators who rebuff these reservations and rather regard spiritual formation at a distance as revolutionising theological education by liberating it from the severe strictures inherent in current residential modes of education. Gresham (2006:24−28) has, for example, demonstrated that the argument insisting on the necessity for bodily presence for spiritual formation to be efficacious derives from a faulty dualistic conceptualisation of the human agent and not from an assessment of the content or effectiveness of distance programmes themselves. Hess (2005:33) has similarly argued that distance education has a better chance of ensuring the moral and spiritual development of the student, since the education is personalised and the students remain situated in their context, and thus are formed through addressing the regular daily challenges of contextualisation of theological knowledge within their communities. Others have pointed to the fact that the immense flexibility unleashed by distance education results in the formation of ministers from different professional and social backgrounds, thus enriching the cohort of church leaders (Chong 2010; Forrest 2012; Wiseman 2015). All in all, an impasse of sorts appears to have marked this debate in some circles, until recently.

What has occurred 'recently' with this impasse is a perfect storm combination of socio-cultural transformations such as the rapidity of technological advances in communication, the dramatic changes in the demography of ministerial and leadership candidature of churches, and the changing attitudes of the churches themselves and also academic faculty with regard to the competing priorities of the curriculum. As a

result, the nature of these debates has significantly altered. Given this context, it is worth critically evaluating the contours of the debates surrounding the efficacy and efficiency of nurturing ministerial formation through distance education, and determining whether the ATS and other organisations with similar views are at all correct in their negative stances towards the enterprise.

This article accordingly has a threefold objective. Firstly, it summarises some of the key issues involved in the debates, and reviews the results of some recent empirical studies comparing the two modes of theological education. Secondly, it critically appraises the biblical and theological arguments which have been mounted in objecting to formation at a distance. Finding that the published literature is still insufficient in its robustness, the article finishes by proposing that the special genre of the Pastoral Epistles provides the biblical mandate, appropriate models, and pastoral principles for maximising the efficacy and effectiveness of ministerial formation through distance education.

Paul's intentional adaptation of the letter-writing technology as a major pastoral tool to circumvent the problems caused by his physical separation from his churches was in keeping with his time. Even so, his further strategic construction of a special genre for the Pastoral Epistles for the purpose of the formation of leaders of some of these churches at a distance should be regarded as the biblical template, model, and mandate for efficacious and effective ministerial formation through distance education.

2. Review of the Current Debates on Formation at a Distance

As preamble to the review of the literature, it is worth noting that the current debates were paradoxically preceded by a period of academic wrangling in the 1980s as to whether spiritual formation should in the first place be a preoccupation of tertiary level theological education. The perception by some at the time, especially those teaching in the University settings, was that the task of spiritual formation of students should be left to the churches, while educational institutions focused on 'hard' outcomes. So for instance, Hall (1988:82; cf., Glanzer and Ream 2009; Kemp 2010:130; Lindbeck 1988) argued that focusing on spiritual formation could well dilute academic rigour:

> [If] we offer courses in spirituality, how can we avoid sliding from the academically acceptable into a kind of substanceless meandering into that which is personally 'meaningful' but intellectually indefensible? Is it appropriate to have quite different expectations of students in such offerings? Or more specifically, does a course that requires only the keeping of a spiritual diary really qualify in an academic curriculum? What does it mean to teach spirituality? Can one, for example, teach 'about' meditative techniques without actually teaching (and thus practising?) the techniques?

On the other hand, others at the time, such as Edgar, in his seminal paper contributing to the 1983 *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* (2005:208–217), and later, Stuebing (1999:47–70), Steibel (2010:340–355), Cheesman (2012) and Graham (2015:58–77) insisted that the task of theological education of ministerial students must prioritise intentional strategies focused on their spiritual formation. It is fair to say that the current consensus in the theological academy, certainly in the conservative tradition, is tilted in favour of this latter view. To cite Naidoo (2010:352; cf., 2013:1):

> Essentially theological institutions and seminaries are responsible for preparing wise, compassionate theologically astute and pastorally proficient servants who can lead the church and society. Learning to be a minister encompasses the holistic development of individuals rather than being limited to either the acquisition of knowledge about the faith or even knowing how to behave as a minister. The acquisition of knowledge is essential in ministerial formation but the scope of education must go beyond a restrictive cognitive qualification to more integrated human development. This is one of the main reasons why pedagogies of formation need to play a significant role in theological education.

Though this argument is now largely settled in the academy, it is worth rehearsing this fact that there was a time when some theological educators felt that they were not the only ones responsible for nurturing the spiritual formation of their students. Theirs, they argued, was to provide the theoretical training and the wider church was to focus on 'spiritual formation'. While such a sharp division of responsibilities is patently artificial and ultimately wrong-headed, current enthusiasts of formation at a distance nevertheless make a valid point in insisting that, unlike the residential mode, their model of education best enables the academy and church to actively and continuously collaborate in fostering the growth and maturation of the future leaders and ministers of the church.

Be that as it may, for many theological institutions, the question now has moved from arguing over whether 'pedagogies of formation' ought to feature in their curriculum at all, to the issue of determining the most effective educational settings for implementing them. This discussion is in three strands, namely, (a) whether the empirical research evidence supports the efficacy and effectiveness of formation at distance, (b) if it is effective, what are the best practices for maximising formation at a

distance, and (c) what biblical and theological warrants and models undergird ministerial formation at distance. I briefly summarise the literature in these strands.

2.1. Is ministerial formation at a distance efficacious?

The question of efficacy may be sharply put in the words of Maddix and Estep (2010:424) *inter alia*: 'Is Christian nurture and spiritual formation possible in an online course or program?' Even though it did not focus on the specific issue of formation at a distance, nonetheless the best place to begin in seeking concrete evidential answer to this question is the meta-analysis of the 'comparative distance education literature' by Bernard and his colleagues in 2004. This is because this study assembled, aggregated the findings and meta-analysed the results of 232 published studies from 1985 to 2002 (2004:379–439), thus providing an excellent overview of baseline findings on outcomes comparisons between distance and non-distance education. Moreover, by employing sophisti-cated statistical formulae to sift out the many confounding variables in the publications to answer the key questions about parameters determining efficacy and effectiveness, this study furnishes questions upon which future more focused studies could be based.

In a nutshell, Bernard and colleagues found that distance education had only a slight advantage over on-campus education with respect to student achievement, even though there was wide variability in the individual outcomes that were analysed. When they split the outcomes between synchronous and asynchronous distance education, there was a small negative effect for synchronous distance education,[6] but the wide

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[6] Rapid technological advances in communication have introduced significant complexities in the levels of synchronicity in distance education that would most likely jettison the current validity of this conclusion (Fleck 2012:398–411; North-Samardzic, et al. 2014:328–346).

variability suggests that it is a mistake to pit classroom instruction against distance education. They found that the quality of course design is the more important factor rather than the media for its delivery.

For distance education in particular, their findings indicate that learning activities which foster student collaboration such as interactivity and problem-solving discussions in asynchronous distance education improve outcomes. In particular, they stress that 'effective DE [Distance Education] depends on the provision of pedagogical excellence' (2004:413). Though they did not focus on the isolated question of ministerial formation, their insights indicate that distance education has immense strengths capable of application in spiritual and moral formation.

This has been specifically confirmed by Nichols (2014) who compared the formational experiences and the propensity for spiritual growth and maturity between two cohorts of undergraduate students (one on-campus and the other through distance learning) studying the same BTh and BMin courses in an evangelical theological seminary (Laidlaw College). A total of 77 students (of the 148 in the programme) were surveyed using the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (Thayer 2004:195–207) as the key measuring instrument, augmented with semi-structured interviews. Nichols found that overall there was no significant difference in the formational experiences between the two arms of the study, even though students in the distance education arm tended to be more mature believers at the time of entry. Of significant interest was the fact that the distance students had a far more significant participation and enrichment through their own churches than the on-campus group. This particular finding is also mirrored in Palka's prior study in the USA (2004:1–6).

Several other studies have confirmed this trend towards equality in formational achievement between distance and residential modes,

especially when the fifth generation of distance education, that is, those employing the Internet and latest interactive communication media, are taken into consideration (Taylor 2001:1–14; Wiseman 2015). Rovai and colleagues (2008) compared the sense of community and perceived learning between campus and online courses at a Christian university using a state university as control. They found that 'the Christian ethos, with its influence on all facets of university life, manifests itself in stronger online as well as on-campus sense of community among students at the Christian university'. No significant differences were found in the perceived formation between the two arms of the student groups. In other words, it is the institution's Christian ethos which invariably drives its educational programmes that reflects itself in the formation of the students, and not necessarily the mode of fostering.

Overall then, the published research indicates that the issue of efficacy and effectiveness of 'pedagogies of formation' depends not so much on whether it is delivered via distance or residential modes. The issue lies with maximising the exact features of the medium which may then make formation more effective. Indeed, many tertiary residential degree courses are reaping the immense advantages from distance educational methods and designs by incorporating their insights into their educational design in the so-called hybrid or blended courses (cf. Fleck 2012). As Delamarter (2004:135) puts it, the issue with education in general has progressed from locating *where* we build the new campus to determining 'what part of which course, that is, what learning objectives for the programme need to be handled face to face and which can be done online' (cf., Delamarter and Brunner 2005:145–164; Rovai, Baker and Cox Jr 2008:1–22; Twigg 2001). It is to the question of the practices which maximise the advantages of distance education in ministerial formation that I now turn.

2.2. What practices maximize effectiveness of formation at a distance?

If spiritual formation can as effectively be fostered at a distance as in residential institutions, what evidence exists regarding the best practices which maximise this effectiveness? In a summary, four practices that influence effectiveness of formation at distance dominate the literature. These are presented in an alliterative fashion, namely, (a) institutional intentionality, (b) interactivity, (c) Internet and all the possibilities it offers, and (d) instructor.

2.2.1. Institutional intentionality and effectiveness of formation at a distance

The contribution of Maddix and Estep (2010:423–434) is quite important in highlighting the role of institutional intentionality in maximising effectiveness of formation at a distance. They have after all accumulated significant experience in delivering full programs that focus solely on formation at distance. Affirming the viability of formation at a distance, they categorised the likely practices that will foster formation via distance education into four, namely, (a) individual course induced practices, (b) one-on-one teacher-student practices including mentorship, (c) small to medium sized group practices, and (d) church worship. They then describe an MA program in Spiritual Formation which is fully online, utilising web-based media such as blogs, journaling, chapel podcasts, mentoring and spiritual direction to foster formation in three domains, the inner, outward and corporate domains.

Similarly dismissing the academic discourse which compares distance with classroom based education as now *passé*, Abrami and colleagues (2011:82–103) have proposed that the more profitable area of research should be identifying the features of distance education that work best,

and how to improve them. Specifically, they identified instructional designs, enhanced student self-regulation, particular aspects of interactions and most importantly, institutional intentionality as some of the key areas that need further research and improvement to maximise the potential of distance education to foster moral and spiritual formation.

Although conducted on residential institutions, Naidoo's (2011:118–146) study examining the key dynamics of institutional intentionality is nevertheless worth applying to formation at a distance. She first designed and validated an index for measuring the perception of level and effectiveness of spiritual formation, the Spiritual Formation Index (SFI), in seven Protestant theological institutions in South Africa. The SFI is a perception test, which attempts to capture the students' perception of emphases placed on their spiritual formation. It is calculated from a composite of six process and integration concepts, namely, '(1) institutional commitment towards spiritual formation, (2) specialised services offered by the institution, (3) formal/informal learning of spirituality, (4) community life, (5) staff/faculty involvement in spiritual formation, and (6) spiritual activities on campus' (p. 129). The SFI was then employed to measure the students' perception of their formational experiences and the factors at play in determining its effectiveness.

The results are interesting in that the students on the whole scored their institutions at relatively positive levels. Within a Likert scale, the total average score was 2.16, with three-quarters of the student sample of 269 scoring their institutions less than 2.49. In other words, the majority of the students agreed that their institutions had a more positive approach to spiritual formation than did not. Of particular interest is that students of Pentecostal and Charismatic institutions scored their organisations far more positively for one of the six factors: 'Institutional commitment towards spiritual formation', a figure which capture students' perception of their institution's formational intentionality. In other words, within

these traditions, there was a high perception among their students that spiritual formation is taken seriously. The figures were less positive for the traditional denominations which also tended to be university-based institutions.

The literature thus indicates that institutional intentionality plays a fundamental role in ensuring that spiritual formation is nurtured among their ministerial students. This is not surprising, as the more intentional institutions are, the more likely that that intentionality will reflect in the design of courses, formational activities and their assessment, and the students' level of enthusiasm and engagement necessary to drive their own formation. Students tend to care more about their spiritual growth if their institutions and instructors demonstrate that they are interested in their growth.

2.2.2. Interactivity and effectiveness of formation at a distance

Bernard and colleagues (2009:1243–1289) conducted another meta-analysis with the aim of comparing the relative effectiveness of different interventions within distance education. They were, in particular, interested in the factors at play in three different types of interactions within the distance education context, namely, student-to-student, student-to-teacher and student-to-content interactions. Overall, all three types of interactions demonstrate highly positive effects on outcomes in terms of student achievements. However, the student-to-content interactions were slightly the most significant of the three. This would seem to imply that learning materials and activities in distance education which involve interactions between the student and the content of the programme yield better results. This obviously has immense implications with how learning outcomes of course are mapped, the courses themselves blue-printed, matrixed, and designed, and the students are assessed.

With regard to the specific issue of interactions, Outz's (2006:292; cf., Swan 2004) conclusion is perhaps most representative of the current evidence: 'The three aspects of distance courses important to student learning are: a teacher who is present and interacting with students, students who interact with each other, and students interacting with the content'. Outz's contribution is based on a study in which, using the Classroom Community Scale tool validated by direct student interviews, she measured the sense of community of a group of online course students. She identified that students' perceptions of the sense of community in a course is a key contributor to increased satisfaction and the need for online course designs to integrate 'activities that promote interaction, negotiation, and debate'. She concludes (2006:293):

> Results indicate that student satisfaction with online learning classes tends to be low when instructors simply post lecture notes, make individual assignments, and ask students to work in isolation without any interaction with other students or with the instructor. If learning is a social process and faculties are concerned about the lack of socialization, courses need to be designed to promote interaction and active learning.

Lowe and Lowe (2010:85–102), have also proposed 'an ecosystems model' for ensuring maximal interactivity in the particular instance of formation at a distance. Employing Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development (EHD) theory as a heuristic device, they conceptualised the various interactional spaces of individual agents into varying sets of 'ecosystems', namely, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem refers to the closest context of interactive relationships involving family, school, and church, whereas the mesosystem refers to the interconnections between the microsystems with the student at their centre. The exosystem relates to the external but local factors which may have positive and negative impact on the formation of the individual, and the macrosystem refers to the overall

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culture in which they exist. They argue that no formational activity, whether campus-based or distance, will be effective without attempting to foster student growth in all these ecosystems.

Though apparently complex, their analysis indicates how serious attention to the student's situatedness will be fruitful for maximising effectiveness of their ministerial formation at a distance. As echoed by Naidoo (2012:5), 'There are at least as many external variables that influence the development of students as there are campus ones, and these variables need to be acknowledged and education should be designed in a way that utilises rather than ignores them'. Lowe and Lowe conclude:

> Rather than adopting a myopic view of student spiritual formation that only considers what a given Christian institution may be doing to facilitate whole person transformation or focuses primarily on the exclusively spiritual aspect of Christian development, we serve our students best with a broad purview to account for the realities of student existence rather than an idealized notion that is a carryover from a bygone era.

2.2.3. Internet and the effectiveness of formation at a distance

There is no doubt that the Internet has completely revolutionised human interaction, turning the world into a global village. This has immense implications for formation at a distance, and several studies have explored the ways and means of maximising its effectiveness through employing the numerous possibilities the Internet offers. So for example, with regard to the best communication media and the design of materials employed in the delivery of instructional courses, Mayer (2009) has perhaps far more than most pinned down some of the best features of

effective multi-media presentations in online courses which generate transformation in the learners.

Also, after identifying the sometimes authoritarian and prescriptive design of some distance learning programmes which undermine or impede intention to generate formation in the students, Le Cornu (2001: 9–21) suggests that programmes which emphasise self-reflection, personal journaling and interactive conferencing enhance the ability of distance education to deliver formation far better than the classroom option. The perceived deficit of community experience as part of formation at a distance has also been addressed by a number of researchers (Hege 2011:13–20; Maddix and Estep 2010:423–434). Others such as Baab (2011) have put forward very good practical ideas on how interactions through social media may enhance the delivery of formation at a distance.

White (2006) has highlighted specific ways in which online instructions may intentionally foster greater affective and relational values among and with the students. In particular, teachers who wish to foster formation at a distance should design their Internet presence that seeks to (a) feature spiritual formation as a course goal, (b) model a redeemed personality as much as is practicable in that space, (c) personalise their experiences for students to share in, (d) encourage interaction via the media, and (e) promote a safe and nurturing community through their interactions on the net (2006:312–315). Several seminaries are also employing social networking, streaming of online chapel services, prayer rooms, faculty Webinars, forums and general synchronous and asynchronous discussions as part of formational activities which at the same time also build learning communities of reflective practice (Gould 2015; Killacky 2015:166–185).

2.2.4. Instructors and maximizing effectiveness of formation at a distance

It should be a matter of no surprise that the exemplary conduct and intentional mentorship by teachers of distance education should play a significant role in the formation of their students. Teacher characteristics which are more conducive to formation of students, such as 'vulnerability, authenticity, care, trust, integrity, and the community values of safety, transparency, boundaries and intimacy' (Nichols 2014:78; cf., Maddix and Estep 2010:423–434; Palmer 1983) are as important for formation at a distance just as much as in the residential format.

In the case of distance education, more intentionality is required to make this personal role of the instructor pastorally effective in fostering the formation of the students. Indeed, the more the distance between the instructor and student, the more likelihood that the minor misconduct of the teacher becomes more influential in the student's formation. A poorly-worded email, an apparently brash comment on a marked assessment, poor body language during a video-conference or even mere silence or delays in responding to questions or queries from students may have effects far in excess of their intention. Conversely, apparently minor teacher activities such as prayerful interest shown in the student's personal development, brief encouragement expressed in the assessments and mere intentional and personalised attentiveness to students may have positive benefits far in excess of what sometimes may result from the same actions in residential settings. Overall, the teacher's exemplary conduct is thus very crucial in formation at a distance. I am here in full agreement with Hall (1988:72):

> One thing seems to me certain: unless the teachers of the theological disciplines manifest this kind of apostolic responsibility, and manifest it not only in their lives but (more importantly!) in the

conduct of their disciplines, it is futile to imagine that their students will do so. If part of the 'character' that educators desire to 'form' through the educational process is a spirituality that is orientated towards the service of God's people in the world, then the presentation of the professional theological disciplines as though they had nothing to do with the church's worldly confession can only be regarded as detrimental to the formation of such a character.

2.3. Biblical theological foundations of formation at a distance

The third strand of debate in relation to spiritual formation at a distance considers whether there are sufficient biblical and theological warrants that undergird it. As stated earlier, objectors argued against the enterprise on such grounds, some such as Diekema and Caddell (2001:169–184) going as far as invoking the incarnation to reject the possibilities of forming students at distance. A less dramatic but nevertheless important objection by Kelsey (K2002) on theo-anthropological grounds has also been highlighted. Others (e.g., Hall and Thoennes 2006:29–45; Sasse 1998:32–38) have made similar theological objections. Thus a challenge is posed to enthusiasts to offer sound biblical basis for the enterprise.

The responses to this challenge may be categorized into two main lines of argument, namely, (a) those which point to incarnational theology as mandating formation at a distance rather than undermining it, and (b) those who have pointed to Paul's pastoral practices as modelling formation at a distance. I now critically appraise these two lines of argument.

2.3.1. Incarnational pedagogy and formation at a distance

With regard to the former, and in response to Diekema and Caddell's charge that as compared to on-campus education, distance education lacks incarnational presence for its theology of formation, Gresham

(2006:27) has countered that 'Virtual instruction can be incarnational if it points students toward response to the gospel in their daily lives, and if the instructor communicates his or her own lived participation in the truth'. He further (2006:25) proposes what he calls a theological model of divine pedagogy: 'Just as the divine adaptation involved accommodation on God's part, requiring the translation of the transcendent divine truths into the humble language of the human audience, so online adaptation calls upon theological educators to accommodate traditional practices to a new virtual environment'. In other words, incarnational theology demands that theological educators adapt to the changing realisms of distance education, an argument which seems to me to be as weak as the original charge itself.

A firmer incarnational approach was put forward by White (2006), who underscores Paul's frequent references to being physically absent from, and yet, at the same time, spiritually present with the recipients of his letters (e.g. Col 3:5; 1 Cor 5:3-4; 1 Thess 2:17) as pivotal. Paul's letters, he argues, show evidence that he frequently employed 'personalising strategies' to enable him to connect both emotionally and relationally with his churches. He cites several practical examples of Paul's incarnational approach to formation as model of the kind of formational disposition that distance educators ought to take in order to foster transformation. He points out (2006:304, 306):

> Christian theology, particularly with respect to God's relationship with humankind, speaks profoundly of how the painful distance between God and humanity was healed and bridged through the incarnation and atoning work of Christ. From a creaturely perspective, this distance (sometimes experienced even in a spatial sense) is bridged and humanity has access to understanding and experiencing God through the person of Christ (the incarnation) and through the indwelling Holy Spirit … By connecting at a level deeper

than merely getting acquainted, the teacher conveys experientially Christ's incarnation by displaying the spiritual riches of connection with God, self, and others, and manifesting the presence of divine life and power, crucial re-sources used by God for advancing spiritual formation.

Overall, while the incarnational line of argument has its advocates, I find its specifics not as compelling and certainly not set on firm enough grounds to serve as foundation for the enterprise of formation at a distance. In particular, by directly seeking to rebut the erroneous claim that the incarnation justifies a residential rather than distance mode of theological education, that line of discourse seems to have entrapped itself.

2.3.2. Paul's letter-writing ministry and formation at a distance

Paul's letter-writing ministry has sometimes been mooted as the biblical evidence and model of the efficacy and efficiency of spiritual formation at distance. To cite Lowe and Lowe (2010a:96), 'If [the Apostle] Paul could facilitate spiritual transformation in his readers through the socially constructed mechanism of written letters, should we not expect similar results when using the socially constructed mechanism of electronically mediated communication?' In another publication, Lowe and Lowe (2010b:281–298) combined the educational theory of developmental interactionism with the pervasive Pauline notion of ἀλλήλων (one another) in his letters to argue that mutual reciprocity should be reflected in the quality of interactions in distance education. While these reflections move forwards the discussion as to the biblical theological basis of formation at a distance, they nevertheless lack sufficient robustness to undergird the enterprise as biblically mandated.

In this respect, the proposal by Forrest and Lamport (2013:110–124) pointing to parallels between how Paul related to the believers of Rome

through his letter to them, and how a professor may foster spiritual formation of their students at a distance, could be judged to be a worthwhile attempt to firmly ground formation at a distance on biblical grounds. Based on how Paul expresses his relationship with the Romans, Forrest and Lamport suggest eight implications for contemporary practice of formation at a distance. These are (a) the Gospel should remain the ground for formational action (b) scripture's authority is fundamental, (c) transparency through personalising the message, (d) dialogue as important component of formation, (e) community as locus of formation, (f) offering of encouragement to motivate the readers, (g) prayer is important, and (h) accountability is crucial.

Though the general principle that Paul would have understood himself as fostering formation of the Romans is correct, some of the correspond-dences that Forrest and Lamport propose between Paul's methods and the contemporary professor's methods of formation at a distance appear strained. In particular, the letter to the Romans served wider purposes beyond seeking to foster the formation of its readers in the bodily absence of the Apostle. This undermines the attempt at reading Romans as providing the sound mandate for formation at a distance. In the next and final section of this article, I propose that by contrast, the special genre of the Pastoral Epistles provides the firm mandate, model, and principles for biblically grounded ministerial formation at a distance.

3. The Pastoral Epistles as Biblical Mandate for Ministerial Formation at a Distance

By genre, the Pastoral Epistles were letters of mandate, that is, they mandated the named recipients who acted as leaders to fulfil the special tasks which Paul details in the letter. Yet, they were to be simultaneously read by two categories of audiences, namely, the named recipients (1 Tim

1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4), and the congregations and their leaders (1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15). This bi-optic genre of these letters contributes to their distinctive vocabularies, literary stylistics and theological proclivities that set them apart from the Apostle's other letters.

Also important was the specific socio-historical contexts in which the recipient leaders ministered. It is evident that both in Ephesus and Crete, there was a chaotic milieu of heterodox teachings with their concomitant heteropraxy that Paul envisaged to be of immense danger to the churches (1 Tim 1:3–11; 4:1–7; 6:3–5, 20–21; 2 Tim 2:14–26; 3:1–9,13; 4:1–5; Tit 1:10–16; 3:8–11). The result of these was social disorder, doctrinal deviations, and moral misconduct of adherents. It is this situation which accounts for the peculiar theological concerns of these letters (Knight III 1992:12; Köstenberger and Wilder 2010; Madsen 2010:219–240; Towner 1989:21–46).

Even though these literary-theological properties are considered by some scholars as placing the authenticity of these letters in question, there are better explanations for them. One such explanation is their unique design to foster the ministerial formation of the recipients in the apostle's physical absence. The triple concerns of these letters certainly suggest a concerted effort by Paul to provide the necessary theological resources in order to empower the ministers to address the contextual challenges they faced. Though Paul's needs also feature in the Pastoral Epistles, the contextual needs of its recipients govern the nature of the discourse so as to achieve the maximal formational impact. In other words, the Pastoral Epistles primarily played the function of ministerial formation at a distance taking due cognisance of the recipients' peculiar ministerial contexts.

It was the apostle's typical style to be personally immanent in all his letters. He saw his absence as a problem, and so constructed his letters in

a manner that would substitute for and project his presence among the recipients. To put it another way, Paul's letters mediated his presence in the community of believers. As he told the recalcitrant Corinthians, 'though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgement' (1 Cor 5:3; cf. 2 Cor 10:11; Gal 1:19–20)[7]. His letters thus circumvented the challenges to his formative ministry posed by his absence.

Nowhere is this circumvention as intense as in the Pastoral Epistles. This intensification is achieved through three literary devices, namely, (a) Paul's literary actualisation of his relationship with the recipients, (b) Paul's personal appeals to himself as example for the readers to emulate, and (c) Paul's direct and forceful formational praxis. Together, these devices result in the Pastoral Epistles acquiring a unique genre of their own among the New Testament letters. I propose that these literary-theological devices and the resulting genre underline the Pastoral Epistles as the mandate and model of ministerial formation at a distance. And in this regard, 2 Tim 2:2—'and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well' embodies this theme. I now briefly summarise these devices.

3.1. Paul's literary actualization of his pastoral relationship in the Pastoral Epistles

One means by which Paul fosters his formation of these ministers at a distance is by means of literary devices which make him immanent in the letters and proceed to actualise his pastoral relationship with the recipient leaders. This also forms the basis of his formational praxes while absent. The first of these devices is his self-introductions. Thus all three letters begin with Paul's trademark introduction in his letters as apostle (1 Tim

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[7] All citations from the Bible are from the NRSV.

1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1), and further as a slave of God (Tit 1:1). It is also his habit to make some modifications to his self-introductions and his descriptions of the recipients so as to establish the nature of the relationships and the concerns of the letter (Knight III 1992, 57). This again occurs in the Pastoral Epistles (Tit 1:1). As one would expect of a letter of mandate, Paul describes himself not just as apostle, but one appointed by God's will, thus underlying his authority serving under God (cf. Col 1:9–10).

The overall picture of Paul in the self-introductions of the Pastoral Epistles is as one who was keenly self-aware of his calling and responsibilities, as well as his authority to foster the transformation which the Gospel brings. It is in this light that Paul describes Timothy as 'my loyal child' (1 Tim 1:2) and 'my beloved child' (2 Tim 1:2), and Titus as 'my loyal child in the faith we share'. For Paul, the authority of apostleship was functional: it was authority to nurture and foster formation in believers under his care. Inherent in this relationship is mentorship, but there is more to it than that. It was a spiritual bond of accountability and mutual blessings of spiritual father and spiritual son.

This picture is replicated throughout the rest of the Pastoral Epistles. But it is more heightened in 2 Timothy in which Paul evidently foresees an imminent end to his ministry, and betrays his anxiety over the future spiritual health of the believers. So he speaks, for example, of his appointment as herald, and teacher not ashamed to continue that service and willing to suffer for it (2 Tim 1:11–12). He brings very fond memories to mind, mentioning Timothy's mother and grandmother by name (1:5), reminding the younger believer of the shared memories they had in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (3:11), and Timothy's own ordination (1:6). He also relates his disappointment with the faithlessness of some (4:10.16), apprehension of antagonism of others (4:14–15), appreciation with gratitude of yet others (4:11; cf. 1 Tim 1:16–18), and

all within the context of his general sense of loneliness (4:16). This is Paul at his most vulnerable.

Such expressions of vulnerabilities and personalised attentiveness to his recipients undercut the argument of those scholars who see the Paul of the Pastorals in overly authoritative tones (e.g. Zamfir 2009:3–14). Rather, these are shared not just as a way of obtaining the sympathy and perhaps urgent arrival of Timothy back to him, but also as part of an intentional actualisation of his relationship with the recipients. As a spiritual father, Paul did not refrain from baring his soul to these leaders at a distance if through it he might foster their growth in Christ. To put it another way, these devices enable Paul to continue his formative pastoral relationship with the recipients in his absence. They form the basis for furthering the formative process, maintaining the strong formative bond and enabling Paul's impartation of himself to the 'spiritual son'. That is how to foster ministerial formation at a distance.

3.2. Paul's Personal appeals of himself as example in the Pastoral Epistles

Paul's personal references to his own experiences, thoughts, attitudes, and habits in all his letters are also well-known. They personalise his letters, symbolise his presence and strengthen his relationships. They also serve as formative model for his readers. That the Pastoral Epistles contain a significant number of these references therefore testifies to their nature as distinctively designed to form the recipients. So for example, after charging Timothy to stop the false teachers in Ephesus, Paul narrates how he himself had excommunicated other false teachers (1:20). After denouncing the false teachers that Timothy is to silence in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:8–11), Paul shares a testimony of his experience of the Gospel as a counterpoint, and exemplar of what 'sound teaching' achieves. 'I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I

received mercy' (1 Tim 1:13). Paul thus depicts himself as model of true conversion which legitimises his teachings over and against those of his opponents.

The exemplar theme is heightened in 2 Timothy. Timothy is exhorted to follow Paul's example and not be ashamed of suffering for the Gospel (1:8). Just as Paul has been entrusted with the Gospel (1:12), so also is Timothy urged to guard that 'good deposit entrusted' to him (1:14), and he to entrust it to other faithful believers (2:2), and so the chain continues. Timothy was to share in the suffering of Christ with Paul as joint-soldier (1:8; 2:3) and continue in what he had learnt as he received those from Paul (3:14). It is clear that as a lead worker, Paul intentionally regarded himself as exemplar so as to maximise his formative impact.

Where such appeals for emulation are not explicit in the letters, it is still no doubt the apostle's formational intention. So, for example, when he reminds Timothy that 'you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness' (2 Tim 3:10), Paul was urging his partner to emulate his example. Similarly, when he declares that 'I have fought the good fight' (2 Tim 4:7), Paul was encouraging Timothy to take his cue from his perseverance. Paul intentionally shared his life's joys and pains, successes and failures, anxieties and aspirations, all as means of nurturing the formation of his readers.

3.3. Paul's formational praxes in the Pastoral Epistles

In addition to the literary devices he employs in order to foster ministerial formation at a distance, Paul also explicates some of his formational principles and practices. One key practice was his principle of leadership replication. In a recent assessment of the theology of the Pastoral Epistles, Köstenberger and Wilder (2010) propose that Paul's response to the false teachings was to emphasise the responsibility of the

ministerial recipients to act as stewards of the entrusted Gospel, interpret it correctly and live by it. They argue that the controlling metaphor of the pastorals was one of 'estate stewardship', with 2 Timothy 2:2 epitomising this concept.

The main weakness of this otherwise attractive proposal lies in the lack of explicit account in the Pastoral Epistles of the details of the Gospel that were to be entrusted to the stewards. The stewardship theme is no doubt consistently present, but it is not pervasive, and knowledge of the exact details of that which they were to steward is assumed and not elaborated. By contrast, Paul expresses concern that this entrusted Gospel that they were to steward be guarded through the replication of faithfully formed ministers. In other words, Paul's primary concern in the Pastoral Epistles was the formative replication of faithful ministers who would thus ensure the perpetuity of the Gospel. Formation of the leaders into faithful stewards was more fundamental than restating the foundations of the Gospel they shared.

A second formational practice in the Pastoral Epistles is the apostle's frequent exhortations, prayers, and benedictions. This practice is not unique to the Pastoral Epistles among his letters. However, they are modified and repeated in the Pastorals in such a manner as to exemplify ministerial formational practice at distance. Paul sometimes uses directive exhortations on how they should go about performing the duties they have been assigned. In passages such as 1 Timothy 1:3–11, 18–20; 2:1–15; 3:1–13; 4:1–5; 5:1–20; 6:1–10, 17–21; 2 Timothy 2:14–19; 3:1-9; Titus 1:5–16; 2:1–10; 3:1–3; 9–11, Paul shows his attention to detail in providing directives, guidance, and instructions for fulfilling their duties, while at the same time leaving room for their discretion and self-determination.

The apostle's exhortational focus was not just on their pastoral duties, but much more on their personal spiritual growth (1 Tim 3:14–15; 4:6–16; 5:21–25; 6:11–16; 2 Tim 1:3–18; 2:20–26; 3:10–17; 4:1–8; Tit 2:7–8; 2:11–15; 3:9). For example, he challenges Timothy to watch his conduct, to pay attention to his own spiritual growth, to develop the correct attitude to the opposite sex, and to money and generally, to make progress in his personal walk with the Lord; 'for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim 4:16).

Paul charges Timothy to pursue a life of godliness with vigour, and to fight the good fight. He describes formation with the athletic metaphor of disciplinary training in godliness. He prays for Timothy 'night and day', while he remembers his young zeal with fondness, and so exhorts him to fan them into flames (2 Tim 1:3–7). He shows a keen interest in Timothy's personal affairs, to the extent that he conveys practical medical advice to his *protégé*. He urges, exhorts, charges and encourages Timothy, using short pithy phrases with forceful second person singular imperatives. All these indicate Paul's intentionality in seeking to foster the spiritual formation of Timothy at distance.

Other passages cite theological maxims or faithful sayings which summarise the faith Paul shared in common with those he sought to nurture (1 Tim 1:15; 3:16; 4:9; 2 Tim 1:9–10; 2:8–13; Tit 2:11–14; 3:4–8). These appear to serve as pithy summaries of knowledge that they shared that bonded him to his students (Campbell 1994:73–86). Paul's interest in the regulatory discipline in the churches in the Pastoral Epistles (Marshall and Towner 2004:52) [8], though not his primary concern,

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[8] The title 'Pastoral Epistles' was first attached to these letters as recently as the 18th century. Before then, the Muratorian canon labelled the letters as useful for the 'regulation of ecclesiastical discipline' and several second-century Church Fathers repeat this description (Knight III 1992:3, 13).

nevertheless also contributes to providing social structure for effective ministerial formation.

It is fair to conclude that the Pastoral Epistles serve as suitable model for mandating, undergirding, and appraising ministerial formation by distance. Their unique genre indeed lends them to be regarded as an ancient handbook for that purpose. It certainly exudes the intentionality which is a prerequisite of any effective formational programme. It contains the literary properties that enable it to maximise the interactions and relational bonds necessary for that enterprise. It places the contextual needs of the recipients as prime in shaping this formational discourse. And it underlines the formational replication of leaders as its key concern. These and other features of the Pastoral Epistles support the thesis that they provide the biblical mandate, appropriate models and pastoral principles for maximising the efficacy and effectiveness of ministerial formation through distance education.

4. Conclusion

This article has sought to achieve three objectives. Firstly, it has reviewed the contours of the current debates regarding the efficacy and efficiency of fostering spiritual and ministerial formation through distance education. It found that the current research evidence indicates that there is little difference in outcomes when comparing distance with residential modes of formation, provided institutional intentionality is the same. Secondly, it critically appraised some of the research findings on measures which enhance formation at a distance. It found that institutions should focus on maximising intentionality in their formational praxes, interactions at all levels; judicious use of all the opportunities offered by current communication media, and underscores the primary role of instructors to model Christ-likeness. The article finally reviewed a

number of proposals put forward to support the biblical and theological underpinnings of formation at a distance. Some of these proposals have a number of weaknesses, which have been enumerated. On the other hand, the article has closely argued that the Pastoral Epistles do provide the biblical mandate, appropriate models, and pastoral principles for maximising the efficacy and effectiveness of ministerial formation through distance education.

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A Biblical Critique of the Veneration of Ancestors and the use of Magic as Practised in the Kingdom of eSwatini

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Abstract

The roles of God, the ancestors, their mediators (the *tangoma*), and His Majesty Mswati III in the lives of the people of Swaziland are critiqued from a biblical perspective. It is shown that there are cultural beliefs and practices which are in conflict with biblical teaching, but which have found their way into the broader Church. This leads to a distortion in the preaching of the Gospel: God is portrayed as far removed and favour with God is believed to be accessible only through his interme- diaries (the ancestors), leading to fearful subjugation. These two aspects of the image of God converge in a way that obstructs the central importance of the grace of God as found through faith in Christ Jesus.

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

1. Introduction

The kingdom of *eSwatini* (Swaziland) is a country in which two cultural themes predominate—ancestral veneration and patriarchalistic rule (van Schalkwyk 2006:219; Nyawo 2004:62; Curle 2012:84). The vast majority of the kingdom can trace their ancestry back to a limited number of Nguni clans with a common language—*isiSwati* (Matsebula 1988; Oluikpe 1997:15–27). This relative homogeneity of worldview within the country makes Swaziland useful as a case study to examine the impact of both of the above-mentioned cultural themes on the preaching of the Gospel. The discussion of the two themes has been split into two articles, so that each can be critiqued in a meaningful way.

According to many people and institutions, Christianity is said to dominate the *eSwatini* belief system (CIA 2016: ¶4; US Department of State 2012:¶4; Kasenene 1993:129; Kumalo 2013:43; Nxumalo 2014:13). However, there are significant areas of conflict within the wider Church's[2] understandings of the roles of God, the ancestors, their mediators—the *tangoma*—and the role played by His Majesty. Firstly, the underlying nature and character of *Mkhulumnqande* (Marwick 1966:228; Mbiti 1991:48) / *Mvelinchanti* (Kasanene 1993a:12; Oluikpe 1997:46; Nyawo 2004:51–57) (the Creator or Great Ancestor of the Swazis) and *uNkulunkulu* (the name given to God by the missionaries) 'are worlds apart' (Kuper 1986:62). Secondly, there is one's own understanding of the role and function of *emadloti* (ancestors). Thirdly, there is a very real dichotomy in the understanding of the role of *tangoma* in the everyday life of the average citizen. Finally, there is the office of the king and his central role in the kingdom's annual *iNcwala* rite.

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[2]   The Swazi understanding of 'the wider Church' includes Zionists, Independent Pentecostals, Mainline Churches, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics.

2. An Overview of Swazi Religious Culture

2.1. The god of Swazi traditionalists

The traditional Swazi understanding of God is based on African Indigenous Religion. But what are its doctrines? The belief system has no historical record of its tenets, so one is limited to an oral tradition that changes according to tribal grouping and from the personal viewpoint of the individual narrating the story. While there are differences in interpretation, the traditional Swazi belief is that *Mkhulumnqande*[3] created the Earth and handed it over to the ancestors who act on his behalf, ruling over the Earth (Buthelezi 2011:74). Within the wider Church, the earthly life of Jesus is acknowledged as the way of truth and living (LaNdwandwe 2009: 189; Mtshali 2004:11), and his death on the cross is recognised as an act of atonement (LaNdwandwe 2009: 189). Yet, his current resurrected status appears to be somewhat shrouded within the ancestral belief system in which, firstly, Christianity is recognised as being just one of the ways to approach God (Mtshali 2004:20) and secondly, Christ is viewed as the white man's ancestor (Palmer 2015:1).

2.2. The fear-filled role played by ancestral spirits

In African Indigenous Religion's understanding, the ancestors form an integral part of the community, to be revered and feared. They are revered so that favours can be asked of them, and feared in case they get upset and cause harm to the living (Oluikpe 1997: 46). It is for this reason that funerals are such elaborate affairs. Those left behind wish to ensure that

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[3] *Mkhulumnqande*—The great one who went before / *Mvelinchanti* (he who appeared in ancient times / the one who appeared first.

there can be no reason for the deceased to be upset, because insufficient honour has been bestowed upon him[4] (Curle 2009:46).

This veneration of the ancestor continues for as long as he is remembered by those left behind. After the memory of the ancestor fades, so does the position of that ancestor, who then changes from one of effectual influence to an ordinary spirit having no influence in the lives of those who are left behind (Mbiti 1991:83). This is why having descendants is so vital to the Swazi, and having many of them[5] ensures that one will be remembered for some time and, to some degree, supports the polygamic custom.

Inherent in the traditional patriarchal custom is a sense of fatherhood— where being a father brought with it a great degree of responsibility to one's 'children'.[6] The practical outworking of these phenomena is seen in the manner in which the average Swazi grouping will approach His Majesty Mswati III, for an audience. Firstly, they will select from among them a group spokesperson. That person will approach the local chief or regional administrator to mediate on their behalf. For in their own eyes,

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[4] This has an incredibly sad side effect. In times of extreme poverty and a high prevalence of AIDS, often widows with young children are forced to throw a lavish funeral even though they are destitute.

[5] The custom of having many children has a downside, since the ability to create children does not bring with it the ability to house and educate them, causing a drain on personal and state resources.

[6] This belonging to the king, the ancestors and eventually to God is not just in terms of being subjects, but it means something deeper than this. It means 'belonging' that requires a filial submission and dependence. The lesser being (in status) belongs to his/her master as a child who can have no life without him (Manci 2005:67). Manci, in his doctoral dissertation, states that in African Traditional Religion fatherhood (in its broadest sense) should be seen in the following manner: In the traditional African Worldview all things are considered in their hierarchical order and position in that order. Therefore, as there is a hierarchy in position, there ought to be hierarchy in possession … The '*emaKhosi*' (kings and chiefs), the elders and the heads of families are the logical Earthly representatives of God and the ancestors who administer property for their respective subjects (Manci 2005:64–65).

they are too menial to approach someone of *iNgwenyama's*[7] status. The chief will negotiate with the secretariat of the king to arrange a time for the audience and the offering that should be made. Once these negotiations are successfully arranged and the time and place set, the spokesperson, together with the mediator (*licusa*), will patiently wait until they are summoned into His Majesty's presence. In fear and awe,[8] they must crawl on their hands and knees as they move to where they will sit. Only the mediator (who has some *sigaba*[9] status) may address the king, unless His Majesty specifically requires the spokesperson to speak. Once finished, they will crawl backwards[10] out of the throne room.

This approach is also adopted when communicating with their god. In this case, the spokesperson is the most senior representative of the group—be it family or nation—who will go before the ancestors who are seen as mediators. There, he will offer sacrifices. Tradition has it that, should the sacrifices be acceptable, the message will be conveyed by the mediators to *Mkhulumnqande*. Should the sacrifices not be acceptable, then it is expected that punishment will come the way of the family, or the nation, as the case may be (Mtshali 2004:9).

This fear and awe of the ancestral spirits is strengthened through cultural rituals. These spiritual rites take place throughout a Swazi's life, beginning when the child is born. The details of these rituals are lengthy. Thus the reader is referred to Curle's thesis (2012:78–79)

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[7] The title of *iNgwenyama* carries the idea of a king or a lion, and incorporates the power and awesomeness of thunder.
[8] A godlike reverential respect.
[9] Hereditary status.
[10] To turn one's back on the king is considered to be an insult.

2.3. The role of Tangoma[11] in the nation's culture

As is seen in the officiating of the *iNcwala* rite, 'the king is ritually assisted by members of the clergy—priests, doctors and prophets—in their role as mediums… (M)ost importantly, the mediums are possessed by spirits of ancestors, dead kings, and deities, who through them, command the ruler or may even admonish the ruler or the community for not carrying out a ritual process' (Ephirim-Donker 2004:901).

Not only do the mediums give advice to the king, but they also are called on by the princes, chiefs, *indvunas* (heads of communities) and heads of homes to mediate on their behalf with the ancestors (Curle 2012:236). In addition, *Tangoma* are seen as having a wide variety of roles in the community:

> In African tribal communities, witchcraft and other closely related practices like sorcery and magic are believed to have a repertoire of functions on a continuum. On the one extreme witchcraft is believed to be responsible for mindless death and extreme social discord through persecution of innocent citizens.
>
> On the positive extreme, witchdoctors help cure ill-stricken citizens and act as a positive force or antidote against the otherwise debilitating fears of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). Many anthropologists and other scholars have consistently emphasized the positive functions of the belief in witchcraft and the role of the witchdoctor in the African society (Tembo 1993:7).

One of the major problems in understanding the role of the so-called 'witchdoctor' (which is the English term given to a broad range of

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[11] Tangoma is the plural of Sangoma which is the common term among the *SiSwati*, *IsiZulu* and *IsiXhosa* languages.

traditional practitioners) is that the word covers both witches [12] and traditional healers. For their part, traditional healers accept that their primary role is to identify and correct the imbalances between the spiritual and the physical worlds. The healers are divided into two types: *tinyanga* (herbalists) and *tangoma* (mediums). The mediums (diviners) allow themselves to be possessed by ancestral spirits to establish where the imbalances are. For their part, herbalists work with roots, bark, and leaves. Unfortunately, the problem for the lay person is to distinguish when a *tinyanga*/*tangoma* is acting as an herbalist, a medium, or an *umtsakatsi* (witch), for some practitioners can operate as a healer or be engaged in sorcery or the casting of curses (Booth 1983:49).

Cumes argues that *tangoma* are able to communicate with the cosmic, the terrestrial, and the water spirits, as well as the ancestors. Within Swaziland, water spirits are feared alongside the ancestors. Sometimes these spirits are said to appear as a snake (Varner 2007:52; Middleton 2012:45). As one reads the almost-weekly news reports of interaction with the spirit world in Swaziland, one witnesses the very real fear that is conjured up in the minds of the people. Fear that, according to tradition, can only be negated through sacrificial offerings (Mtshali 2004:9, 23, 58) to the ancestors and covering oneself with *muthi*[13] to guard against the other spirits.

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[12] The power of witches according to Booth is 'both physiological and psychological' (1983:49). Their deeds are secretive and 'motivated by fear, jealousy, hatred or frustrated ambitions' of the initiators of the witchcraft (Ibid).

[13] *Tangoma* use '*muthi,* a physical thing, as a solution for a spiritual battle' (Selepe 2013:43). Because of this, the royal family is susceptible to their possessions being used against them if they are misplaced.

2.4. The position of the iNgwenyama and his role in the Sacred Swazi iNcwala Ceremony

According to Swazi tradition, 'sometimes ancestors have unfinished affairs to complete. Then they are given a strong body to allow them to do this' (Mtshali 2004:10). Flowing from this belief is the understanding that kings will take on the spirit of their ancestor as they take his name at their coronation. Thus, Sobhuza II would have been possessed by Somhlolo's spirit. The same can be said of Mswati III who would have taken on the spirit of Mswati II, who would have been possessed by the spirit of Mswati I. Ephirim-Donker reports that a king

> is the eldest among elders, a member of a royal family who has been duly nominated and elected to the highest socio-political and spiritual office… (T)he ruler embodies his predecessors, entrusted with sacred traditions, which he must preserve and protect for posterity.[14] As the personification of the ancestral rulers, the king (as a living ancestor), is on the threshold between the world of the living and therefore accorded the same praise and worship as his predecessors.

> Deriving his divine and temporal authority from a long continuum of rulers, the king exercises religiopolitical and psychological control over his people, his pronouncements having powerful effect on them. Accordingly, he addresses his subjects indirectly through mediators, and he observes many taboos and prohibitions, which he must follow in order to preserve his divinity. The mediators mitigate the potency of the king's pronouncements, and they attest to the veracity of words emanating from him, verifying that the king never errs[15] (2000: 900-901).

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[14] This preservation of the Swazi culture is done not only for the king and his family but also for the entire nation.

[15] The Swazi equivalent is ʹUmlomo longacali ʹmanga (the mouth that can tell no lie)

Whilst the passage refers to the situation in Ghana, it could just as easily be a comment on the traditional position[16] of His Majesty Mswati III within the Kingdom of *eSwatini*.

In addition to the rituals mentioned in 1.2 above, one more custom needs to be considered. Not only is His Majesty the embodiment of the Swazi people and perceived as a living ancestor, but as *iNgwenyama*, he must annually preserve and protect the sacred tradition by dancing *iNcwala*, which Mzizi describes as 'the epitome of Swazi Religion' (1995:100).

In the final weeks of every calendar year—the exact timing being dependent on the phase of the moon—the kingdom of *eSwatini* celebrates a type of Scapegoat Rite (*iNcwala*). Despite the fact that this ritual, at its heart, is shrouded by secrecy, Hilda Kuper, who spent many years with His Majesty Sobhuza II, was able to record much of the event. She documented her findings in her seminal work, *An African Aristocracy-Rank Among the Swazi* (1947), and summarised the details in her later work, *The Swazi: A South African kingdom* (1963), which was substantially revised in the 1986 edition (1986).[17]

The reigning king has no choice but to partake in the ritual that is riddled with magic, potions, drugs, and drama—as it is his supreme act of kingship. Without the king, there can be no *iNcwala*. Yet, the king does not control the event. During *iNcwala*, the king, acting as High Priest of the Swazi kingdom, submits himself to a process wherein he is stripped naked in front of his people under the authority of the priests, known as *Bemanti* (people of the water or *Belwandle,* people of the sea (Kuper

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[16] Whether this traditional position is actualised in the practical outworking of the Swazi kingship is discussed in Curle's unpublished discussion of patriarchalism within the Swazi kingdom.
[17] Because of the secrecy surrounding the Sacred Ceremony, no other recognised authorities are available.

1944:231; 1972:594–595; Matsebula 1988:333; Mzizi 1995:104) together with the 'faceless Labadzala'.[18]

The high point of the ceremony takes place on the fourth day. Apart from the drama of first appearing naked apart from an ivory tip to cover his penis (*umncadvo*) (Kuper 1944:249), in the evening His Majesty will appear 'in demonic costume, powerfully doctored and painted black, a wild beast dancing aggressively and showing reluctance to join the people' (Beidelman 1966:377). At this point he must drink from the sacred gourd (*luselwa*)[19] (Kuper 1944:251). Traditional belief holds that 'iNcwala is an affirmation of the king's rule and endorsement thereof by *Mvelinchanti*[20] and *emadloti* (ancestors)' (Mabuza 2007:42). If the ancestors consider him to 'be of good standing he will successfully come out of this ritualistic encounter…, (having received) a confirmation and endorsement … by the supernatural powers to lead the nation into yet another year' (ibid).

During the night, he sleeps with his ritual queen. In a rite reminiscent of the ancient Vedic Indo-European Mare Ritual (O'Flaherty 1982:156), in full view of some of the kingdom's elders, he must 'wipe away the soot' of the nation.[21] Having performed the required cleansing ritual and been

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[18] The 'faceless *Labadzala*' form a part of the *Liqoqo* (Councillors) but the identities of these princes of the realm are never revealed to the public hence the use by the media of the additional word 'faceless'.

[19] It is at this point that the *iNgwenyama* is at his most vulnerable. He must drink from the gourd without the benefit of his *Tinsila* pre-tasting it. Throughout the rest of the year, His Majesty, is under the watchful eyes of his *Tinsila* (blood brothers). The *Tinsila* absorb the supernatural dangers preventing any harm coming to him. ' Like the king, they have no real family but are considered the fathers of the entire nation; should one die, he cannot be mourned' (Beidelman 1966:390)

[20] *Mvelinchanti* - He who appeared in ancient times / the one who appeared first.

[21] It is my interpretation of the existing writings that through this sexual act, the 'Bull', having 'overcome the powerful forces acting against himself and the nation' (Beidelman 1966:378), discards the residue of the 'evil' into the womb of the Ritual Queen (Beidelman1 966:399).

'revivified' (O'Flaherty 1982:164) through the act, the king will sit 'naked on a lion skin … in the Royal Sacred Hut (*Nhlambelo*)' (Kuper 1944:219). Apart from the counsellors, only the two ritual queens are permitted into the enclosure.

The people of the kingdom, for their part, are 'also in a state of taboo and seclusion. Ordinary activities and behaviour are suspended; sexual intercourse is prohibited, no one may sleep late the following morning, and when they get up they are not allowed to touch each other, to wash the body, to sit on mats, to poke anything into the ground, or even to scratch their hair (ibid).

Gluckman describes *iNcwala* as a ritual of rebellion (1963:129) as opposed to an act of rebellion, while Beidelman sees it as ritual symbolism (symbolising the supernatural attributes of the kingship) (1966:377), as opposed to the man who has been purified through *iNcwala* (1966:391). For his part, Apter (2007:50–65) sees it as part of a joking relationship where His Majesty is dispraised as a man while praised within his kingly office. While one needs to accept the symbolism of the ceremony in whatever form, there is an underlying reality exemplified in the death of Ngwane V[22] during *iNcwala*.[23]

This is the one occasion throughout the year that *iNgwenyama* is vulnerable to rebellion. (Whilst his *Tinsila* are present, they may not pre-

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[22] Ngwane V (Bhunu) is recorded as having died while dancing *iNcwala*. Popular belief is that he was poisoned because he angered the elders.

[23] While they did not occur during *Incwala,* the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rebellions of Fokoti, Somcumba and Malubule against Mswati; that of Mbilini against Ludvonga (heir to Mswati, but never installed as king), Ludvonga's murder, probably by Ndwandwe, his uncle and regent; and the rebellion of Mabedla against Mbandzeni. In addition, there were countless plots with varying degrees of seriousness, in which Dlamini princes conspired against different kings (Lincoln 1987:152).

taste the gourd which he must drink). Custom has it that, if the king survives *iNcwala*, the favour of the ancestors still rests on him. Others, who are more cynical, would argue that, should he not survive the ceremony, his brothers, the 'faceless *Labadzala*' or the *Bemanti* (who oversee the ceremony) (Mabuza 2007:55–56) have come to see him as a liability to the nation.

On the 6th day, if the act of atonement has been successful, the ancestors will bless the ceremony by quenching the fire with rain (Malan 1985:46). If it does not rain, it is an omen of ill fortune for the New Year.

3. The Impact of Culture on the Church and *Vice Versā*

Throughout the ages, people groupings have developed differing worldviews that determine their particular way of life. For better understanding, let us call these worldviews tints in the spectacles through which one views one's personal circumstances. Growing up in the household, these spectacles are tinged by the circumstances within the home. Absent fathers create a worldview for boys that when they marry, they should not be housebound. Similarly, one's local community adds layers of colour to the glass, as does one's national culture. Bring a foreign (western) culture into the mix and the tints grow even darker.

Whilst it is true that Christianity has had a powerful influence on Swazi culture, it can also be stated that Swazi Culture has potently impacted the biblical witness of the Gospel.[24] Within this context, it is important to consider the relationship between His Majesty Mswati III and the Church. To fully understand it, one must begin with Sobhuza I's

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[24] Kasenene records that the earliest Christian converts 'changed their way of dressing' [24] (1993:132–133) On the other hand, Mtshali reports that numbers of Mainline Swazi Christian Congregations have adopted practices of Ancestral Worship found in the African Indigenous Religion (2004:82).

(Somhlolo) reported vision of a white man bringing two objects with him into the kingdom. The first, *umculu* (scroll), and the second, *indilinga* (a round object) (Kumalo 2013:236). *Umculu* has been interpreted as the Bible, while *indilinga* is seen as currency, western lifestyle, but also domination (Kumalo 2013:249). Somhlolo's instruction was to accept the Bible but to reject the lifestyle (Kasanene 1993:132; Kumalo 2013:236).

Since then, the church has twice approached the State. In 1932, the evangelical churches were losing influence and membership[25] to the Zionists. Accordingly, they approached the British Government to outlaw the movement (Kumalo 2013:49–50). At the time, His Majesty Sobhuza II and his advisors controlled all aspects related to Home Affairs. Accordingly, Sobhuza told the British that he would deal with the Zionists. This action by the Evangelists politicised the issue. Sobhuza saw within this a way to not only emphasise the Swazi worldview as opposed to the imposition of the British way of life, but also to entrench his own position and that of the Dlamini's. Somewhere between 1937 (Ndlovu 1993:24) and 1939 (Kuper 1972:669), he created the League of African Churches under his patronage, which effectively made him head of the Church in Swaziland and its High Priest. Ever since then, *iNgwenyama* and *iNdlovukazi* (Queen Mother) have celebrated and brought the message at the Royal Easter Ritual (Ndlovu 1993:2).

For their part, the Evangelical Churches such as the Anglican Church stagnated. Prior to 1932, the numbers of Anglicans were doubling every decade (Froise 1996:31).

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[25] One of the significant reasons for the loss of membership was the elitist attitude of the whites who refused to ordain black clergy and the legalised racial discrimination (Kuper 1972:595).

In comparison to the growth of the population, the Anglican Church effectively failed in its mission. The fate of the Methodists was similar. It is of interest to note that the Roman Catholics, with their acceptance of venerating the saints continued to grow.

In 2005, the wider Church[26] was 'shocked to the marrow when the Christian clause declaring Christianity an official religion was removed from the Constitution Bill of 2004' (LaNdwandwe 2009:242). In this second time that the Church approached the State, His Majesty told the Church to rethink its objections (ibid:243). His reasoning, which is admirable, was that he had studied the religions of the other two imported faiths (Islam and Baha'i) and concluded that they were legalistic. The request from the wider Church would bring it in line with the legalism of those two faiths (ibid).

But what sets the Zionist Church apart from the mainline and Evangelical churches on the one hand and the Indigenous African Churches on the other? In many respects, Zionist belief systems can best be described as a continuum between Pentecostalism as practised by the Apostolic Faith Mission (from where they originated) to Indigenous African Religion. Cazziol splits them into three categories, namely, progressive, conservative, and nativistic (1986:181).

Commenting on Cazziol's classification, Cummergen explains that 'Progressives tend to have relatively large congregations with viable organizational structures and an educated leadership. Their membership is socially diverse, including teachers, small businessmen and clerical workers as well as farmers and agricultural workers.' (2002:374) Cazziol believes that these congregations doctrinally show little difference to

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[26] In this case the wider Church included not only the Anglicans, Methodists but also the Roman Catholics and the Zionists.

other fundamentalist charismatic churches (1986:181). Cummergen continues (2002:374):

> Conservatives, likewise, may have large congregations, most often in the rural and peri-urban areas. The traditional Zionist practices of healing, divination and purification continue to be stressed during worship. Organizational structure tends to be rudimentary and authority is firmly centred on the person of the Bishop. More often than not, these leaders are now old, their authority linked to that of the charismatic pioneers of Zionism in Swaziland.

Nativistic churches do not belong to the League of African Churches. According to Cummergen, they 'exhibit a higher degree of tolerance for traditional (non-Christian) Swazi beliefs and practices than do the other two types' (2002:374).

Kumalo gives the following examples of cultural practices that have been incorporated into the life of the Church. (1) Polygamy is unchallenged. (2) Because the 'Zionists and the League belong to the king' (Cazziol 1986:117), political and social issues are legitimized as the will of god. (3) The manner of worship is more cultural and traditional (2013:50). These cultural and traditional aspects of worship include the veneration of the ancestors, which incorporates sacrifice, rituals and the use of mediums.

Whilst I agree with Cazziol's broad classification, there is fluidity within each of these three classifications, since it is common for Swazis to assimilate their Christian faith into their Swazi culture. I concur with the following thoughts from Kasanene:

> Although many people (in Swaziland) have become Christians, embracing Christianity does not mean total abandonment of one's traditional religion. Even for Christians, Swazi Traditional Religion

remains a major factor in their lives. It is, for example, common for
a Christian to go to church on a Sunday morning and to visit a diviner
in the evening (1993:129).

Thus, we can conclude that, while Christianity is said to be the
predominant faith in Swaziland, it is important that distinction should be
made between those who profess to be Christians and those who 'practise
the presence of Christ'[27] (Herman 1895; Bell 2010:160, 170; Payne
1995:39, 116, 159, 214).

4. A Theological Evaluation

4.1. The god of Swazi traditionalists

The god worshipped by Swazi traditionalists is not the same as the God
of Christian believers (Kuper 1986:62)—in spite of the fact that the vast
majority of the Swazi people believe that they are followers of Christ.
Central to the difference is the position of God and the role of the
ancestors. What does not appear to be recognised is Christ's bodily
resurrection and current status as 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'
(1Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16); 'the way, the truth and the life' (John
14:6) who is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty (Acts
2:33).[28] To many Swazis, Jesus is widely thought of as the *mlungu's
lidloti* (the white man's ancestor)[29] (Curle 2012:110). Added to this, God
is seen to have no interest in day-to-day occurrences. In a view similar to
that of the ancient Mesopotamians (Launderville 2010:121), Swazis
consider such matters to lie in the hands of the *eMadloti* (ancestors)

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[27] This nominalism amongst those who profess to be Christians is not unique to the
Swazi kingdom.
[28] An example of this is in LaNdwandwe's understanding of Christianity (187–191)
that excludes any reference to Christ's current position.
[29] A preferable *siSwati* name for Jesus is that of '*uNkulunkulu wemimangaliso*' (God
the Miracle Worker).

(Curle 2012:110). Thus the intercessory role of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; 26; 15:26; 16:7–14) is also negated.

4.2. The role and function of the ancestors

In 1.2 above, the reality of the role that the ancestors play in the life of the Swazi was reviewed. As Mabuza comments, 'Right from the time a Swazi person is born until one departs from this world, ancestral veneration is crafted and firmly rooted in the religious inclination' (2007:157).

Because of their deistic understanding of God, the 'Abba' to whom Jesus prayed (Mark 14:36) and of whom Paul writes (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), is a totally foreign concept. The Swazi perspective of their guardians (ancestors) is one of abject fear (Curle 2012:78). This fear, which clouds all other issues within the Swazi kingdom, is directly opposed to Paul's understanding of the Christian life in 2 Timothy 1:7: 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.'

In his study of African ancestral veneration, Jebadu (2006) focusses on three 'prejudices' commonly held by those who oppose the integration of ancestral veneration into worship, namely, accusations of (1) practising idolatry, (2) superstition or (3) necromancy. We will consider Jebadu's comments:

1) Is African ancestral veneration idolatry?

Even if in the religious practices of African traditional societies, ancestors are addressed more often than God, normally the living will turn to the Supreme Being as the last resort when their recourse to the ancestors fails to procure the desired effects (Jebadu 2006:3). While

Jebadu rejects the concept that the ancestors are worshipped, one might legitimately query this position when applied to the kingdom of *eSwatini* (Swaziland). Dlamini and Whelpton in their codification of Swazi law and custom comment that 'Owing to the practice of *ancestral worship*, the question remains whether death terminates legal subjectivity in terms of Swazi law and custom (n.d.:168) (emphasis mine). While Whelpton is a Professor of Law, Dlamini is a senior prince of the realm and would know the implications of such a statement. Added to this, idolatry need not focus on an inanimate object as Jebadu submits (2006:3). Idolatry has as its focus that on which we place our faith. Nxumalo (2014:274) puts it as follows:

> In the New Testament, the term idolatry is used to designate covetousness (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13; Col 3:5; Eph 5:5). This means that any strong desire for material things that replaces our desire for God is a form of idolatry. Thus we can be idolaters when we make things other than God himself a priority in life. Believers who devote their time to their cars, houses, jobs, hobbies and other material things more than they do to serving Christ may be guilty of idolatry (Col 3:5; Matt 6:21–24).

Therefore, idolatry is not just the adoration or worship of images; it is putting things and other beings, dead or alive, ahead of God. Paul describes the origin of idolatry in Romans 1:21–25:

> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a

> lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

In the West, this could be the amount of money in the bank, our position at work, or our attractiveness. In the case of Swaziland, it cannot be denied that dualistic Swazi believers put more trust in the ancestors and *muthi* to protect and guide them than is allowed for by John 3:16–18 where the phrase 'πιστεύων' εἰς αὐτὸν is in the present continuous. This led Grudem to comment that John's words could be translated as 'believe into him' with the sense of trust or confidence that goes *into* and rests *in* Jesus as a person (1994:711). The understanding here is of a vibrant, continuous reliance and belief in a living Christ—not an afterthought when all else fails; or the incorrect view that God is far removed from our daily realities. Polycarp (c. 135: E 1.245), Tertullian (c. 207: W 3.458), Clement of Alexandria (c. 195: E 2.216), Origen (c. 245:9.465) all held to the necessity of an understanding that personal salvation is dependent on personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. With regard to the veneration of the saints (martyrs), Tertullian commented 'Who can redeem another's death by his own, except the Son of God alone?' (c. 212: W 4.100). This indicates that the Fathers in the first and second century held the same view that would later be declared by Luther. The slide toward the Roman Catholic belief that one should pray through Mary[30] or the saints developed over a period of time but only came into full fruition in the 11th century (Fenn 2014:¶2)

A further problem for the Swazi Church's understanding of a truly Christian view of veneration is the position that has developed within Roman Catholicism regarding *sola scriptura*. Their position is set out in

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[30] The biblical reference to praying to Mary comes from 1 Kings 2:19–20 when Solomon lifted the status of the Queen Mother above what it had been. This tradition was carried on by the kings that followed him (CatholicDoors.com: n.d.:¶8).

the AskACatholic.Com Website: 'The Church however, has never accepted the notion that Scripture alone is its source. The Church has a teaching authority along with Sacred Tradition. Together with the Scriptures, they make a three legged stool upon which doctrine safely sits'(n.d.:¶8).

This Roman Catholic tradition (arguably adopted by most Protestant denominations in some form) of adding to scripture, has further confused the average Swazi to the point that many (such as is seen in Jebadu) now accept that venerating the ancestors is validated by his Church's tradition, regardless of what scripture stresses.

2) Is African ancestral veneration Superstition?

> Some elements of African ancestral veneration, such as excessive fear of the living dead, the belief that the dead cannot get rest when not being offered a large amount of food and drink continuously, can be regarded as superstitious and it should be part of the pastoral work of the Church to trim and polish it if the Church decides to incorporate it into the frame of the Judeo-Christian faith and elevates it as African Catholic ancestral veneration (Jebadu 2006:4).

To the Western mind, so plagued by its enlightenment thinking which requires scientific proof for all and sundry, ancestors and their veneration would definitely be seen as superstition. Ma (2002: 166) points out that religious experiences in the west have been reduced to 'an abstract conceptualization or scientistic reductionism'. Juxtaposed to this western position, is the situation found in the Kingdom of Swaziland. It is the domain of spirits, ghosts, ancestors, demons, and earthly deities who reside in nature (Ndlovu 2009:¶1). It is in this environment that the fear engendered, and the hold that the ancestral spirits have over the Swazi people, is very real.

One must therefore ask the question 'Where or what is the origin of this fear?' Three possibilities exist: (a) the mind is playing tricks on the individual; (b) the spirits are real and do represent God; or (c) the spirits are real, but demonic in nature. We will consider each alternative.

a) The mind is playing tricks on the individual

Kasanene is of the opinion that the Dlamini clan established their authority firstly by way of force and secondly, by mind control. Through this, they established and 'consolidated their power over all the other clans' (1993b:89). While this aspect will be dealt with in greater detail in the article on patriarchalism, it is important to understand that the Dlamini Royalty, over centuries, established a culture that included 'the values such as respect for the elders and one's seniors, (which were) then used to promote respect for the royal household and (encouraged people) not to question it, and not to do anything that was considered to be un-Swazi' (1993b:89–90).

What then, is it to be Swazi as opposed to un-Swazi? First and foremost, it is to accept the hierarchical structure comprising God, the ancestors, the king, the princes, the chiefs, the headmen, the grandfathers, the fathers, the sons and finally, the women and children. Alongside the princes are those gifted in magic. Alongside the grandfathers are the *gogos* (grandmothers), but they are honoured in a different manner to their husbands. Looking up from the bottom of the pot are the cripples, albinos and, last of all, the homosexuals (Curle 2012:314).

God (being 'uninterested' in day-to-day human events) has passed control over to the ancestors, or such is the perception of the majority of Swazis. This position is inculcated into each child from the time that they are born. For the first few weeks, they are 'its', not humans (Marwick 1940:146; Kuper 1986:52; Oluikpe 1997:36). From the time that they are

ritually introduced to the ancestors at about six weeks, (Kuper 1986:52; Marwick 1940:147; Oluikpe 1997:36) each child is programmed to fulfil its position in life, be it male (superior) or female (inferior), and always in fear of what the ancestors will do (Marwick 1940:146–147; Kuper 1986:52–56; Oluikpe 1997:36). For those at the bottom, there is no individualism, and their lot is cast in stone. For those of royal blood, there is a golden highway.

In this manner, the entire nation could be conditioned to follow a world-view that subjects itself to the establishment enforced by a fear of the ancestors. Any movement to be independent is frowned on and thought to be un-Swazi. In that sense, it might certainly be argued that the mind is indeed playing tricks on the individual.

b) The spirits are real and do represent God

Mzizi considers that the ancestors should be seen as worthy 'heroes'[31] (1995:70). His argument is centred on Hebrews 12:1: 'Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance that race that is set before us.' He argues that the ancestors are necessary for the community to establish values in the lives of those left behind. The ancestors are to be respected and honoured in a manner similar to that set out in Hebrews 11 and 12 for the biblical heroes of faith (ibid 72–73).

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[31] Mzizi notes that not all persons are considered to be ancestors. Some pass on and become a part of the 'living-dead'. Among those numbered as not achieving ancestorhood are: witches (1995:75); those that are not held in high esteem by their relatives. (They are still remembered but with little emotion and sentimentality. Amongst them are children, young men, and women who passed on before making their mark on community life) (p. 70); and those whose exploits are no longer remembered by the living (p. 70).

At issue is the question as to whether or not these heroic ancestors function in an intermediary role. If there is a distinction between God and the ancestors, then Mzizi would be correct to argue that they do not function in any divine role. The problem for African theologians is whether God's relegation to a being so remote is so great that he has been replaced by the ancestors. This is crucial to the discussion as it highlights the difference between *uNkulunkulu* (the greatest of the great who lives in an intimate relationship with his people) and *Mvelinchanti* (he who appeared in ancient times).

c) The spirits are real, but demonic in nature

There are respected Christian writers who argue that ancestral spirits are, in fact, familiar spirits who have been attached to a family for many generations (McNutt 2009:96; Oparaocha 2010:16; Bailey 2008:162–163; Selepe 2013:75). These familiar spirits can possess an individual and appear to give wisdom and guidance.

3) Is African ancestral veneration Necromancy?

Jebadu (2006:5) explains that, 'In African ancestor veneration, the dead are believed to continue to live and are still regarded as the part of the family of the living. They are believed to be the guardians of the living as well as the mediators between God and the living community.' While Tlhagale holds that Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus supports the theology of ancestors in the gospels (Tlhagale 1994:10), Choon Sup Bea (2007:211–212), having extensively researched ancestral worship in Korea, Japan and Africa, concludes the following:

> The Bible makes it clear that the rich man (in the story of Lazarus) was not granted permission to communicate with his living family members to warn them to mend their ways and ultimately avoid a

similar fate... To interpret the passage otherwise than in the context of eternal judgement and the need for salvation is misguided. To see it as supporting ancestral veneration indicates an underlying Hermeneutic that reflects 'a process of enculturation in an attempt to integrate the traditional religious practices (of ancestor worship) with the church'… The mediatory role which African theologians have ascribed to the ancestors relegates the redemption of Christ to insignificance and appears to make his role redundant. This in itself puts traditional religion in direct opposition to Christianity in which redemptive salvation of Christ is pivotal.

Perhaps the single greatest tragedy of modern Christendom is the teaching that we need third party mediators between us and God. The scriptures are clear: The Holy Spirit is our constant Advocate (John 14:26) who dwells within us (1 Cor 6:19; Rom 8:11) leading us into all truth (John 16:13). Added to that, Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father 'interceding for us' (Rom 8:34; 1 John 2:1). Why, therefore do we need any ancestor or saint to give us personal direction or intercede on our behalf, when God himself is doing just that? I suppose that one could argue that Christian counsellors fulfil a similar role, but the counsellors pray directly to God, the Father, Son or Holy Spirit and encourage the counselee to do likewise. This is a vital aspect of Christian prayer: acknowledging the believer has an Advocate; The Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) or Christ Jesus (1 John 2). That Advocate then, is God himself.

Summarising my rebuttal of Jebadu's position, in focussing on only idolatry, superstition, and necromancy, Jebadu has ignored, from a Christian perspective, the heart of the debate; the nature of God and the need for salvation (with eschatological history in mind). Those holding to an African Indigenous Religious position believe that salvation is

unnecessary as, subject to certain terms and ritual conditions, [32] everyone becomes an ancestor within the hierarchical positioning that they enjoyed on earth. On the other hand, Christianity holds that 'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 6:23). The concept of the coming judgement and Christ's saving grace is spelled out in detail in Hebrews 9:24–29.

It is this pivotal position of Christ's redemptive salvation that brings Christianity into sharp conflict with African traditional beliefs. The scriptures clearly state that, after death, there is judgement (Matt 12:36; 13:40; 18:32–35; 25:31–46; Luke 3:17; 12:46–48; John 3:18; 5:27–29; Rom 2:1–8; Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10–11; Heb. 9:27; Rev 20:11–15). The function of judgement has been given over to Christ Jesus. Those found to be in right standing will be separated from those who are not (Matt 25:31–46). This separation will determine whether those judged will live in God's presence or will remain outside of his presence, facing 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt 25:41). John, in his Revelation, gives a 'macro' picture of what it will be like in heaven where the saints join with the elders, the four living beings and the angels in worship (Rev 7:9–11). A 'micro' vision of the reality of what happens when we die is given by Jesus in his account of the rich man and Lazarus. Both have passed on from this life and have been judged (Luke 16:22–31).

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[32] Those who attain ancestral status must meet these important requirements: 'parenthood before death, goodness in the society, one whose body received a ritually proper burial and a guardian of morality in families, clans and the entire nation' (Nyawo 2004:61–62). Should one not have met these conditions, one becomes a 'mere spirit' (64). There is no understanding of Final Judgement (ibid 119; Holland 2005:208).

4.3. The role of Tangoma in the culture of Swaziland

If we consider the scriptures, we do find reference to a spirit world that exists; that of the angels (Rev 7:11) and the devil's angels (demons) (Matt 25:41). Scripturally, these are the spiritual forces that continue to war in the heavens (Dan 1:10; 12:1; Eph 6:12). Unfortunately, while Swazis recognise the witchcraft and evil forces of the *batsakatsi* (witches) (Kuper 1986:68; Mzizi 1995:96), they confuse the work of God's ministering angels (Heb 1:14) with that of the ancestors. What adds to this confusion is the use of spiritual curses and drugs by *tinyanga* and *tangoma*[33] to work out their 'white magic' (Kuper 1986:65). Kuper records that, 'Because of the similarity of principals and techniques, based on belief in ritual, the greatest *tinyanga* are sometimes feared as the greatest sorcerers; those who have the highest power to combat evil have also the greatest means to achieve it' (1947:175).

This belief in the work of the *batsakatsi, tinyanga*, and *tangoma* brings with it an inordinate fear, both of them, and of the spirit world they inhabit. Allied to this is their authority and hierarchical positioning. It was noted earlier that these individuals have similar ranking to the kingdom's princes (Curle 2012:313) and perform the role of soothsayers, which illustrates the level of fear within the nation.

While this fear of the spirit world is experienced by the king, his princes and chiefs, it also augments the control that they are able to impose on those below; there is always the threat that the ancestors will 'punish the living when they do not uphold their legal and moral duties' (Oluikpe 1997:46).

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[33] *Tinyanga* = traditional doctors. It is interesting to note that the singular form of the term *inyanga* also means the moon, indicating the influence that the celestial bodies have on the Swazi culture. *Tangoma* = 'Traditional medicine persons with powers or possessing the spirit of divination' (Mabuza 2007:88) (singular = sangoma).

Biblically, fear reflects that one has not fully experienced the perfect love of Christ. Consider the words of John in 1 John 4:1–7. This passage is central to the biblical position of all Christians. First, believers should test the source of the spirit. Second, they should understand their authority in Christ Jesus over all evil spirits that comes with the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

A further consideration is the Godly principle espoused by Jesus at Gethsemane: 'all who draw the sword will die by the sword' (Matt 26:52). Similarly, those who use magic for evil will die accordingly.

4.4. The position of iNgwenyama and the role played by His Majesty in the Annual Ceremony of iNcwala

Buthelezi comments that 'iNcwala has striking similarities with the Day of Atonement, where the whole nation would be in prayer, making a new commitment to their God who is the source of their existence, and from whom they find their own life and identity' (2011:77). A practice that existed during the Greco-Roman period [and before], but not mentioned by either Aristotle or Osiek and Balsh, is that of the expiation of sin through a scapegoat ritual. Smith and Doniger (1989:190) spell out the functioning of such a sacrificial ritual.

> The victim represents or 'becomes' (and thus substitutes for) both the invisible divine recipient of the offering and the human being who makes the offering. 'Through this proximity the victim, who already represents the gods, comes to represent the sacrifier also. Indeed, it is not enough to say that it represents him: it is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together.' (Hubert and Mauss 1964:31-32) Every sacrificial victim, then, symbolizes both the god and the worshipper; every sacrifice is both an ersatz self-sacrifice and a dramatization of a deicide.

During the ritual, an animal or a person is substituted as a scapegoat for the sin of an individual or a nation. Hallo, Moyer, and Perdue comment that of all the tribes in the Middle East, the Hittites 'seemed to be the most concerned about ritual purity though the Israelites come a close second on the point' (1983:33). The Israelite practice is spelt out in Leviticus 16. The principle of the Israelite rite was the atonement of sin through shedding the blood of one goat and sending another into the desert. 'That the goat was accompanied by someone and was led to a desert place was meant to show that there was absolutely no possibility for its return. Thus, the guilt of the nation was symbolically forgiven and carried away' (Feinberg 1958:324).

Comfort Mabuza notes that the *Ncwala* Ceremony is at 'the very heart of Swazi Culture (2007:159). The rite, where His Majesty takes on the sin of the nation in an act of atonement, is more than atonement or a celebration of first fruits. It is far more than 'a pageant in which the early life of the Swazi people is re-enacted in a dramatized form' (Marwick 1966:191). It is also a concretisation of the patriarchalistic powers of the ancestors, the king, the princes, and the *tinyanga*. As Kuper wrote (1947:225):

> Incwala dramatizes actual rank developed historically; it is 'a play of kingship'. In the ceremony the people see which clans and people are important. Sociologically it serves as a graph of traditional status on which, mapped by ritual, are the roles of the king, his mother, the princes, councillors, priests, chiefs, queens, princesses, commoners, old and young. Just as in the dance, clothing, service, feasting, and luma - the laws of rank are expressed in action, so in discussing the ceremony they are consciously articulated. Major political adjustments are indicated, and the balance of power between the king, his mother, the princes, and commoners is a central theme.

I find Mabuza's conclusion, that Incwala forms a missiological 'bridge' (2007:159) for the Gospel, somewhat disconcerting. It is agreed that the 'sacred ceremony' (2007:1) plays a powerful cultural part within the Swazi kingdom. However, to use it as a bridge to advance the Gospel is problematic, for *Incwala* has several aspects that are contrary to traditional evangelical biblical approach to the Gospel.

First, the god that Mabuza speaks of is *Mvelinchanti* (2007:1) (not uNkulunkulu) the One True God (see 4.3 above). It is noted that traditional Swazis believe that *Mvelinchanti* was 'A being who became rather than being formed or created; The first of all and the beginner or the cause of life; The Creator Himself and what followed, all knowing and powerful to be manipulated by human control and was not limited in his relationship with any of the creatures' (Nyawo 2004:51–52). However, they also believe that 'people could only have access to Him through lesser divinities and ancestors, whom He delegated to handle the mundane affairs' (Nyawo 2004:54). It was probably for this reason that the early missionaries introduced the name of *uNkulunkulu*—to differentiate between a god who had lost interest in the affairs of man and the God of John 3:16 and John14.[34]

Second, the medium through whom the prayers are made, the *emadloti* (ancestors) (4.3; 6.2.2), are not efficacious, for Christ is 'the way and the truth and the life' (John 14:6) and only he can act as mediator between sinful man and Almighty God (John 1:29; 1 John 2:1–2).

Third, *iNcwala* sacred ceremony declares to the world that the one who atones for the sin of the nation is primarily the King, assisted by his ritual

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[34] The term *uNkulunkulu* is decidedly apt for the average Swazi. *Nkulu* is the name of one's Grandfather. In a Swazi's eyes, the Grandfather is the 'Great One'. He is also much beloved of the family and loves his Grandchildren unconditionally. Thus God is seen as the Greatest of the Great, who loves one unconditionally.

Queen (4.8), not the Messiah, Jesus. The sacrifice of the two oxen and the scapegoat function of His Majesty and his first ritual wife (biblically) are insufficient to be the expiation of the sins of the nation (1 John 2:2). The problem with reliance on a man (who by definition is sinful; Rom 3:23) or the ancestors (who were previously men and women) to mediate between humankind and God is that the price paid by sinful man cannot atone for sin (Rom 6:23a). It denies the need for a perfect Christ, who is God made flesh (John 1:14) and negates the completed work of the cross (John 3:16; Rom 6:23b).

Fourth, from the writings of Kuper it appears that His Majesty is referred to as 'King of kings' when summoned by the counsellors (1947:217). This is the title of Christ Jesus (Rev 17:14; 19:16).

Fifth, only old men may go anywhere near the burning of the *incwambo* (others are prohibited for fear of inhaling the smoke) and during the thirty-six hours when His Majesty is sequestered, he is 'dangerous to himself and to others' (1947:219). These two aspects indicate the use of strong drugs during the ceremony. Gluckmann's comment that 'the medicines used are known as "black" medicines, and they are supposed to stir up supernatural power in (His Majesty), from which he must be released with "white" medicines, before he can again move among his people' (1938:25), is cause for concern. Paul instructs Christians: 'Do not get drunk on wine' (Eph 5:18). He also warns against the use of '*pharmakeia*' (administration of drugs other than for healing, particularly, drug related spells or sorcery) (Gal 5:20). Thus, the apparent use of drugs is contrary to the tenets of scripture.

Sixth, the fact that the children get to eat the meat from an ox that was first suffocated and beaten into unconsciousness, before being killed and

thereafter sacrificed to the ancestors is at odds with the apostles' instruction to the Christians in Antioch, in Acts 15:28–29.[35]

Seventh, the entire ceremony is a demonstration of hierarchical power as opposed to Christian service. The erect penis, which is central to the fourth day of the ceremony (Kuper 1944:215), is the symbol of patriarchalistic power. This is misplaced in Southern Africa where constitutionally, 'women hold up half the sky' (Ackermann, Draper, and Mashinini 1991) and should be acknowledged as equals. Biblically, it is at odds with the Christian principle that there is no place for position and status this side of the grave. Also, the ceremonial depositing of the sins of the nation into the womb of the ritual queen, being the only time when the couple has sexual relations, contradicts 1 Corinthians 7:5.

In the same way that Swazi law does not permit a person to hold dual citizenship (Citizenship Act 1992:¶10.1), dualism in Christianity is not biblical (1 Cor 5:11; Phil 3:1–21). The issues set out above would seriously compromise any believer's Christian standing, were they to participate in *iNcwala* rite of atonement. Some would consider such an act to be blasphemy.[36] Yet the Zionist Churches 'occupy a special place in the ritual' (Mzizi 1995:106).

4.5. The impact of culture on the Church and vice versa

Because His Majesty Mswati III is the acknowledged 'Chief Priest' of the Zionist Church in Swaziland, as well as the nation's Ritual Scapegoat,

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[35] It should also be noted that 'stress, fear and pain when animals are being slaughtered or [are] waiting to be slaughtered results in several disease processes in the humans [who] eat the meat. Most notable are cardiac problems, impotency and general fatigue' (Putzkoff 2003:¶1).

[36] Blasphemy: 'irreverence toward something considered sacred or inviolable' (Merriam Webster Dictionary 2011).

it is difficult for the Church[37] to speak prophetically into any situation that involves the ancestors, the role of the king at *iNcwala* and the role of *tangoma*. The fear engendered in the average Swazi by all of them is very real. Objectively, there are three possible reasons for this fear:

Firstly*,* the magic is non-existent, except within the beliefs of the people. Secondly, the rulers manipulate the beliefs of the people through indoctrination. And thirdly, the magic is real.

Should the magic be real, then biblically it has one of two sources? On the one side of the spectrum, those who are swayed by African Indigenous Religion, would argue that it is god, working through the ancestors and their agents, the *Tangoma.* On the other side, there are those who posit that the so-called ancestors are familiar spirits acting through spirit mediums, which is demonic.

Therefore, I stand in agreement with Sup Bea, that the so-called magic is real and is demonic. As such, the Church should have no part in it.

5. Conclusion and Some Recommendations

Loren Cunningham doubts whether many of the 'reported millions of (African) believers are truly loyal to Christ' (2007:162). His concern is that 'Animism, particularly worshipping ancestors and clinging to fetishes, continues to physically disable many churchgoers' (2007:162). I concur with Cunningham and maintain that this syncretic hold over Africa extends throughout the Sub-Saharan continent and it also includes the kingdom of eSwatini (Swaziland). On the subject, Kraft (2000:390) warned that in making converts, two paths to syncretism are opened by

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[37] Mzizi believes that Swazi Zionism, insofar as it has continued to blindly align itself with the state in postcolonial Swaziland, has allowed itself to be corrupted and manipulated by royal power at national level.

missionaries: (1) Missionaries required converts to adopt a faith pattern that is so foreign to the persons own culture that in converting to Christianity, their existing world view remains untouched by biblical principles; (2) So concerned are the Missionaries about the peripherals of their own culture that they allow existing non-biblical worldviews to predominate, thus compromising the Gospel.

In Swaziland, both of the two paths appear to have been followed. Firstly, the missionaries rejected every practice (even the clothing) of *eSwatini* and substituted a foreign culture that was not biblical but cultural. Hayes (1995:344–345) comments that the missionaries were effectively saying, 'You must abandon your problems and accept our problems and explanations of evil'. Secondly, Sobhuza II responded to the British Colonial enlightenment thinking by defending the Swazi Culture (especially its patriarchal world-view). To do so, he encouraged the Swazis to join the syncretic Zionist Churches by becoming their patron. The Swazi people flocked to these churches rejoicing in the fact that they could maintain their cultural practices without losing their Christian status. Unfortunately, this meant that they lost sight of the risen Christ as king of kings and Lord of Lords. In addition, each person's value (as found in Christ Jesus) was lost to the patriarchalistic culture. For their part, the evangelical churches stagnated. The Roman Catholic Church, which acceded to the veneration of ancestors continued to grow. The mass movement to the syncretic churches resulted in the wider Church in Swaziland becoming largely 'nativistic' and unbiblical. For the people and the evangelicals, it was a lose-lose solution.

As far as Sobhuza II was concerned (from a power perspective), the position of the Royal Family was advanced, since he effectively took ownership of the Church becoming its High Priest (Kuper 1972:610). In doing so, Sobhuza chose the 'round metal piece' which Kumalo

interprets as "domination" (2013:249) and rejected the 'scroll' of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. It is this Gospel which loudly proclaims that each person, from His Majesty to the handicapped person in the street, is a 'love slave' (1 Cor 7:22) of Christ Jesus while being his 'joint heir' (Rom 8:17).

Looking forward, what should the Church do? The veneration of ancestors is so deeply ingrained in the life and world-view of the Swazi that it will not easily be deculturalised. The challenges that face the Church in advancing a gospel that excludes the reliance on ancestors (as opposed to Christ) are substantial. Alongside there is the need for believers to desist from the cultural practices of (1) using a *sangoma* as a mediator or (2) settling one's grievances by paying the *sangoma* or a witch to bedevil the accused with a curse or a spell (Holland 2005:11).

Before any change will occur, the wider Church should examine itself and its own practices. This inward reflection would also need to take account of the following: (1) Other modern practices such as the prosperity cult, imported from the west, are harmful; (2) There is a real spirit world that is at odds with the message of the Gospel; (3) Critically rejecting traditional practices, without taking the people's cultural needs to account, is unwise.

One is reminded of Christ's injunction to take the log out of one's own eye so that one can see more clearly to remove the splinter from one's brother's (Matt 7:5; Luke 6:42). Regarding the rejection of traditional practices, Sup Bea advises that 'when one removes a traditional ritual one must take cognisance of the void it leaves in its wake' (2007:212).

Finally, the Church cannot and should not look to the state to bring about changes in a nation's culture so as to bring it in line with a biblical understanding. One need only to recall the fate of the Jewish leaders who crucified Christ to understand that when people turn to the state for

overriding support, it will be the Church that loses. If the Church truly believes in the power of the Holy Spirit, then it should heed the words of Zechariah 4:6; It is not by might nor by power (nor by the government) but by His Spirit.

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Does the New Testament support Messianic Judaism?

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Abstract

This article considers whether the New Testament supports Messianic Judaism. As a form of Judaism, Messianic Judaism is found to be anachronistic to ancient Israel of the Old Testament and the Judaeans of the second temple, making it problematic to use the New Testament in support of Messianic Judaism. The contention that the New Testament propagates an ongoing distinction between gentile and Judaean Christ-believers is contested in respect of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15), the claim that Paul was fully Law observant and Paul's portrayal of the nature of the identity in Christ in respect of gentile and Judaean believers. It is found that belief in Christ constitutes a new identity for both gentile and Judaean believers that fulfilled and superseded the identities in the old age before the Christ event. The notion of an ongoing Judaean-gentile distinction in the early church is thus incompatible with the way in which Paul portrayed the new identity in Christ. The

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

final conclusion is reached that the New Testament does not support Messianic Judaism.

1. Introduction

Messianic Judaism in its current form is a relatively recent phenomenon that surfaced with the 1960s Jesus movement, and became known as Messianic Judaism in the 1970s (Kinzer 2000:3, 6; Ariel 2006:191, 194–195; UMJC 2013:16). Messianic Jews see themselves as essentially Jewish rather than being (Hebrew) Christians (Kinzer 2000:4, 2013:131–132; Ariel 2006:195). In Messianic Judaism, 'Judaism' is the genus and 'Messianic' is the species, signifying the priority of their connection and identification with the Jewish people and their religious tradition (Kinzer 2000:4). Their approach is inclusive, in that they recognise and acknowledge other forms of Judaism. They are messianic in that they recognise Jesus as Messiah, who they normally refer to as 'Yeshua' (e.g. Kinzer 2000, 2013; UMJC 2013), and acknowledge the New Testament as apostolic and authoritative. But other than in the protestant tradition, Messianic Jews do not normally adhere to the principle of *sola scriptura*, for that would mean that they would not value the Rabbinic tradition, including the Oral Law, which they are not generally willing to do (Kinzer 2000:4–8).[2]

Since Messianic Jews see themselves as essentially Jewish, they adhere to the Mosaic Law as well as Jewish culture and tradition (e.g. keeping Jewish feasts and sabbaths, adhering to dietary laws, practising circumcision, and gathering in synagogues). But by believing in Jesus as Messiah, they do believe that one is saved by accepting Jesus into one's heart and by believing in him as Lord (UMJC 2004; 2013:2). The

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[2] There are exceptions in the Messianic Jewish community in that some do not accept Rabbinic Judaism (e.g. Brown 2016) or that some selectively adhere to Talmudic instruction (Burgess 2006:308).

observance of the Law is thus not usually understood as a prerequisite for salvation (Ariel 2006:209, 213). By both identifying with Judaism and accepting Jesus as Messiah, they see themselves as a link or bridge between the gentile people of God (Christians)[3] and the Jews, whom they see as God's eternal people (cf. Kinzer 2000; Woods 2014b:129). Messianic Jews base their unique identity on what they perceive to be an *ongoing distinction* that the New Testament portrays within the body of Christ between gentile believers in Christ and believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι ('Judaeans', see below). In their understanding of the *ekklesia* in the New Testament, gentile Christ-believers were only subjected to a limited set of requirements (primarily based on Acts 15) whereas believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι would maintain full obedience to the Mosaic Law, including circumcision and dietary restrictions (e.g. Juster 1995:68–87; Kinzer 2000:32–39; UMJC 2013:22–24; Woods 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2015a; 2015b). The different sets of requirements that are perceived to be required of gentile believers and believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament, correspond with the idea in Judaism to accept a gentile as righteous on the basis of the Noahide Laws (or Noahic Covenant), which Messianic Jews tend to retroject into the New Testament.[4] This approach to identity in the New Testament, including the reference to the Noahide Laws, closely coheres with the so-called *Radical New Perspective on Paul* (RNPP), which is advanced by scholars such as Bockmuehl (1995; 2000), Tomson (1990:259–281; [1996] 2001:251–270), Nanos

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[3] In Judaism, the designation 'Christians' is normally identified with the gentiles (*goyim*), which is one of the reasons why Messianic Jews would differentiate being messianic from being Christian (Kinzer 2000:4).

[4] The complete set of the seven Noahide Laws is contained in the *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 8:14, twelfth cent. CE), and includes prohibitions on (1) idolatry, (2) blasphemy, (3) murder, (4) theft, (5) sexual immorality, (6) eating living flesh, and (7) exhortations for the establishment of courts of justice. They are considered in Rabbinic Judaism as binding to all humankind. A gentile that adheres to these seven laws would be considered a 'righteous Gentile' (Blickenstaff 2009:280) or a 'Godfearer' (Tomson 1990:50).

(1996:50–56; 2012:123–124), Campbell (2008a:89–93), Eisenbaum (2009:252), Rudolph (2011) and Tucker (2011:62–114).

The main focus of this article is to determine on an exegetical and theological level if the view that an ongoing distinction of identity between gentile Christ-believers and believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι is supported by the New Testament. Was there a *universal and fixed principle* laid down by the apostles that determined that a distinction between gentile believers and *all* believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι needed to be upheld? Can one derive such a distinction from the Pauline material? Did Paul remain fully Law observant after his Damascus Experience? Another pertinent question is whether one can equate contemporary Judaism with the faith of ancient Israel or with the Ἰουδαῖοι of the New Testament. While a comprehensive treatment of these questions cannot be achieved within the scope of this article, the focus will be (1) on the hermeneutical distance between contemporary Judaism, the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament and ancient Israel, (2) the Apostolic Decree (esp. Acts 15:22–35), (3) the question whether Paul remained fully Law observant (esp. Acts 18:18; 21:17–26; 1 Cor 7:17–22; 9:19–22), and (4) how one should understand the identity in Christ in respect of gentiles and the Ἰουδαῖοι in the Pauline material (esp. Gal 3; Eph 2:11–19). Yet, even in this discussion, some of the main arguments that pertain to certain passages will be presented in light of previous publications (Du Toit 2013a; 2013b; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2016a; 2016b) instead of a comprehensive treatment of each passage.

2. The Hermeneutical Distance Between Ancient Israel, the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament and Contemporary Jews

In Messianic Judaism, the continuity of Judaism with the faith of Old Testament Israel is often stressed without fully accounting for the hermeneutical distance that exists between these two traditions. As

pointed out before (Du Toit 2015b:46–48; 2015c:420–422), Judaism as such only started to develop into a full scale religious system after the fall of the second temple in 70 CE. In the strict sense, a 'religion' is a Western category with no counterpart in ancient culture. As Mason (2007:481–488) explained, the Ἰουδαῖοι in the time of the second temple, which includes the Ἰουδαῖοι in most of the New Testament, were more of an *ethnos* than a religion. That is why many prefer to translate the term Ἰουδαῖος in the New Testament with 'Judaean' rather than 'Jew' in order to account for this hermeneutical distance between contemporary Jews and the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament. The same will be done in the rest of this article. A matter that lies adjacent to this hermeneutical distance is the different connotations attached to the designations Ἰουδαῖος and Ἰσραὴλ ('Israel') in the time of the second temple. In the time of the second temple, the designations Ἰσραήλ and Ἰσραηλίτης ('Israelite') leaned towards denoting the ancient *people of God* who lived *before* the time of the second temple. The term Ἰουδαῖος leaned more towards denoting the *ethnic people* that *descended from* historical Israel, without necessarily carrying connotations of being God's people (see esp. Josephus, *Antiques* 11.169–173; see Du Toit 2015c:420–421).

In Rabbinic Judaism, the Oral Law is claimed to be communicated to Moses in parallel with the written Law (Oral Torah 1997; Oral Law 2002). The Oral Law can be considered an esoteric tradition (cf. Jaffee 1997:527; Oral Torah 1997) with no clear antecedent in the Bible. However, it is possible that an earlier form (or forms) of such a tradition might have been present in biblical times (cf. Mark 7:7–9). As part of Rabbinic teaching, the Oral Law is held to be an orally transmitted legal tradition from sages or *tanna'im*—those who transmitted Rabbinic teachings (Jaffee 1997:526; Schiffman 2009:336). The period of the *tanna'im* can be dated within the second century CE (Oral Law 2002). At about 200 CE the Oral Law was codified in the Mishnah (Neusner 1984:18). The

Mishnah led to further discussions that were collected and edited in the sixth century in the form of the Babylonian Talmud (Oral Law 2002). There is thus no concrete evidence that the Oral Law, which is an essential element of that which constitutes Judaism, was part of the tradition of Biblical Israel, which in turn contributes to the hermeneutical distance between the faith of Israel of the Old Testament and contemporary Judaism. Another factor that is often overlooked is that Rabbinic Judaism developed partly as a *reaction* on the claim of Jesus being Israel's Messiah (Charlesworth 1992:16, 30; Dahl 1992:382). In the Mishnah (200 CE) the whole concept of an 'anointed one' developed into an ahistorical system where the anointed ones became 'a species of priest' (Neusner 1984:18). It is thus questionable whether Judaism's rejection of Jesus being the Messiah was merely a result of early Christians' antagonism towards those descending from historical Israel or Christians' denial of their historical heritage, as Messianic Jews seem to argue. Neither is it completely accurate to propose that in Judaism's formative period, their rejection of Jesus as Messiah was not foundational to their identity (contra Kinzer 2000:21–22). The fact that believers in Christ were persecuted by the Judaeans from the earliest times, including Saul before his Damascus experience (Matt 23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12; John 5:16; 9:34; 16:2; Acts 5:18, 40; 7:58–60; 9:4–5, 23–24; 17:5–8; 18:12–17; 20:19; 21:27–32; 22:4, 8, 19–20; 23:12–14; 26:10–15; 1 Cor 15:19; 2 Cor 11:24; 1 Gal 1:13, 23; 4:19; 1 Thes 2:14–16; Rev 2:9–10; 3:9; cf. Reasoner 1997), strengthens the notion that the development of formative Judaism was influenced by a reaction to faith in Jesus as Messiah.

3. The Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:22–35)

Notwithstanding the hermeneutical distance pointed out above, the main question is whether the New Testament indicates a fixed, universal

principle in the early Christ-believing community that would *distinguish* between gentile and Judaean believers. A passage that probably features the strongest in the latter contention is Acts 15:22–35, which reports the so-called Apostolic Decree (cf. Acts 16:1–5; 21:25; e.g. Juster 1995:81–87; Woods 2015a).

In the narrative of Acts 15, after certain people from Judaea insisted that gentile Christ-believers had to be circumcised in order to be saved (vv. 1–2), Paul and Barnabas were met by a similar opinion by believers from the party of the Pharisees, but with the added condition that gentiles should adhere to the whole Mosaic Law (v. 5). Peter, a Judaean believer, stood up and explained that God decided to include the gentiles in the gospel (v. 7) and to give the Holy Spirit to them 'just as to us' (καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν, v. 8). Peter added that God 'made no distinction between us and them' (οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν, v. 9). Then, quite significantly, Peter protested against placing a yoke (the Mosaic Law) on the neck of the disciples that neither the patriarchs nor they, Judaean Christ-believers, were able to bear (v. 10). Peter then contrasted the Law with the grace in Christ and applied it to Judaean believers like himself—a grace that he considered as applicable to them in the same way as to gentile believers (v. 11). Two elements stand out in Luke's account of Peter's speech: (1) there is *no distinction* between the way in which gentile or Judaean believers received the Spirit and the cleansing of their hearts by faith, and (2) in terms of salvation, the *grace in Christ is contrasted* to the Mosaic Law for both Judaean and gentile believers. These characteristics correspond with Peter's words to Cornelius about God showing no partiality and his acceptance of anyone who fears him (10:34–35; cf. also Paul's speech in 13:39, 43).

The remark about the yoke of the Law (v. 10) might seem surprising on the lips of Peter, for the bearing of the yoke of the Law was seen by many

as a privilege and a help, and no reason for complaint (Haenchen 1971:446; e.g. Psa 119:97–98). But a few factors have to be considered in respect of the context behind such a reference in Acts: (1) As a Galilean fisherman, Peter might have seen at least parts of the Law as a considerable burden, especially the feasts that would require pilgrimage up to Jerusalem and involve the abandoning of work and family; (2) the attempts to extend various priestly requirements of the Law to all Judaeans by the Pharisees and the Qumranites may have led to such a view among the ordinary working class; (3) Jesus seems to have suggested that the yoke of the Law was heavy (Matt 11:30; *Sir* 51:26; Witherington 1998:454; cf. Bruce 1990:337 on point 1). Dunn (2006:430) went so far as stating that Peter was '*the bridge-man … who did more than any other to hold together the diversity of first-century Christianity*' (emphasis original).[5] Furthermore, if the Mosaic Law would only have positive connotations for all Judaean believers, why would the Mosaic requirements (see below) be considered as a limited set of requirements 'not to trouble' (μὴ παρενοχλεῖν, v. 19) gentile believers and as imposing 'no further burden' (μηδὲν πλέον … βάρος, v. 28) upon them? Could it be that the Mosaic Law was considered by many of the Judaean believers as burdensome altogether?Although it is quite evident from the text of Acts 15 that the motivation of those from Judaea and the believers from the party of the Pharisees was that circumcision and full Torah observance had to complement *salvation* (vv. 1, 11), and that Peter's reaction indicated that there was freedom from the Law for Gentile believers and Judaean believers in respect of *salvation*, it may be asked if the freedom from the Law did not go beyond salvation for all believers (contra Woods 2015a:121). Strictly speaking, we have no indication from Acts that *all* Judaean believers in the early church thought that

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[5] Cf. how Dunn (2006:430) perceives Peter as serving a kind of mediatory function between the extremes in the early church, being sensitive to both the heritage of the Judaeans, which Paul seemed to have lacked, and an openness to the demands of developing Christianity, which James seemed to have lacked.

circumcision or full observance of the Law was expected of *all* Judaean believers. That the latter assumption might have been 'prevailing' (Woods 2015a:115) for many Judaean believers is certainly possible, but if so, that would not mean that such an assumption would have been universal for all Judaean believers in the early church. It is in fact quite likely that Luke meant to say that the believers 'from the party of the Pharisees' (ἀπὸ τῆς αἱρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων, v. 5) were in fact Pharisees 'in their pre-conversion days', just like Paul, and that their 'old attitudes' were carried over to their belief in Christ (Marshall 1980:249).

Although in Woods' (2015a:118) interpretation of Acts 10:34–35, he is right that Cornelius' conversion meant that Judaeans had 'no advantage concerning acceptability to God' (10:34–35), the acceptability of the gentiles had to do with more than merely extending salvation to them. For in Peter's vision (10:10–16), God asked him to eat food that was considered unclean and impure for historical Israel, which Peter refused. God then commanded Peter to eat the food, because 'what God has made clean, you must not call profane' (v. 15, NRSV; cf. Mark 7:19). This vision is certainly about 'the abolishment of the dietary laws' (Schnabel 2012:491; cf. Marshall 1980:197; Milgrom 1991:726; Peterson 2009:330). This interpretation is the only one that makes sense of the vision, for the food laws had set Israel apart from the gentiles and *constituted a distinction* between Israel as holy and the gentiles as impure (Schnabel 2012:492; cf. Marshall 1980:197; Milgrom 1991:726). By removing the food laws, gentiles themselves were no longer considered impure by extension. Peter's vision thus constituted a 'new stage' (Peterson 2009:330) and a 'new order' (Marshall 1980:197; Schnabel 2012:492) in the progress of the Gospel. The fact that Luke reported in 11:3 that Peter was accused of eating with gentiles (in Cornelius' house), followed directly by Peter's retelling of the vision (vv. 4–10), confirms that Peter's vision *primarily* involved the abolition of the food laws and

the acceptance of the gentiles *by extension* (cf. Schnabel 2012:492; contra Keener 2013:1773). The fact that Peter interpreted his vision as implying that gentiles cannot be considered unholy or impure (v. 28), does not mean that he interpreted the vision differently from its original, literal intention (v. 28, contra Woods 2012:180), but that gentiles could not be considered unclean *on account of their diet* any more (Schnabel 2012:497–498; Marshall 1980:199; Peterson 2009:333). That the declaring of all food as pure was (primarily) at stake in 10:10–16 is also explicitly attested by the ante-Nicene father, Clement of Alexandria (second to third cent. CE), in his *Paedagogus* 2.1, other than what Woods (2012:206–207) contended.[6]

Although the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29) on a surface level seems to have accommodated believing gentiles among Judaean believers in order that they could have mutual fellowship (cf. Talbert 2005:135; Parsons 2008:220), it may be asked if those who were really being accommodated were not the more Law-oriented Judaean believers. Apart from Peter's vision of all foods being pure, if one compares the situation in Acts 15 with the situation addressed in Romans 14, it is noteworthy that the 'weak' persons in Romans 14:1, 2 and 15:1 are portrayed as Judaean believers who adhered to dietary restrictions and the observance of days out of continuing loyalty to the Mosaic Law (Moo 1996:829; Schreiner 1998:713–714).[7] It seems that they condemned gentile

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[6] Although not an ante-Nicene father, see also Cyril of Alexandria (fifth cent. CE) in *Against Julian* 9.318–319.

[7] Several factors favour this interpretation. (1) The differences between the Judaeans and gentiles is an important theme in Romans (e.g. 1:14–16; 9:24; 10:12; 15:8–13) and the significance of the OT food laws was a primary issue in the early church (e.g. Mark 7:19b; Acts 10; 15; Gal 2:11–15). (2) Paul's plea for the understanding and acceptance of the 'weak' shows that they were not propagating a view antithetical to the gospel. In other words, it could not have been Judaeans who thought that the Law was necessary for salvation. (3) Paul's failure to mention 'food sacrificed to idols' (cf. 1 Cor 8:1), his reference to the observance of special days and abstention from wine makes it unlikely that the dispute in Romans can be confined to food offered to idols. (4) The practices

believers who did not adhere to these restrictions (Rom 14:3). The 'strong' with whom Paul agreed (Rom 14:14a, 20; 15:1) would then be gentile believers who believed that the coming of Christ had brought an end to the ritual requirements of the Mosaic Law (Moo 1996:831; cf. Cranfield 1979:697). Such a conclusion would cohere with Paul's statement that he was persuaded that in the Lord Jesus nothing is unclean in itself (Rom 14:14b).

Although the things listed in the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29) mostly cohere with Mosaic, ritual requirements of the Old Testament (Lev 17:10–14; 19:26; 1 Cor 8:1, 4–13) and not to the Noahide commandments found in Rabbinic Judaism,[8] πορνεία ('adultery' or 'fornication') seems to carry a stronger ethical connotation. Yet, although πορνεία might have been intended in a mainly ritual sense of sexual activities that defile a person (cf. Polhill 1992:331), it probably stands in

that Paul ascribed to the 'weak' can all be related to requirements in the Mosaic Law (Moo 1996:829–839). See also Gagnon (2000) who argued against Nanos (1996:105) who contended that the 'weak' referred to those of monotheistic 'Jewish' faith. Gagnon shows from the context that the 'weak' persons have to be believers in Christ.

[8] As argued in some length elsewhere (Du Toit 2013b), the idea that these requirements represented an earlier form of the seven 'Noahide Laws' (e.g., Campbell 2008a:6; Eisenbaum 2009:252; Nanos 1996:50–56; Tomson 1990:50), a belief in (later) Rabbinic Judaism that implies that 'righteous gentiles' who adhere to these seven laws (see above) would have a place in the world to come, is unfounded. The prohibitions listed in Acts 15:19–32; 16:1–5 and 21:25 do not correspond well with the seven Noahide Laws and are rather to be interpreted as having a Mosaic origin, constituting a practical arrangement in the early church with the intention to establish unity. That the idea behind the Noahide Laws is present in the book of *Jubilees* 7:20–21 is doubtful (the restrictions in *Jubilees* do not correspond well with the seven Noahide Laws; the requirement that the laws would be binding on all people is absent; that those concerned would be 'righteous gentiles' is absent; that they would obtain a place in the world to come is absent). That the Noahide Laws existed in some kind of early form in the *Didache* (3:1–6; 6:3) is questionable too. Apart from the tendency to date it later than Paul, the *Didache* lacks a reference to Noah, and the correspondences that there are with some of the stipulations in the *Didache* with the Noahide Laws are embedded within many other commands and covenantal requirements akin to the Mosaic Law.

direct connection with the sexual immorality associated with pagan religious festivals (cf. 1 Cor 10:7–8, Gaertner 1993:268; Witherington 1998:466). Nevertheless, even if the reference to πορνεία might have involved an ethical reprimand to gentile believers, on a deeper level, the other conditions in the Decree could well be a compromise to accommodate 'weak'[9] Judaean believers (cf. Bruce 1990:331; Fernando 1998:425) and not so much a requirement for gentile membership (contra Polhill 1992:330). From the text of Acts it is thus not clear whether the whole of the Jerusalem church was zealous for the Law. It is quite likely that there was a strict Law-abiding group within the Jerusalem church (Longenecker 2015:196).

Paul's reaction on the Apostolic Decree is not known from the text of Acts 15, and neither is it clear from his own letters. Yet there is no reason to suspect that he would disagree with it either (cf. Bock 2007:643). Using Paul as a guide, Bock (2007:644) suggested two options: '(1) keep the law scrupulously for the sake of evangelizing Jews, or (2) be less scrupulous for the sake of Gentiles (1 Cor 9:19–22; Rom 14–15). Each person is to do what conscience permits without imposing a requirement on someone who has different convictions'. In other words, Paul might have adhered to the Decree, especially the ritual requirements, for the sake of those with a 'weak' conscience (cf. Bruce 1990:331; Longenecker 2015:230).

4. Was Paul fully Law-abiding?

While the notion of an ongoing Judaean-gentile distinction in the early believing community presupposes that Judaean believers in the time of

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[9] Longenecker (2015:207) pointed out that Paul's reference to the 'pillars' (the elder apostles) in Galatians 2:9 could imply that in some ways Paul considered them as weak. Paul did not directly speak of them as pillars, but wrote that they 'were considered to be', 'were reputed to be' or even 'seemed to be' (δοκέω) pillars (cf. BDAG, s.v. δοκέω).

the New Testament observed the whole Law, it is often argued that Paul is portrayed in the New Testament as being fully Law observant (e.g. Juster 1995:85–87; Nanos 2009:4; Woods 2015a:136). Since such a contention cannot be discussed in full in the scope of this article, and since I have argued elsewhere from the Pauline material (Du Toit 2013a:66, 180; 2015a) and Acts (Du Toit 2016b) that Paul was *not* fully Law observant, the focus will be on the main arguments in this debate.

4.1. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

One of the prominent passages that those within the RNPP seem to have difficulty in explaining, is 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, where Paul stated that he would make himself a slave in order to 'win' them for the Gospel. To Judaeans he would become 'like' or 'as' (ὡς) a Judaean in order to 'win' them. Paul would place himself under the Law if he could win people by doing so. Similarly, he indicated that he would become like a weak person for the weak, and that he would become 'all things to all people' in order that he might get them saved—all for the sake of the Gospel. In verse 20 Paul specifically wrote that 'I myself am not under the Law' (μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον), a reading that Tomson (1990:276–277), a RNPP proponent, attempted to argue away on the basis of weak textual evidence.[10] For Nanos (2012:129–130), Paul did not actually become weak, or saw himself as free from the Law. Paul was merely prepared to meet people rhetorically. Tucker (2011:102–107) read this passage in terms of a 'relaxed halakhah', which he saw as a kind of middle ground between Nanos and Tomson (1990:276–277), who also read the passage

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[10] Tomson problematised the first ὡς in 1 Cor 9:20, referring to manuscripts that omit it (e.g. (F) G* 6* 326 1739 Cl Or[1739mg]). But he also questioned the authenticity of the participle phrase: μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον (cf. Juster 1995:107 who omitted this phrase from his quotation of 1 Cor 9:20). Manuscripts that omit the latter phrase are e.g. D2 K Ψ 81 1241 1881 2464 M sy[p]. The external evidence with these readings included is far superior, however.

through the hermeneutical lens of Jewish halakha. Tucker (2011:102–107) argued that Paul differentiated between two types of Judaeans in verse 20, where the one group would point to the majority of Judaeans living around the Mediterranean basin and the other group would represent a subgroup identity within this broader classification that adhered to a stricter interpretation of the Law of the Pharisees.

To propose, however, that Paul in verse 20 used some form of coded language to a largely gentile audience to make a distinction *within* Judaeans, is highly unlikely, and mars Paul's view of the cross being a stumbling block (1 Cor 1:23; Wright 2013:1437). Further, such an interpretation can hardly be harmonised with the notion that Paul saw himself[11] as being dead to the Law in Galatians 2:19 and the idea of not being 'under the law' in Romans 3:19; 6:14–5; Galatians 3:23 and 4:4–5 (cf. Wright 2013:1437; see below). In terms of the halakhic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, it is questionable if an approach that views Paul as communicating in 'cross-culturally intelligible terms' (Nanos 2012:139) can be superimposed on Paul. Such an approach is rather postmodern in nature, and can hardly be understood as Paul enslaving himself (v. 19). In the halakhic model, Paul would not have given up anything (Wright 2013:1437–1439). The halakhic model is rather a contemporary Jewish model that is retrojected and superimposed on Paul. The fact that Paul stated that he was *not himself* under the Law and became *like* a Judaean for Judaeans rather suggests that Paul was not fully Law observant after his Damascus experience, and that he did not see himself as within the Judaean identity any more—at least not in the way that those zealous for the Law envisioned their identity.

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[11] Paul used the first person singular: ἐγὼ ... ἀπέθανον.

4.2. 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

A passage that is often used in an attempt to offset what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 9:19–24, is 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, where Paul advised people to remain in the calling in which they were called. Those in the RNPP argue that Paul here made an intra-ecclesial distinction between gentile and Judaean Chirst-believers. The reference to the keeping of God's commandments (v. 19) would then point to the continued binding force of the Law, although it would have involved different ethical obligations for gentile and Judaean believers (e.g. Tomson 1990:259–281; Nanos 1996:50–56; 2012:123–124; Campbell 2008a:89–93; Eisenbaum 2009:252; Rudolph 2011; Tucker 2011:62–114; Woods 2014b:112). According to this interpretation, the gentile subgroup of believers would have been accommodated within the social community on the basis of Jewish halakhah. Nanos (1996:366) and Tomson (1990:271) interpreted this halakha in terms of the Noahide Laws (see above).

1 Corinthians 7:19–24 is, however, a difficult passage to interpret on several counts. Sanders (1983:103) considered Paul's reference to the keeping of God's commandments (v. 19b) as 'one of the most amazing sentences that he ever wrote'. (1) The first problem is that in Galatians 5:6 and 6:15 the insignificance of circumcision and uncircumcision is contrasted with being in Christ and terms of not keeping the Law. In verse 1 Corinthians 7:19a Paul's reference to the insignificance or irrelevance of both circumcision and uncircumcision in terms of one's new standing in Christ (Thiselton 2000:551; Wright 2013:1434; Taylor 2014:205), is then followed by a reference to the keeping of God's commandments: 'but the keeping of God's commandments' (ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ). (2) The wording of this verse 19 is elliptical, requiring a predicate in contrast to οὐδέν ἐστιν ('is nothing').[12] (3) The verb ἐπισπάομαι ('undo

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[12] E.g. 'but the keeping of God's commandments *is something*' (Fitzmyer 2008:308).

circumcision') in verse 18 is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament and both the noun τήρησις and the phrase ἐντολῶν θεοῦ are *hapax legomena* in Paul (v. 19). (4) 1 Corinthians 7:19–24 is best understood as a digression (Kistemaker 1993:229; Thiselton 2000:546; cf. Fee 2014:339). There is for example no indication in the letter that circumcision (or slavery) is a special problem in the congregation (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:306). Paul did not address the theme of circumcision anywhere else in the Corinthian correspondence. Apart from cursory references to the Law in the letter (9:8–9, 20; 14:21, 34; 15:56) and a reference to the Mosaic ministry in 2 Corinthians 3, there is no elaborate and explicit discourse on the Law as such in the Corinthian correspondence. The disconnected and elliptical nature of 1 Corinthians 7:19–24 thus asks for caution not to derive too much theologically or in terms of identity from this passage, a danger that seems to be lurking behind the RNPP-interpretation of this passage.

In 1 Corinthians 1:9, the calling (καλέω, see also 7:15, 17–18, 20–22, 24) points to the calling into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ the Lord (Collins 1999:274; Fee 2014:340). Paul's instruction that someone who is circumcised at the time of calling must not undo his actual, physical circumcision or vice versa (7:18; Dunn 2008:335; Wright 2013:1435; cf. 1 Macc 1:15; Josephus, *Antiques* 12.241), can thus be understood as an instruction to stay in the same *physical or social condition* at the time of coming into the fellowship and under the lordship of Christ. There is no indication in 1 Corinthians that the calling itself involves a subordinate identity in relation to Christ. Christ's calling rather transcends everything related to your physical appearance (circumcision), ethnicity or any other social identity, including being a slave or free (vv. 21–24; cf. Fee 2014:340). In the RNPP, one's ethnicity or cultural tradition is very much constitutive of how one relates to God, for the Law, including circumcision, has always been constitutive in marking off the status of God's people and their relationship to him. The Law and

circumcision was always more than something belonging to the domain of tradition or culture, but was constitutive of one's covenant relationship with God and thus constitutive of one's status before God (see below). The argument that the different relationship wherein Judaean believers would stand towards the Law over against gentile believers, would not imply a superior-inferior relationship (Woods 2014b:102), does not fully account for the constitutive significance of the Law in determining one's status before God. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with his people. Someone who was not circumcised had to be removed from God's people (Gen 17:9–14). Doing the Law safeguarded life (Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11, 13, 21), and so forth. Romans 2:23 is precisely directed against an attitude that the possession of the Law, including circumcision, would safeguard one's status before God (see Du Toit 2016a:3–5), even if such a safeguarding involved merely staying in the covenant and thus remaining part of God's people, as proponents of the *New Perspective on Paul* normally argue.

As argued in some length elsewhere (Du Toit 2015a:35–43), given the disconnected and elliptical nature of 1 Corinthians 7:19–23, it is possible that Paul's reference to the doing of God's commandments (v. 19b), which is contrasted to the irrelevance of physical circumcision, can be understood as a pejorative, short-hand reference to a more elaborate teaching on the Law to the Corinthians that Paul must have undertaken previously. His reference to the doing of God's commandments (v. 19b) would then imply that if one attaches significance to circumcision in terms of one's status before God, as circumcision would claim, one could just as well revert to doing the whole Law, for that is what really mattered in the old era under the Law. Such a short-hand reference would then correspond to (1) the requirement of doing the whole Law in the old existence under the Law in Romans 2, which I also argued elsewhere (Du Toit 2016; see also Du Toit 2015a:39–40), and (2) Paul's reference to the

obligation in Galatians 5:1–6 to do the whole Law if one let oneself be circumcised (Du Toit 2015a:36–39).

4.3. The picture that Acts paints of Paul

For those who promote an ongoing distinction in the early church between Judaean and gentile Christians, it has often been argued that the Acts of the Apostles portrays Paul in such a way that he was loyal to the Law: he circumcised Timothy, who had a Gentile father (16:3); in Jerusalem's temple he participated in purification rites akin to the Judaean way of life (18:18; 21:17–26); he referred to himself as an Judaean (21:39; 22:3) and even a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5). Since I have addressed these passages in a recent article (Du Toit 2016b), I will summarise the main lines of argument here.

While some would see in Timothy's circumcision as reported by Acts 16:3 a precedent for Paul to promote circumcision for Judaean believers (e.g. Nanos 2009:4; Woods 2015b:101), the reason for his circumcision is more complex. Paul specifically stated that he circumcised Timothy 'because of the Judaeans'. Since Timothy had a Greek father, Paul could just as well represent him as a Greek. Why would Paul choose to present him as a Judaean? While gentiles were admitted in synagogues, the sentiment among Judaeans around the admittance of gentiles in the temple (21:28; 24:6) is probably the main reason why Paul wanted to present Timothy as a Judaean rather than a gentile. Paul thus accommodated Judaean sensitiveness after the principle of salvation by grace had been established (15:11). In other words, Paul's action was consistent with the principle(s) laid down in 1 Corinthians 9:20 to become like a Judaean for the Judaeans in order to 'win' them for the Gospel (see Du Toit 2016b:4). Timothy's circumcision could thus not be used as proof that Paul promoted circumcision for Judaean believers.

The argument that Paul's participation in purification rites would be proof that he was fully Law abiding, cannot be sustained either. Paul's actions as described in Acts 18:18 and 21:17–26 have to be understood in a *polemical context*. Paul's shaving of his head as a result of being under a vow (18:18) might primarily be understood, not as a means to obtain certain blessings from God, but as a private religious exercise to show his thankfulness to God who enabled him to complete his mission in Corinth under God's protection. But as argued elsewhere, it is quite plausible that the shaving of his head might secondarily have involved a kind of delayed reaction to pacify the earlier antagonism he experienced from the Judaeans who accused Paul of not adhering to the Law (18:12–13, Du Toit 2016b:4).

The purification rite that Paul underwent according to Acts 21:17–26 has to be understood against the background of the antagonism that Paul experienced from believers who were *all* (πᾶς) zealous for the Law (v. 20). While πᾶς is probably meant in a hyperbolic way (Witherington 1998:647; Bock 2007:841), even if it is meant literally, the many being zealous for the Law does not necessarily imply that *all* Judaean believers in the *early church* were zealous for the Law. It is in fact likely that many of Paul's Judaean converts, when they joined communities of largely gentile believers, ceased to be Law abiding. Teachings such as are found in Romans 2:25–30, Galatians 4:9; 5:3 and 5:9 seem to point in this direction (Witherington 1998:648; Pervo 2009:544). Note especially the first person plural ('we') in which Paul stated that believers in Christ, including himself and Judaean believers by implication, are not under the Law or the curse of the Law any more (Rom 6:15; 7:5–6; Gal 3:13, 23–25; 4:2, 4, 5; 5:1, 5). Paul's willingness to undergo purification would thus be a prime example of being a Judaean for the Judaeans although he did not consider himself to be under the Law any more (1 Cor 9:20). As Thiselton (2000:703) pointed out, Paul's freedom from the Law has to be

understood in both ways. Just as Paul did not view it necessary to comply with Mosaic regulations on circumcision, feast days and food, he did not regard it as forbidden for a Christ-believer to undergo something such as the Nazirite vow (or similar) either. Wright (2013:1441) concluded that Paul, who believed that the Gospel was to the Judaeans first (Rom 1:16), had to choose between either leaving the impression that he was loyal to the Law or leaving the impression that he tore up scripture. Under these difficult, tricky, and life-threatening political and/or religious circumstances, Paul chose the former (see Du Toit 2016b:4–5).

In context, Paul's participation in purification rites thus does not point to him being fully Law abiding. Although the early church was still in a developmental phase in terms of its identity, the question is not whether there *were* Judaean believers who still wanted to (partly) define their identity by full Law observance, especially food laws and circumcision, even though they might have been great in number. The question is rather whether one could derive from the text of Acts if a *fixed principle* was laid down in the early church that Judaean believers were *all expected to* distinguish themselves from the gentile believers in terms of Law observance. On this question the answer has to be negative. Neither can one derive from Paul's vows that he would adhere to such a fixed principle. He was rather like a Judaean to the Judaeans (1 Cor 9:20), or in this case, to Judaean believers who demanded full Law observance (see Du Toit 2016b: 5–6).

Paul's conduct in terms of the purification rites suggests that there was some truth in the allegations that Paul forsook Moses, or that he told Judaeans not to circumcise their children or observe their customs (Acts 21:21; cf. the allegations in terms of profaning the temple in 21:28 and 24:6). Although Paul probably did not directly prohibit Judaean believers to circumcise or actively prevented them from adhering to the customs, such implications were probably implied in Paul's teaching. The same is

probably true of the allegations against Stephen's teaching (6:11–14). It is not so much Paul and Stephen's inherent antagonism towards the Law in their teaching that aggravated those who wanted to protect the Mosaic Law and preserve the identity of the Judaeans, but rather the implications that would arise from the kind of teaching that the Law has been fulfilled and completed in Christ (Acts 7:48–55; 13:39–43, see Du Toit 2016b:6; cf. Rom 7:5–6; 10:4; 2 Cor 3:7–17; Gal 3:10–13, 23–25; 4:4–5, see Du Toit 2013a). Although the allegation that Paul would have defiled the temple by bringing gentiles into it is most likely untrue, the other allegations seem to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the message(s) that Stephen and Paul preached. For them, their teaching did not denigrate the temple, the people or the Law, but revealed their true glory (Stott 1990:344).

As argued elsewhere (Du Toit 2016b:7), both Paul's references in Acts to being a Judaean (21:39; 22:3) and being a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5) are set within a *highly polemical context*, and can be understood as part of Paul's rhetorical strategy to avert his detractors and to win people over for the Gospel. Paul's reference to being a Judaean from Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:2–3) follows immediately on an attempt to kill him (21:26–34). His reference to being a Judaean has more to do with his former, national identity and his pedigree than his current identity in Christ. Such an understanding is strengthened by Paul's retelling of the change that came into his life as a result of his Damascus encounter, followed by the new way in which he perceived Stephen's death by implication (22:4–21). Paul's reference to being a Judaean can thus be understood as another example of being like a Judaean for the Judaeans, for he aimed to win their favour in order to bring the Gospel to them and hoped to change their minds about wanting to kill him.[13] Paul's references to being a

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[13] Cf. Paul's references to 'the Judaeans' in Acts 20:21; 25:8, 10; 26:2–4, 7, 21 and 28:19, implying that he left the Judaean identity and considered himself an outsider.

Pharisee, once in the present tense (23:6) and once in the past tense (26:5), occur within the same chain of events following Paul's arrest and his words to the tribunal and the crowd (21:33–22:39). By identifying with the Pharisees, Paul tried to divide the crowd on the resurrection and to confirm the validity of the resurrection itself. While Paul's aim could be understood as rhetorical, his conduct falls under the pattern of being 'everything to everybody' (1 Cor 9:22) in order to win them over for the gospel (1 Cor 9:23). Paul wanted to show that he was a product of Pharisaic instruction rather than being a practising Pharisee. Again, in 26:5, Paul's reference to being a former Pharisee and his reference to 'our' (ἡμετέρας) religious practice shows that his belief in Christ shared roots with Pharisaism, especially in terms of resurrection (see esp. v. 8). Given the context(s), Paul's references to being a Judaean or a Pharisee thus do not show that Paul saw himself as still being a Judaean or that he still observed the Law in full.

4.4. Is there other evidence that Paul was fully Law abiding?

In addition to the passages already discussed, Nanos (2009:4) argued that Paul remained fully Law abiding in reference to passages such as 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:3–6; Galatians 2:15 and 5:3. In 2 Corinthians 11:22 and Philippians 3:3–6, Paul employed the terms Ἰσραηλίτης and the Ἰσραήλ (the patriarch) respectively (not Ἰουδαῖος) as designation for his physical heritage and ethnicity and not so much for his current identity (see Du Toit 2013a:60–64, 187–191). Paul's status as being 'blameless' concerning the righteousness in the Law (Phil 3:6) defines his previous identity before belief in Christ, which he rejected and considered as refuse (Phil 3:8).

In Paul's reference to being a Judaean in Galatians 2:15–16, he merely designates his ethnicity and then went on to state that no one is made righteous from the works of the Law, but through faith in Christ. His

reference to being a Judaean (v. 15) rather refers to status by birth than denoting full Law observance (Du Toit 2013a:185). Lastly, Galatians 5:3 does not put Law observance in a positive light, but rather implies that if you circumcise yourself, you have an obligation to do the whole Law. Paul stated earlier in Galatians that the Law has put those under the Law under the curse of the Law (3:10, 13). The curse was constituted by the fact that the Law demanded full Law observance (3:10), a demand that no one could fulfil. The context of Galatians thus demands a pejorative understanding of the reference to full Law observance in 5:3. The first person plurals in 5:1 and 5 suggest that Paul implicated himself and Judaean believers in his aversion to circumcision and full Law observance.

A factor that is often neglected in determining whether Paul was fully Law abiding is the extra-Biblical references to the persecution of Paul that resulted from the Law-free gospel that he proclaimed. Longenecker (1990:26) discussed some of Paul's opposition that he encountered from Judaean Christ-believers. This opposition to Paul's law-free Gospel was often bitter and intense. The *Ascension of James* (second cent. CE) speaks of Paul's law-free approach: 'he [Paul] … began to write against circumcision, the sabbath, and the law' (cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*). In the *Kerygmata Petrou* (second cent. CE), Paul is referred to as 'the enemy man' who proclaimed 'lawless and absurd doctrine'. Although we do not know of any such attacks against Paul in the first century, this kind of opposition 'undoubtedly had roots in earlier times', and it is possible that Paul's opponents in Galatia insinuated something similar (Longenecker 1990:27).

5. The New Identity in Christ According to Galatians 3

Galatians 3 is probably one of the most decisive passages in the New Testament that define the new identity in Christ. Most within Messianic Judaism and the RNPP would contend that what Paul argued in Galatians is targeted solely at gentile Christ-believers (e.g. Nanos 2002; Lancaster 2011). While it is true that the original addressees are most probably gentile believers, Paul's opponents can be considered as Judaean believers who wanted gentile believers to perfect (ἐπιτελέω, 3:3) their identity by adding full Law observance to their faith, especially circumcision (Betz 1979:136; Martyn 1997:289–293; De Boer 2011:179). Paul's rhetoric thus did not merely target gentile believers, but Judaean believers too. Such an understanding is further supported by the fact that Paul utilised the first person singular (2:19–21) and plural (1:4; 2:4, 5, 15, 16, 17; 3:13, 14, 23–25; 4:3, 5, 6, 26, 28, 31; 5:1, 5, 25) in the context of the freedom from the Law or the new position in Christ: it applies to both gentile and Judaean Christ-believers.

In Galatians 3, Paul portrayed the beginning of a life of faith in Christ by receiving the Spirit (vv. 3–5, cf. v. 14). Paul's contention in verse 3 was 'that *the mode of existence based on the works of the law is eschatologically obsolete*. Faith, on the other hand, is the way to new life' (Silva 2001:176, emphasis original). The basic contrast in Galatians 3 is thus a contrast between the old, obsolete *era* under the Law (vv. 10–14, 23–25) and the *era* of faith that 'came' (vv. 23, 25; cf. Fee 1994:367–471; Martyn 1997:323; De Boer 2011:239). In verse 23–25, in utilising the first person plural (ἐφρουρούμεθα; ἡμῶν; ἐσμεν), Paul specifically implicated himself in being 'under the Law' in the previous era before faith 'came'. Similarly, in Galatians 4:4–5 Paul used the first person plural (ἀπολάβωμεν, v. 5) to include himself in being redeemed from being under the Law. The mode of existence of the old era under the Law is thus fulfilled and completed in Christ. The mode of existence is

therefore not (partly) based on flesh (including ethnicity, circumcision or even the doing of the Law—see below), but is solely based on the eschatological work of the Spirit in believers. Being children (literally being 'sons') of Abraham, which is parallel with being children of God, is solely constituted by faith in Christ (vv. 7, 26). Only those who believe are blessed with Abraham (v. 9) and those who belong to Christ are the 'seed' of Abraham and heirs to the promise God made to him (v. 29). The connection of believers to Abraham does not flow through historical Israel according to the flesh (4:21–5:1), but is a punctiliar connection (Martyn 1997:444) to Christ as single 'seed' of Abraham (v. 16).

In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul in fact stated that in Christ believers neither know Christ nor other believers κατὰ σάρκα ('according to the flesh'). In 2 Corinthians 11:18–28, boasting κατὰ σάρκα (v. 18) involved boasting on the basis of pedigree, descent or external credentials (vv. 22–28; cf. BDAG, s.v. σάρξ §4, see Du Toit 2013a:60–64). Knowing Christ or others 'according to the flesh' in 2 Corinthians 5:16 is thus an extended sense in which Paul used σάρξ, and probably involved being a 'fleshly' descendant of Abraham and/or included knowing them in terms of excelling in Judaean culture or pedigree (Harris 2005:427; cf. BDAG, s.v. σάρξ §5).[14] The 'new creation' (2 Cor 5:17) is thus best understood as a new identity that completes but supersedes the mode(s) of identity in the previous age, which involved 'flesh' (cf. Sanders 1983:173, 178–179, 207; Lincoln 1990:14; Sechrest 2009:15; Wright 2013:1443–1449). According to Romans 7:1–6, an existence in the 'flesh' (σάρξ, v. 5) is portrayed as an eschatologically old way of existence under the Law that all believers have died to. In the new era in Christ, identity is not partly based on that which relates to 'flesh' in its extended sense, but is defined by the eschatological 'now' (νυνί), which denotes a new way of existence

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[14] A measure of overlap has to be acknowledged between the meanings in §4 and §5 in BDAG (s.v. σάρξ).

for all believers in the Spirit (v. 6; cf. Fee 1994:504, 821; Moo 1996:422; Jewett 2007:436–437; Longenecker 2016:636–367; see Du Toit 2013a: 247–256).

Paul stated in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there would no longer be Judaean or Greek, slave or free, or male and female, but that all of these would be one in Christ. RNPP proponents are right that these distinctions are not eradicated (e.g. Juster 1995:111; Nanos 2009:4–5; Woods 2014b:120). But the important point is that none of these social, natural identities are *constitutive* in one's identity as God's child any more. Being male or female does not influence or help define one's status in Christ. The same is true of being a slave or free. In the same way, being a Judaean believer in Christ could not have been considered as constitutive of one's identity or status before God. In other words, being a Judaean believer could not contribute in the way one related to God. The latter confirms that Paul used the designation Ἰουδαῖος *solely in terms of an ethnic and social designation* without connotations about being God's people (see above). The problem is, however, that in Messianic Judaism, being a Jew is very much constitutive of one's status before God. As discussed above, Judaism is in fact the genus whereas being messianic is merely the species. But how can one be messianic without subscribing to the *criteria for identity* in the new era in the Messiah? Messianic Jews very much base their core identity before God on being under the Law (including circumcision) and on claiming cultural, religious and ethnic relation to historical Israel (see above). In other words, in terms of making Judaism the genus they continue to define their core identity 'according to the flesh', a category that essentially belongs to the old age before Christ.

It is important to note in this regard that Judaism involves more than culture or ethnicity, but involves a claim to being the same people of God as Israel of the Old Testament (see above). In its original meaning,

circumcision was not merely a cultural symbol, but a sign of the *covenant* between God and his people (Gen 17:11, 13) and thus facilitated the marking-off of Israel as God's people. According to Acts 7:8, Stephen told of the 'covenant of circumcision' (διαθήκην περιτομῆς) given to Abraham. Circumcision thus had theological meaning. If one was not circumcised, he was cut off from the people (Gen 17:14). Similarly, the Law, which involved dietary laws, feasts and the sabbaths, marked Israel as God's people and ensured their life and multiplication in the land (Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1; 8:1). The doing of the Law thus confirmed their claim on God's promise to Abraham and their status as God's people by implication. Mixing (contemporary) Judaism with faith in Christ thus cannot be on the same level as being male, female, slave or free. To justify a Messianic Jewish reading of Galatians 3:28, it is thus not enough to designate Paul's reference to οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος ('there is no Jew') as a 'hyperbole intended to stress the irrelevance of one's social status *in comparison to* one's standing in Christ, which eclipses the former' (Woods 2014b:120, emphasis original). Messianic Judaism is more than a social status, but in identifying with historical Israel and the meaning that they attached to the Law and circumcision, Messianic Judaism inevitably *adds* religious and covenantal meaning to Christ's completed work, and can be compared with Paul's opponents in Galatia who wanted believers to 'perfect' their status before God in the realm of 'flesh'. Woods (2014b:127) elsewhere admitted that Messianic Judaism involves more than 'ethnicity and culture', and that it includes 'faith tradition (including Torah-obligation in a manner not required of Gentile Christians) and a unique function (or service) within the body'. The latter notions are not accounted for in his interpretation of Galatians 3:28, however.

One's status of unity in Christ (Gal 3:28) also involved more than an equal status in terms of salvation (see the discussion of Acts 15 above).

For one thing, all who belonged to Christ were entitled to the entire promise to Abraham (Gal 3:29). In Galatians, the sufficiency of Christ involves more than access to salvation, but defines the *whole life* of any believer, including Judaean believers, for Paul wrote that *he* died to the Law that he might live to God. His former 'I' (his old identity) did not live anymore, but Christ lived in him (Gal 2:19–20). Christ defined the *totality of his identity* in relation to God. In essence, a Messianic Jewish view of identity defies the all-sufficiency of Christ and wars against the principle of *solo Christo*. To illustrate the latter, one could only look at the following statement of Woods (2015a:134): 'To impose the Law on Gentiles who had already been saved would be to detract from the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice'. The logical question that follows from Woods' statement is: if the adding of the Law would detract from the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for gentile believers, does the retaining of Law observance not detract from Christ's sufficiency for Messianic Jews?

6. The 'One New Man' According to Ephesians 2:15

The 'one new man' (ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον) of Ephesians 2:15 is one of the most fundamental concepts that defines the nature of identity in Christ as a new identity that fulfilled and replaced the old identities before the Christ event. Woods (2014b:106–123, 129), who approached this text from a Messianic Jewish perspective, discussed each of the terms 'one' (εἷς), 'new' (καινός) and 'man' (ἄνθρωπος) individually. In comparison with a marriage relationship, he argued that the unity (εἷς) in Christ does not erase distinctions between individuals, implying different roles for Judaean and gentile believers. He explained the newness (καινός) of the identity in Christ as a transformation or renewal rather than a re-creation (cf. Campbell 2008b:15), where the gentiles were grafted into the 'commonwealth' (πολιτεία, Eph 2:12, see below) of Israel (cf. Rom

11:16–24, see below)—a contention that is often advanced by Messianic Jews and those from the RNPP (e.g. Juster 1995:35; Campbell 2008b:22–24; Woods 2014b:119–120).[15] Lastly, Woods envisioned the new people (ἄνθρωπος) as a new unity of people with distinction.

The contention that gentiles in Christ became part of the commonwealth of Israel is not evident from the text of Ephesians 2:11–19, however. Verse 12 speaks of the gentiles being aliens of the citizenship (πολιτεία)[16] of Israel in the *former age* before the Christ event (vv. 1–3, 5, 11–12).[17] Nowhere does the text of Ephesians indicate that gentiles in the eschatologically new age became part of Israel. 'Israel' was rather the name given for God's people in the Old Testament (see above). In contrast, in the new eschatological identity in Christ, the middle wall of partition that held gentiles out of God's people was removed (vv. 13–14). In Christ, both those who were Israel in the former era and the gentiles who were formerly alienated from them (v. 12) and were considered as Israel's enemies (ἔχθρα, v. 14), were now created (κτίζω, v. 15) into 'one new man' (v. 15). The grafting of gentiles into the olive tree in Romans 11:16–24 does not specifically point to a grafting into the commonwealth

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[15] The whole concept of the Noahide Laws to which 'righteous gentiles' ought to subscribe (see above), can be understood as a kind of accommodation of gentiles within the community of 'Israel' (as RNPP proponents define Israel), although their status and the requirement of becoming part of God's people are not the same as 'Israel', and they never become 'Israel' proper.

[16] While πολιτεία can refer to the commonwealth of Israel, the notion of citizenship or membership is preferred in the context, for it is more inclusive. One can be a resident of a state and not be a citizen. Apart from the fact that Israel was not an independent state as such, but part of the commonwealth of Rome in the time of Paul (Hoehner 2002:357), the status of the gentiles as strangers from Israel in this context pictures the situation in the Old Testament (cf. Perkins 2000:397). The gentiles would not want membership of the political state of Israel so much as they would want the special privileges God bestowed on Israel (Hoehner 2002:357).

[17] See esp. ποτέ ('formerly') in vv. 2, 3 and 11, and τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ ('in that time') in v. 12.

of Israel or even into Israel itself either, but can be understood as a grafting into God's people of all ages (Moo 1996:698, 702, 709; Wright 2002:684). The branches that were cut off rather point to Israel (Dunn 1988b:659; Fitzmyer 1993:613; Moo 1996:699; Wright 2002:683). As argued at some length elsewhere, Paul's use of the term 'Israel', including in Romans 9–11, can be understood as echoing its prevalent use in the time of the second temple (see above) and as consistently pointing to historical Israel of the Old Testament (Du Toit 2015c).

In terms of Ephesians 2:11–19, Campbell (2008b:15) argued for the retaining of 'ethnic identity' in Christ and the establishment of 'real political and social peace' (Campbell 2008b:25) between gentile and Judaean believers. But as argued above, in the RNPP the retention of the Law and historical Israel's faith tradition has to involve more than ethnicity or social identity, but carries connotations in terms of being God's special people distinct from the gentiles. In the RNPP and the Messianic Jewish approach to identity, it is inevitable that notions of superiority and exclusivity in the Jewish identity are retained in distinction from gentiles. But can such a position be reconciled with Ephesians 2:11–19?

A decisive question in interpreting the 'one new man' in Ephesians 2:11–19 is: *what* constituted the alienation of gentiles from historical Israel (v. 12), the hostility and the dividing wall between gentiles and Israel (v. 14) in the previous age? The closest that Woods (2014b:103) came to addressing this question is when he wrote that the same verse in which we find 'one new man,' Ephesians 2:15, also speaks of Christ 'invalidating the law of commandments in ordinances. It is not possible in this paper, however, to present an interpretation of these words that

reconciles with distinction theory (i.e. one which does not regard the Law as annulled).'[18]

Woods (2014b) rather confined his approach to the 'one new man' of Ephesians 2:11–19 to a study of each individual term that constitutes this concept. In the process, very little, if anything, was made of the immediate *context* in which the concept of the 'one new man' is set. Carson (1996:27–64) keenly warned against word studies that disregard or neglect the context in which words are used. Building on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959:79–95), scholars such as Silva (1983; 1990), Louw and Nida (1989) have shown that language is like a prism through which a non-linguistic system is viewed. Such an approach to language implies that the *meanings* that are expressed by utilising words are primary: rather than words *carrying* inherent meanings, meanings or ideas are expressed by *utilising* words. The meaning that a writer conveys thus transcends the words that he or she uses. The *context* in which language is used or the context that the arranging of words creates is the main determining factor from which meaning can be derived.

In answer to the above question, the context of Ephesians 2:11–19 reveals that it was 'the law with its commandments and ordinances' (NRSV) or 'the law with its commands and regulations' (NIV, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν, v. 15) that constituted the dividing wall between Israel and the gentiles in the former age. This certainly refers to the whole Law (Perkins 2000:400; Hoehner 2002:375; Arnold 2010:162; Thielman 2010:169), and not only to those laws that were contained in decrees made by those who interpreted the Law (i.e. the elders, Matt 23:1–4, 15–24; Mark 7:5–8; contra Juster 1995:113). That the Law would be divisible into rites and customs over against Moses' legislation has little

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[18] He did supply a footnote to another discussion on the Law (Acts 10:9–16; Woods 2012).

support in Judaean texts (Deut 8:1; Josephus; CD-A 19.29; 4QMMT; see Perkins 2000:399–400). In Lincoln's (1990:141) words, the Law functioned 'as a fence to protect Israel from the impurity of the Gentiles, the law became such a sign of Jewish particularism that it also alienated Gentiles and became a cause of hostility'. Why was this so? Because the Law constituted a distinction between Israel and the gentiles as expressed in laws such as the food laws, the feasts and sabbaths (see above). It showed that Israel was a distinct people that were pure and holy unto the Lord, separate from the gentiles. The definitive external mark of distinction was circumcision (cf. Lincoln 1990:135). This is why verse 11 specifically mentions circumcision. Circumcision disqualified the gentiles from the citizenship of Israel (v. 12). This enmity, which definitely involved circumcision, has been destroyed (λύω, v. 14; BDAG, s.v. §3; NIV; cf. NRSV; ISV; ESV) in Christ's 'flesh' (v. 14) through the cross (v. 15). A similar idea is conveyed by Colossians 2:11, where the circumcision that is not made with hands in believers (circumcision of the heart) and the putting off of the 'flesh' (the old mode of existence under the Law[19] and sin) is effected through Christ's 'circumcision', which points to his death—his whole body that was sacrificed (e.g. Dunn 1996:157–158; Lincoln 2000:624; Pao 2012:166).

A significant note is struck in Ephesians 2:18, where it is stated that all believers have access to the Father through the Spirit. This was evidently true of Judaean believers too. The implication is that the Spirit and not the Law, circumcision, or their tradition constituted access to the Father. The indwelling Spirit thus rendered all of these external things in relating

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[19] That the Law is at stake here as being part of 'flesh' is confirmed by the reference to the 'record of debt' (χειρόγραφον, v. 14) and the 'legal demands' (δόγμα, v. 14) that were erased in Christ. Such an interpretation would correspond with Eph 2:14–15 (Moo 2008:210; Pao 2012:170–171). Cf. also Paul's reference to food and drink, festival, new moon and Sabbath in v. 16, which all seem to relate to the Law, although it could include broader religious traditions (Moo 2008:220–222). Paul did not want people to judge believers for not observing them.

to the Father redundant and unnecessary. The entity that gentiles became part of in Christ, was 'the household of faith' (v. 19), which signifies all of God's people of all ages (Bruce 1984:302), and can only be described as a new entity that fulfilled yet replaced the old modes of existence (Bruce 1984:296; Perkins 2000:400–404; Hoehner 2002:219; Arnold 2010:164).

In the Messianic Jewish interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–19, (1) the Law that alienated gentiles is not destroyed, but retained, (2) circumcision that held gentiles out of God's people is retained, and (3) the fundamental distinction that existed between ancient Israel and the gentiles is retained. The 'unity' that belief in Christ constitutes for Messianic Jews thus cannot be a unity of equality, for it implies that gentiles do not share in the same core identity, promises, or privileges. The 'unity' that Messianic Judaism envisions with gentiles is thus a unity of accommodation and tolerance at best.

7. Conclusion

Since Messianic Judaism can be considered primarily as a form of Judaism, which incorporates the Oral Law and other post-Biblical traditions, rather than being a variant of Christianity, it has to be evaluated in terms of its anachronistic relationship with Israel of the Old Testament and/or the Judaeans in most of the New Testament. In terms of this hermeneutical distance alone, it is problematic to find direct support for Messianic Judaism in the New Testament. But even if this hermeneutical distance is set aside for the moment, as argued in this article, the notion that there was an ongoing distinction in the early Christ-believing community between Judaean believers and gentile believers in respect of Law observance does not find support in the New Testament.

In comparison with the situation portrayed in Romans 14, the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15) can be understood as constituting a measure by the early church to accommodate Judaean believers who were zealous for the Law, rather than a set of conditions for gentile membership of the church. That the abolition of impure food was primarily at stake in Peter's vision and the acceptance of the gentiles by extension (Acts 10:10–16), would strengthen such a notion. On the question whether it was expected of *all* Judaean believers in the early church to observe the Law in full, the answer has to be negative. But that is not to say that there was not a large Judaean believing contingent that still wanted to (partly) define their identity in relation to the Law. On the other hand, Peter's remarks about the yoke and the burden of the Law (Acts 15) imply that there probably were Judaean believers who considered the Law as burdensome altogether.

The proposal that Paul was fully Law abiding, which normally accompanies the Messanic Jewish approach to the New Testament, is highly contestable in light of Paul's statement that he did not consider himself as being under the Law and that he was prepared to become like a Judaean to Judeans (1 Cor 9:20). An attempt to offset the statements in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 with 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 is problematic in light of the latter passage's disconnected and elliptical nature. 1 Corinthians 7:19b can be understood as a short-hand reference to a fuller teaching to the Corinthian believers that demanded full Law observance when one assigns significance to circumcision and/or reverts to an 'old age' attitude (cf. Rom 2; Gal 5:1–6). As argued, the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3), Paul's participation in purification rites (Acts 18:18; 21:17–26), and his reference to himself as a Judaean (Acts 21:39; 22:3) and a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5), can all be understood within a polemical context wherein he became like a Judaean to the Judeans in order to win them over for the Gospel and to avert his detractors.

The identity in Christ that Paul portrayed in Galatians 3 implies that the era under the Law has been fulfilled and superseded by the era of faith that 'came' (vv. 23, 25) for both Judaean and gentile believers. The latter understanding is strengthened by Paul's use of the first person singulars and plurals throughout Galatians, which implies that Paul included himself and other Judaean believers in everything that he argues in the letter. In other words, no Christ-believers were under the Law any more. The reference to 'no Judaean' in Christ (Gal 3:28) has to be restricted to an ethical designation, which would be similar to the other social designations (slave/free; male/female), and cannot be interpreted as retaining an ongoing Judaean way of life that included Law observance. For the latter notion incorporates religious and covenantal connotations that are all connected to the Law, and damages the way in which Paul argued the abrogation of the Law in Galatians 3.

Lastly, the 'one new man' in Ephesians 2:15 has to be understood as a new entity that fulfilled and superseded the previous identities before the Christ event. For the Law constituted the middle wall of partition that alienated gentiles from Israel in the previous age. To retain an identity that attaches to the Law would disregard the abolishing of this middle wall of partition and resurrect the same enmity that kept gentiles out of God's people in the first place. The 'one new man' rather relates to the new creation and new identity in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) wherein believers do not know Christ or other believers in terms of 'flesh' (2 Cor 5:16), which arguably includes descent, pedigree or inherited status. In light of all of the above considerations, it has to be concluded that Messianic Judaism is not supported by the New Testament.

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The Lion, the Witch and the Cosmic Drama: An African Socio-Hermeneutic

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Abstract

This paper intends to make a unique contribution in our interpretation of witchcraft in Africa by providing a socio-hermeneutic that is dramatic and meaningful. African theologians have sought to understand the ontology of witchcraft and its implications, as well as witchcraft accusations and possible solutions and remedies, which are all very important. This paper, however, offers something quite different, the possibility that witchcraft might have an important part to play in African cosmology, in the African cosmic drama. By employing Kevin Vanhoozer's work, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine,* and superimposing features of this work onto an African context, namely, African realities, we are able to explore issues such as witchcraft in light of an African theo-drama. It is argued in this paper that witchcraft, as abominable as it is, plays an important role in God's 'most glorious theatre' as the antagonist. Nevertheless, before one explores the idea of

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

God's glorious theatre and the stage for Africa's cosmic drama, witchcraft must first be understood and defined. The atonement, the sacrificial death of Christ, on the other hand, takes centre stage in this drama. Without witchcraft and without the atonement, the African cosmic drama is insipid, without great meaning or significance. Further, it is of importance to know the performing parts in Africa's cosmic drama; these are identified and elucidated in order that we may know our part and perform it well in response to African witchcraft. Therefore, we too, together with the Triune God, have our performing parts to play in this cosmic drama.

1. Introduction

My interest here is in interpreting African realities in light of a cosmic drama thereby providing an African socio-hermeneutic which is not only fascinating, but, I believe, also helpful for the African Christian community. There are many aspects of African realities that we could consider, but in this paper I wish to focus on African witchcraft. I will begin by offering a brief overview of witchcraft, and then reflect upon God's glorious theatre, the stage for Africa's cosmic drama. This brings us to Africa's cosmic drama itself, where I will provide a hermeneutic and an argument for the important, yet negative, part which witchcraft plays in Africa's cosmic drama. Next, I shall demonstrate how the atonement of Jesus Christ is the centre stage for this cosmic drama. Lastly, the performing parts of the drama are identified and elucidated in order that we may know our part and perform it well in response to African witchcraft.

2. A Brief Overview of African Witchcraft

There is no doubt that witchcraft is feared in almost every corner of the African continent, in traditional African societies and perhaps, to a lesser extent, in contemporary urban settings. Whether witchcraft can be reasonably comprehended or not, and certainly it cannot be studied by any scientific methods,[2] is a matter almost entirely irrelevant, for its destructive contribution to African socio-disharmony is undeniable. For many Africans it is a poisonous black thread woven through the very fabric of their reality. Speaking of witchcraft, Kunhiyop (2008:377) has said, 'This belief is not irrational; rather, it is a serious philosophical attempt to deal with the question of evil. It has its own natural logic.'[3] For societies which do not have ready access to scientific explanations, witchcraft is perhaps not as illogical as one might suppose.[4]

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[2] Khathide (2007) offers detailed discussions on the mystical means employed by witches and their craft in his book, *Hidden Powers: Spirits in the First-Century Jewish World, Luke-Acts and in the African Context* (2nd ed.). Cf. Onyinah (2002); Light (2012).

[3] Ikuenobe (2000:128) argues, 'It is reasonable to argue that the rationality of the metaphysical belief in witchcraft may be fundamentally construed in an internalist sense to involve the ability to see a coherence relationship among evidence, a set of background beliefs, and the belief. The belief in witchcraft exists and is meaningful for African people relative to the coherent context of their beliefs and lived experiences: this provides the basis for its understanding and acceptance. Thus, the rationality of the metaphysical belief in witchcraft cannot be determined, empirically, objectively, and out of context.

[4] For the African the belief in witchcraft is deeply ingrained in their worldview. Diseases, accidents, untimely death, inability to gain promotions in office, failure in examinations and business enterprises, disappointments in love, barrenness in women, impotence in men, failure of crops and many other evils are said to originate from witchcraft. Witchcraft for the African is not an illusion and neither is it believed to be a figment of imagination. Instead, it forms part of the very fabric of reality (Awolalu 1996:81; cf. Falconer 2013:227).

We know what witchcraft is in broad terms, but how can we offer an explanation of the phenomenon of African witchcraft? While not exhaustive, I believe the following four points are significant and helpful; some points mentioned may overlap. (1) Witchcraft offers explanation; a scapegoat for misfortune, sickness, and untimely death. This may lead to false accusations of innocent people practising witchcraft,[5] many of whom are children. (2) Witchcraft may be explained simply as deception and trickery. This is especially true of the counterpart of witchcraft, the work of witch doctors who are notorious for their trickery, sleight of hand, and high compensation. (3) The use of psychic powers also offers suitable explanation. Awolalu (1996:83–84) articulates his understanding of magic and witchcraft emphasising the 'omnipotence of thought'. That is, as he explains, 'a man wishes that certain things may happen, and they do happen as he wishes—the wishes may be good or evil'. Therefore, witchcraft is intangible, it 'is projected from the mind – it is psychic'. He believes that man is created powerful, able to reconstruct and demolish. When he is destructive, he acts 'contrary to the will of his Creator'. (4) Of course, the cradle of witchcraft may also be considerably more sinister. It is not unreasonable to consider the activity of malevolent spirits. After all, the gospels record how Jesus frequently dealt with such spirits.[6]

Whether we are willing to attribute the work of demons to witchcraft or not, I think it is clear that witchcraft, however we wish to explain it, is undergirded by a spirit of evil. Ultimately, whether we are considering the practice of witchcraft itself, or witchcraft accusations, the evil of social disharmony is forcefully promoted. The most prominent feature of

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[5] Despite the reality of witchcraft in the lives of Africa peoples, many are falsely accused of practising as witches. Khathide points out that because misfortune and death are credited to witchcraft, some societies attempt to eliminate all witches and witchcraft. No doubt many innocent people, including children who are thought to be witches, are eliminated (2007:349; cf. Falconer 2013:232).

[6] cf. Matt 8:16–17; 8:28–34; 12:22; 15:21–28; 17:14–21; Mark 1:21–26; 1:29–33; 5:2–13; 7:24–30; 9:15–29; Luke 6:17–19; 11:14; 13:10–13; 13:31–32; Acts 10:38.

witchcraft is therefore its anti-social nature[7] (Falconer 2013:228). As John Mbiti (1970:225) points out, witches are 'the great enemies of society'.

My interest, however, is not in witchcraft itself, but rather in interpreting its part being played out in God's theatre, his cosmic drama of which we are part. Nevertheless, the reality of witchcraft must be dealt with appropriately and immediately by the Christian community, it cannot be ignored.

John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* talks about 'this magnificent theatre of heaven and earth' (2.6.1), 'this most glorious theatre' (1.6.2) and 'this most beautiful theatre' (1.14.20). Jonathan Edwards also starts off one of his sermons with the following statement, 'God erected this visible world as a monument of his glory, a theatre for the display of his adorable perfections' (1773:443).

If some of the great theologians of the past have used the *Theatrum Gloriae Dei* (the theatre of God's glory) for understanding God's relationship to their own cosmology, we can use it as a hermeneutic for African cosmology and related social issues as well. In any drama production, film, theatre or narration, the characters are comprised of protagonists and antagonists (and anything in between): without either, the story is dull, lacking in glory and wonder. The grand narrative of scripture is a case in point whereby the evil of sin and Satan is introduced early in Genesis 3, together with the consequences of man's rebellion. The narrative unfolds throughout scripture and the *Theatrum Gloriae Dei* is magnificently displayed through Jesus' redeeming work on the cross

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[7] Turaki (2006:103) mentions that witches not only harm their victims, but can sometimes even kill them. Apparently, the killing of a victim can be achieved by casting spells from a distance, or meddling with articles of clothing, nail clippings or hair. Otherwise they may also use poison to achieve their evil ends.

where God and man are reconciled, the earth and the heavens will be made new and where all evil will finally be banished.

3. Africa's Cosmic Drama

Africa has its own cosmic drama, and plays its own part in God's salvific narrative on African soil. In the greater scheme of things, I argue that witchcraft too has its role to play, in light of a superlative narrative among the Africa people. Witchcraft is experienced in many parts of Africa as the height of evil. However, could witchcraft be viewed from another angle, whereby, despite its abominable character, it offers a positive contribution, constructing a setting in which Jesus comes to Africa as Victor?

Brown (1984), early in his book, *Heresies*, comments on the positive contribution of heresies in the Christian church. Not that heresies are noble, but rather that they evoke a response from Christian theologians, polemists, and apologists. In turn, detailed arguments and the development of theology in response to heretical teachings, demonstrate the credibility of the Christian faith. Over time heresies have helped define and develop Christian theology.

I propose that African realities, such as witchcraft, could be interpreted similarly. As provocative as it might appear, there is a hermeneutic, I believe, in which we can interpret witchcraft, with place and relevance in God's cosmic drama. Without such African realities, the grand narrative or cosmic drama in African cosmology dwindles. Could Jesus Christ be a victor in African cosmology if there is nothing to conquer? Is there a Gospel to preach to the traditional African without African realities?

Such a hermeneutic is found in C. S. Lewis' (1950) children's novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the story, four children passed

through an old magic wardrobe and into a magical land, Narnia. At the time of the children's arrival in Narnia, the antagonist in the narrative, the illegitimate White Witch, ruled the land with tyranny and a perpetual winter. The legitimate king of Narnia, Aslan, the great lion, after a long period of absence returned to Narnia. Edmund, one of the four children, committed treason and betrayed his siblings and all the creatures of Narnia to the White Witch. Later, after having recognised his folly and having remorse, Edmund was reunited with his siblings and meets Aslan and the noble creatures of Narnia. When the White Witch heard of this, she, with her minions, approached the lion and demanded the life of Edmund, a legitimate decree of Narnia for such a traitor. However, the lion agreed to save Edmond's life by having himself sacrificed on the stone table at the hands of the White Witch. After all was done, the substitutionary sacrifice made, and the witch and her creatures had left the stone table, Aslan is raised in resurrected glory and in the end, together with the four children, they defeated the White Witch and her creatures. Giving commentary on the lion's substitutionary death and resurrection, in Aslan's words, Lewis wrote:

> 'It means', said Aslan, 'that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards'.

Certainly, without the witch, Lewis does not have a narrative. The cosmic drama being played out in Africa is not too dissimilar. The magical land of Africa has malevolent witches who work their craft as well, and here

too one can find the very same lion of Narnia, who roams Africa as the legitimate Lord, only that he goes by a different name.[8]

Africa needs witches for its own narrative, but it also needs the ultimate demise of witchcraft for the climax of God's cosmic drama and the socio-renewal of Africa. And the Christian community have a significant part to play as we demonstrate the reign and kingdom of God.

4. The Atonement as Centre Stage

We may conceivably interpret this African cosmic drama as dramaturgy. Kevin Vanhoozer explains that '"Dramaturgy" is the working of drama' and that it is the dramaturge who is 'responsible for helping the director to make sense of the script both for the players and for the audience' (Vanhoozer 2005:244). Dramaturgy in the African cosmic drama then, considers the dramatic composition on Africa's 'social stage', articulating the large themes and finer details, providing the whole narrative with structure, plot, and climax.

One might say that I am acting as a theological dramaturge at the moment, helping to articulate the sense of African cosmic drama by way of offering a socio-hermeneutic. I am seeking to answer the questions as to why there is an African cosmic drama at all, and why there is witchcraft in 'this most glorious theatre' (cf. Vanhoozer 2005:246).

Let us not forget that witchcraft in 'this most glorious theatre' shares the African 'social stage' with the Royal Lion. Davies said it well when he wrote that 'Christianity, as a religion of death and resurrection and eternal life, is implicitly metaphysical, and has throughout its history had an intimate alliance with the languages of ontology'. The Christian

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[8] This illustration from C. S. Lewis' (1950) children's novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* is a further development from Falconer (2013:233–234).

affirmation, he continues, is 'that God has taken flesh and that he still lives among us' (2001:3, 9). To be sure, the Royal Lion, Jesus Christ, *does* live among us, and the understanding of which, as well as its implications are melodramatic and powerful.

In C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* Aslan's death and resurrection is the focal point in the story, so it is that Jesus' atonement is the glorious centre of Africa's cosmic drama. As Vanhoozer (2005:380) puts it, the doctrine of the atonement firstly narrates 'the climax of the theo-drama, attempting as it does to state what it was that God was doing in Christ. Second, it helps to articulate the eschatological superobjective that drives the theo-drama. Third, it equips disciples to play their parts by revealing to them who they really are'.

Jesus provides atonement by offering himself up as a penal substitutionary sacrifice so that the 'victims' of witchcraft may be re-leased.[9] If Jesus died for our sins and all the curses of the law were laid upon him on the cross (Gal 3:13), could this not be extended for the African believer, that all curses and magic conjured by witchcraft are also absorbed by Jesus as well during his vicarious death? The victim who comes to faith in Christ is freed from witchcraft, receiving redemption and adoption (Eph 1:3–7). Of course, Jesus' atoning work was not only to offer a penal substitution, as important as that is, but also to conquer and to disarm the rulers and authorities (1 John 3:8).[10] We see this when

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[9] Awolalu (1996:86) says, 'A substitute sacrifice may be prescribed by a knowledgeable priest, to be offered to the witches; and once the witches are satisfied with the offerings, they will "release" the prospective victim'.

[10] N.T. Wright (1996) offers an exhaustive contribution to the notion of Jesus being the Victorious Son of God in his *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2.

Paul addresses the Ephesian church.[11] Ephesians 1:20–30[12] place all the spirits of the spirit world in proper relation to Christ and to the Christian believer. These verses seem to be Paul's interpretation of Psalm 110, where he describes the spiritual forces which are now made subject to Jesus Christ.[13] Paul tells us that when God raised Christ up from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly places, this position is far above all rule, power and authority of the spirit world, and above all dominion (Falconer 2015:26).

Turaki (2006:46) offers some helpful commentary on Ephesians 1:20–23; he proclaims that the fallen world has now been handed to Christ by God the Father because of his victory and triumph at the cross. The cross has become the symbol of his kingdom, his power and rulership over all the earth. It was through the cross that Christ dethroned Satan, and thereby subjected all principalities and powers to himself.[14]

In Colossians 2:12–14,[15] we were once spiritually dead in sin, but that now our sin has been forgiven, on account of Christ's atoning work on the cross having satisfied the legal demands by cancelling the record of debt. Paul's atonement theology is interesting here because verses 12–14 discuss the legal aspects of the atonement and then, in verse 15, Paul emphasises a *Christus Victor* theme, saying, 'He (God) disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him' (Falconer 2015:27). Again, the African Bible Commentary's historical background for the rulers and authorities mentioned in these verses is helpful, for it explains that they are the defeated enemies of God, and they are the ones being dragged along in

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[11] For a discussion on Ephesians and magic and its historical settings, cf. Arnold (1989).
[12] For detailed exegesis cf. Falconer (2013:151–150).
[13] Cf. Matt 26:64, Mark 12:36 and Luke 20:41–44.
[14] Cf. Falconer (2015:27).
[15] For detailed exegesis cf. Falconer (2013:151–153).

Christ's procession. In the Roman world, 'when a city surrendered to a victorious general, the conquerors would stage a victory parade at which they would display their conquered enemies and all the goods they had plundered' (Adeyemo 2006:1453; cf. Falconer 2015:27). The atonement is then the hermeneutical means by which we understand the theo-drama.

Christ's atonement in Africa's cosmic drama directs Christians towards what Vanhoozer calls, a 'fitting participation in the drama of redemption'. Not that it offers detailed descriptions of behaviour, but rather that 'new situations and new problems require improvising' (2005:363). Our participation in the drama of redemption is carried through into the larger picture, the African cosmic drama, in which the atonement takes centre stage. Here, we find ourselves in unique situations having to 'improvise' as the problem of witchcraft and other African realities are dealt with through Christ's atoning work. Vanhoozer explains that we are directed 'to perform the atonement by appropriating our identity in Christ and by engaging in practices that participate fittingly in Jesus' saving work. Jesus' death and its aftermath are the high point of the theo-drama' (2005:362). Of interest then are the performers in the African cosmic drama and the parts they play.

5. Performing in Africa's Cosmic Drama

All of us play a part in Africa's cosmic drama. Talking about the cosmos as a theatre of energies, Davies writes how 'our thinking may be problem-solving and essentially short-term, so that we are destined as a species to play a brief "walk-on" part in the cosmic drama of life. Being uncertain as to who we are, we are equally disorientated as to our destiny' (2001:xvi). Drawing on Kevin Vanhoozer's *The Drama of Doctrine,* I hope to provide identity, orientation, and purpose in this 'most glorious theatre'. If we want to play a positive part in Africa's cosmic drama, we

are required to learn what is entailed in our role in Christ (Vanhoozer 2005:362).

According to Vanhoozer, 'The church is a celebratory theatre, through its liturgy and its life, inserts its members into the drama of redemption. This drama is *really* present in the life of the church, and the liturgy helps us to see, taste, imagine, and *live* it' (2005:410). That is all very well and good, but in our case, the social evils of witchcraft are not *usually* played out in church, but rather in day-to-day traditional African life, wherever it might take place. Our theatre is not confined to church, or any other institution in Africa. But perhaps we could agree with Vanhoozer when he says that 'The church is the theatre of the gospel, its members the company of performers. It is only as a company that the people of God can function as a "hermeneutic of the gospel"' (2005:413). Nevertheless, I am arguing for an African socio-hermeneutic, but there is no doubt that an interplay between these two hermeneutics exist. Both are essential.

A Trinitarian participation in this African cosmic drama is decisive, because without it there is no drama, no 'most glorious theatre'. Once again Vanhoozer offers us insight here. The Father's role is as playwright and producer, while the Son provides us with the dramatic climax, through his incarnation and ultimately through his redemptive act, the crucifixion and resurrection. The Holy Spirit, though, is the dresser, dressing us in the righteousness of Christ and uniting us to him (2005:448). The Spirit also leads and guides us in playing our part in the drama.

The pastor or minister, and might I include missionaries, who are actors as well, oversee the local performances, and yet their role might include 'assistant director', mediating between the script (scripture) and the performers. The director communicates to the actors, the believers, the meaning of the script in order that the meaning of the drama may be

understood (Vanhoozer 2005:448). Sadly, the actors in the theo-drama have not always performed very well in terms of dealing with the issues of witchcraft appropriately. Kunhiyop correctly points out that, 'missionaries, early African church leaders and some contemporary leaders have dismissed belief in witchcraft as mere superstition' (2008:383). The theologian, on the other hand, is the dramaturge. His role as the dramaturge is to work on the text and assist the production members, especially the director, to gain a better understanding of the drama in order for it to remain true to the intent of the playwright (Vanhoozer 2005:245, 448).

Along with the script (scripture) we have doctrine, helping the performers understand their identity as new creations in Christ and their union with him (Vanhoozer 2005:399). The doctrine of atonement, as I have already shown, is the climax of Africa's cosmic drama, offering a socio-hermeneutic for witchcraft.

In Africa, evil finds its social expression in witchcraft. The South African Missiologist, David Bosch, reminds us that 'the mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. We must therefore evangelise, response [respond] to immediate human needs, and press for social transformation' (1991:407; quoting the *Wheaton '83 Statement,* paragraph 26). This is our responsibility, the part we play in Africa's cosmic drama, to proclaim the Gospel and to demonstrate its power,[16] by responding to the needs of countless Africans who suffer from witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. This also means that we are

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[16] Healey and Sybertz also state that one of the greatest needs of the African people is relief from the bondage of witchcraft. They urge that Christianity needs to demonstrate its relevance to the people of Africa by addressing witchcraft. A person, they say, 'who has gone through the experience of being bewitched and healed is able to appreciate in a deeper way what God has done for human beings in Jesus Christ' (Healey and Sybertz 2004:218–219; cf. Falconer 2013:227).

to proclaim and demonstrate that the power of Christ's atoning work on the cross is all powerful, rendering the power of witchcraft for the believer as powerless.

Considering the atonement and our roles as performers, perhaps Bosch says it best when he proclaims, 'In Christ's death and resurrection the new age has irreversibly begun and the future is guaranteed; living in the force-field of the assurance of salvation already received and the final victory already secured, the believer gets involved in the urgency of the task at hand' (1991:509). As I have said elsewhere, the atonement offers a powerful theology for African Christians who find themselves enslaved to the fear of witchcraft and the socio-disharmony it creates and seeks to promote. Christ alone has offered himself up as a substitutionary sacrifice and in turn has overcome witchcraft and has subjected it to himself through his atoning death [17] (Falconer 2013:234). We too have our performing roles to play in this theo-drama.

6. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to argue that, even though witchcraft forcibly promotes evil and socio-disharmony, it may offer a contribution, constructing a setting in which Jesus comes to Africa as Victor. It plays an important, though negative part in God's glorious theatre, his cosmic drama here in Africa. Without witchcraft, the grand narrative of African cosmology diminishes, because it provides the setting in which the Gospel of Christ finds expression and his victory is demonstrated. The atonement of Christ takes centre stage in the theatrical drama, being the hermeneutical means by which we understand the African cosmic drama. It calls us to participate in the drama as performers with very real parts to play, demonstrating the reign of God and proclaiming the Gospel to

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[17] 1 Cor 15:24–28; Eph 1:20–22; Col 1:12–16.

those in Africa, so that they may be freed from the curse and the fear of witchcraft and find salvation and victory in Jesus Christ.

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A Comparative Analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

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Abstract

This journal article undertakes a comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. One incentive for doing so is to advance the field of scholarship concerning the intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments by examining two seminal passages in the Judeo-Christian canon. A second motivation is that this topic has received only a cursory consideration in the academic literature. The major claim affirmed by the study is that there are discernible connections between these two passages at the linguistic and conceptual levels. In turn, recognising the latter helps to clarify the meaning and significance of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 for ministers of the Gospel.

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

1. Introduction

The concept of 'blessing' dominates both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12.[2] With respect to Psalm 1, the Hebrew noun אַשְׁרֵי (*'ăšrê*)[3] only appears at the beginning of verse 1. Even so, it establishes the theological foundation for the entire sacred song. For instance, it is not only the prevalent theme in verses 1–3, but also stands in sharp contrast to the wretched state of the ungodly described in verses 4–6. Concerning the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12, the Greek adjective μακάριος (*markarios*)[4] appears in every verse but the final one in the series. This datum indicates that the term is a central leitmotif of the passage.

An immediate query concerns whether there are discernible connections between the above two passages at the linguistic and conceptual levels. The comparative analysis undertaken in the upcoming sections of this journal article affirms the existence of such linkages. In particular, section 2 explores the linguistic aspects of this issue. Next, section 3 is an excursus dealing with the kingdom of God in biblical perspective. This important background information serves as a conceptual bridge to the descriptive analyses of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12, which are undertaken in sections 3 and 4, respectively. The conceptual

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[2] Even though the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 are the principal focus of this journal article (along with Ps 1), attention is also given to the parallel passage in Luke 6:20–26, which includes both a series of blessings pronounced on the impoverished righteous and corresponding woes decreed to the wicked rich.

[3] The Hebrew noun, which in Psalm 1:1 is an abstract nominative, intensive masculine plural construct, is commonly translated as 'blessed' (cf. NIV, NASB, ESV, NRSV, KJV, Lexham).

[4] The Greek adjective, which is a nominative, plural, masculine construct in Matthew 5:3–11, is commonly translated 'blessed' (cf. NIV, NASB, ESV, NRSV, KJV, Lexham). Technically, the Beatitudes belong to a literary subgenre called 'religious macarism'; cf. Collins (1992:629).

connections between these passages are taken up in section 6, followed by a concise wrap-up of the study in section 7.

One benefit arising from the proposed inquiry is that it helps to clarify the meaning and significance of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 for ministers of the Gospel. Moreover, the investigation advances the field of scholarship concerning the intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments by examining a lacuna, namely, the under-explored and underappreciated interrelationship between two seminal texts in the Judeo-Christian canon. For instance, Zimmerli (1978:13) in his deliberation of the relationship between the Matthean Beatitudes and the Old Testament, reserves just two sentences to Psalm 1. Likewise, Blomberg (2007:20) briefly notes that the 'Beatitudes' include 'several key allusions' to the Old Testament. In a similar vein, the analysis Howell provides concerning the Jewish origins of the Matthean Beatitudes includes just four incidental references to Psalm 1 (2011:117, 122, 197, 198).

Along the same lines, Plummer (1982:59–60) only devotes a single paragraph to the general premise that Jesus possibly was thinking about the beginning of the Psalter 'when He placed' the 'Beatitudes' in the opening verses of his oration. In a corresponding manner, Craigie (2004:61) observes that the contrasting destinies of the righteous and the wicked (Ps 1:6) are 'illuminated further' by the Saviour's remarks in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matt 7:13–14). Moreover, a representative survey of other scholars indicates that each offers just a single sentence concerning the intertextual connection between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12.[5] In light of the preceding assessment, this

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[5] Cf. Anderson (1983:58); Boice (199414); Brown (2012:99); Davies and Allison (1988:432); Delitzsch (1982:82–3); Grogan (2001:146); Hagner (2000:88); Holladay

journal article seeks to address a topic that has received at most a cursory consideration in the academic literature.[6]

2. The Linguistic Connections Between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

As put forward in section 1, an analysis of the relevant biblical and extra-biblical data indicates there are strong linguistic linkages between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. The preceding assertion is based on a candid appraisal undertaken in the present section of the corresponding terms rendered 'blessed'[7] in each passage. In both texts, the horizon of redemptive history encompasses the past, present, and future. Also, it involves the divergent fates of the righteous and the wicked.

Concededly, the Hebrew noun אַשְׁרֵי (*'ăšrê*) only appears in Psalm 1:1; nonetheless, it sets the thematic tone and theological direction for the entire sacred song.[8] Several standard lexical resources define the term as meaning either 'blessed / blessedness' or 'happy / happiness'.[9] Cazelles (1977:446) affirms the view that *'ăšrê* is predominately secularised in its emphasis, whereas *bārûk* ('blessed') places a greater accent on what is

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(2012:144); Keener (1999:165); Kidner (1973:47); Lenski (1964:183); Liefeld (1984:891); Osborne (2010:162).

[6] Admittedly, there is a vast amount of academic literature dealing separately with Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–11. Furthermore, this journal article makes no pretence of trying to engage all of it in a thoroughgoing manner. Be that as it may, the issue broached here remains underexplored and consequently worthwhile to comprehensively investigate.

[7] Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from the 2011 version of the NIV.

[8] Cf. the usage of *'ăšrê* in Deut 33:29; Pss 40:4; 84:4–5; Prov 3:13.

[9] Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Cazelles (1977:445); Hamilton (1980); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Swanson (2001b).

sacred and solemn. Routledge (2012:61) clarifies that while *'ăšrê* and *bārûk* ('blessed') are not necessarily 'synonymous', they have some 'overlap in meaning'. Specifically, the basis for experiencing happiness (i.e. *'ăšrê*) is 'closely' tied to the 'bestowal of divine favour' (i.e. *bārûk*).

In Psalm 1:1, *'ăšrê* is an intensive plural form[10] that can be 'interpreted as a type of interjection' (Cazelles 1977:445), especially a 'liturgical cry' (446). The term denotes a 'heightened state' (Swanson 2001b) of 'joy', which points to an exceptionally 'favourable circumstance', whether in the present or future (or both).[11] In keeping with what was noted above, the basis for such a propitious outcome is a 'life in right relationship with God' (Brown 1997). For all that, the author of Psalm 1 most likely did not make a sharp distinction between the so-called sacred and secular realms of existence. Put another way, the righteous remnant experience genuine happiness, regardless of whether the context is temporal and physical or eternal and metaphysical. After all, in every area of life the godly should be characterised by piety and rectitude (vv. 1–2),[12] along with an unwavering trust in and unmitigated devotion to the Creator as their 'refuge' (2:12).[13]

As with *'ăšrê*, numerous standard lexicons indicate that *markarios* can mean either 'blessed / blessedness' or 'happy / happiness', along with such interrelated connotations as 'fortunate', 'privileged', and 'highly favoured'.[14] Accordingly, Danker (2000) posits the core nuance as

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[10] Cf. Waltke and O'Connor (1990).

[11] Cf. Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014).

[12] Cf. Pss 112:1; 119:1–2; 128:1–2; Prov 8:32; 1 En 99.10; 4 Macc 7:22; Sir 34:15.

[13] It may be that the occurrence of *'ăšrê* functions as a thematically introductory inclusio, since it appears at the beginning of Psalm 1 and the end of Psalm 2; cf. n 44 (below), along with Brown (1997); Cazelles (1977:445); Waltke and O'Connor (1990).

[14] Cf. Danker (2000); Hauck (1999); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Strecker (1990); Swanson (2001a).

someone being the 'privileged recipient of divine favour'. In the words of Spicq (1994), those who are blessed experience an 'interior joy' that becomes manifest in the 'external' world. Turner (2008:146) explains that the antithesis of divine blessedness is not feeling miserable or despondent; rather, it is the state of being 'cursed'.[15]

The lexical connection between *markarios* and *'ăšrê* is strengthened due to the fact that the Septuagint often uses *markarios* to render *'ăšrê*, especially in the Psalms and Sirach.[16] This holds true for the Septuagint version of Psalm 1:1, where *markarios* is used for *'ăšrê*. For the sake of comparison, the Vulgate translates *'ăšrê* by using the Latin verb *beatus*, which has a comparable range of meanings to its Hebrew and Greek counterparts, including 'happy', 'blessed', 'fortunate', and 'prospe-rous'.[17] Bertram (1999) notes that in Jewish literature, *markarios* 'always refers to a person, never a thing or state'. Silva (2014) adds that the noun especially concerns individuals who exist in a 'right relationship' with God. Indeed, there is a strong 'connection' made between the 'favour' of the Lord and 'earthly happiness', as evidenced by his gracious bestowal of temporal 'gifts'.

Moreover, Silva (2014) points out that in Jewish texts written during the Second Temple period, *markarios* is found in a 'series' of 'elaborate pronouncements'.[18] In turn, these declarations of 'blessedness' stand in contrast to a comparable 'series of woes'.[19] The 'setting' is the 'consolation' awaiting the upright at the 'eschatological' terminus of the age, as well as the consummation of the divine 'kingdom'.[20] Similarly,

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[15] Cf. Matt 25:31–46; Luke 6:24–26.
[16] Cf. Nolland (2013:87); Silva (2014).
[17] Cf. Collins (1992:629); Crane (2016); Grounds (2009:530); Lewis (1980); Lewis and Short (1879).
[18] Cf. 2 En 42:6–14; Sir 25:7–10; Tob 13:14–16.
[19] Cf. Eccles 10:15–16; 1 En 103:5; 2 En 52:1–14.
[20] Cf. Isa 61:1–3; 1 En 58:2; Pss Sol 17:50.

according to Strecker (1990), the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 occur in a concatenation, reflect a 'prophetic-apocalyptic' backdrop, and are anchored to the 'Christ-event'.

Nolland (2013:88) posits that the Beatitudes are an 'expanded restatement' of 4:17, which records Jesus' summons for people to 'repent', especially since the 'kingdom of heaven' had drawn 'near'. Even more consonant with the intertestamental Jewish literature is the parallel passage in Luke 6:20–25, which includes a succession of 'blessings', followed by corresponding 'woes'. Indeed, as Silva (2014) observes, the future promise of an end-time 'salvation' provides the incentive in the present for the faith community to prize and cultivate such 'virtues' as humility, holiness, and rectitude, despite experiencing maltreatment from their foes.[21]

3. Excursus: The Kingdom of God in Biblical Perspective

As noted in section 1, background information concerning the kingdom of God serves as a conceptual bridge between the linguistic analysis put forward in section 2 and the descriptive analysis promulgated in sections 3 and 4, respectively. To begin, 'kingdom' in Matthew 5:3, translates the Greek noun *basileia*. The term refers to the rule of God over the entire universe, which according to Hauck (1999), involves a 'sacred paradox'. After all, as Holladay (2012:155) notes, God's reign is a 'future reality' operative in the present. Specialists refer to this dialectical tension as 'inaugurated eschatology'.

Guelich (1982:77) highlights three 'facets' of the divine kingdom, especially within Matthew's Gospel, as follows: (1) the 'redemptive

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[21] Cf. the use of the Greek temporal adverb *nyn* ('now') two times in Luke 6:21.

historical element'; (2) the 'personal and ethical implications'; and, (3) the 'cosmological-universal focus'. The first component anchors the rule of God within the narrative of *past* human existence and activity. The second aspect situates the Lord's reign within the *present* moral circumstance. The third factor calls attention to the *future* implications of the Creator's sovereignty for every creature throughout the cosmos.

An examination of the Judeo-Christian canon depicts God's kingdom as being heavenly,[22] unshakable,[23] and eternal.[24] Scripture describes the richness of God's kingdom in a variety of ways. It is inseparably linked to righteousness, peace, and joy.[25] The kingdom of God is associated with suffering and patient endurance,[26] supernatural power,[27] promise,[28] glory,[29] and the 'renewal of all things'.[30] God's kingdom is not the product of human striving or invention.[31] It is given as a gift[32] and humbly received.[33] The Lord brings his people into his kingdom,[34] makes them worthy of it,[35] and preserves them for it.[36]

An assessment of the scholarly discourse[37] points to the divine kingdom including God's presence and rule over human hearts, regardless of

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[22] Cf. 2 Tim 4:18.
[23] Cf. Heb 12:28.
[24] Cf. 2 Pet 1:11.
[25] Cf. Rom 14:17.
[26] Cf. Rev 1:9.
[27] Cf. 1 Cor 4:20.
[28] Cf. Jas 2:5.
[29] Cf. 1 Thess 2:12.
[30] Cf. Matt 19:28.
[31] Cf. John 18:36.
[32] Cf. Luke 12:32.
[33] Cf. Mark 10:15.
[34] Cf. Col 1:13.
[35] Cf. 2 Thess 1:5.
[36] Cf. 2 Tim 4:18.
[37] The scholarly discourse on the divine kingdom is extensive. Concerning what the biblical and extra-biblical literature teaches about the kingdom of God, cf. Bivin and

where and when they live. This kingdom embraces all who walk in fellowship with the Lord and do his will. The kingdom is governed by God's laws, which are summed up in humankind's duty to love the Lord supremely and love others unreservedly. Moreover, this kingdom, which was foretold by the prophets and introduced by Jesus, would one day displace all the kingdoms of this world, following the return of the Redeemer. God's kingdom is the society in which believers ultimately find perfect congruity, but its realization awaits the end of the age.

In Jesus' day, the concept of 'kingdom' was rooted in the Old Testament. The term most often referred to the reign or royal authority of a king. Jewish people prayed daily for the coming of God's reign. When they prayed for his kingdom, they did not doubt that God presently reigned over his creation; yet, they longed for the day when God would rule unchallenged and all peoples would acknowledge Him. Most Jews, therefore, associated this kingdom with the coming of a Jewish ruler who would lead his people to victory over their enemies.[38] During Jesus' first advent, he inaugurated the kingdom of God.[39] Also, through Jesus' words and works, he clarified the foremost ethical priorities of the divine kingdom.[40]

Tilton (2015); Duling (1992), Marshall (2009); McClain (2001). In terms of what the four Gospels reveal about the divine kingdom, cf. Green (2013a). With respect to Paul's letters and the kingdom of God, cf. Kreitzer (1987). The theme of God's kingdom, as developed in the later New Testament, is examined in Kim (1997). For a treatment of how the theme of God's kingdom fits within the biblical narrative of the history of redemption, cf. Schreiner (2013). Concerning how the divine kingdom theologically relates to the atoning sacrifice of the Son at Calvary, cf. Treat (2014). A comparison of the three leading millennial views of the kingdom can be found in Walvoord (1983). For two views regarding the connection between the kingdom promises and the testaments, cf. Kaiser (1991); Waltke (1991).

[38] Cf. John 6:15; Acts 1:6.

[39] Cf. Matt 4:17.

[40] Cf. Matt 4:12–16, 23–25.

In Jesus' nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, the latter initially operated under the assumption that those who wanted to be right with God had to strive to perfectly obey the Mosaic law. With profound insight, Jesus told Nicodemus that, in order to see God's kingdom, a person must be 'born again' (John 3:3). In this decisive intervention, God miraculously raises the repentant from spiritual death to new life. The desires, goals, and actions of the regenerate are so radically changed that they want to live for God and serve others.

Against this theological backdrop, to see God's kingdom (as a result of the new birth) means to experience fully the redemptive blessings associated with the rule of the Lord in one's life, both in the present and throughout eternity. Even such a respected individual as the rich young ruler needed to be spiritually reborn. Also, God's power alone, not human effort, could transform his sinful heart (as well as that of all people). Ultimately, the kingdom of God can be received only by those with childlike faith. Just as children are dependent on their parents, so believers are dependent on their heavenly Father for eternal life.[41]

4. A Descriptive Analysis of Psalm 1

Before exploring the conceptual connections between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 (in section 6 below), it is necessary to undertake a descriptive analysis of each passage, beginning here with Psalm 1. Perhaps more than any other part of scripture, the Psalms tell readers what it feels like to walk in the way of the Lord. Old Testament specialists, having noted the similarity of forms and themes among many of the Psalms, have tried to classify them according to type. For instance, Psalm 1 is identified with wisdom literature, for it provides instruction about living as the people of God. In this didactic sapiential poem,

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[41] Cf. Mark 10:15.

readers are admonished to abandon the ephemeral trail of evil and follow the enduring path of rectitude.[42]

A further analysis of Psalm 1 indicates that it is a sacred song with sagacity as its predominant theological characteristic. Expressed differently, this psalm shows Proverbs-like thinking and language. The theological outlook is either 'yes' or 'no', with no middling ethical equivocation. Furthermore, life is portrayed as offering only two moral choices, namely, right or wrong. The implication is that a truly wise person would always choose the upright path. The human author[43] realized that not everything turns out well for believers. Still, he understood that saying 'no' to some situations and 'yes' to others was crucial to enjoy the blessings God wants for his people.

Dahood (1965:1) refers to the Psalm 1 as a 'précis' to the rest of the Psalter.[44] This designation is appropriate, for the ode is similar to a map

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[42] The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the discourse in this section dealing with Psalm 1: Anderson (1983); Boice (1994); Botha (2012); Brown (2012); Bullock (1988); Cohen (1992); Cole (2013); Craigie (2004); Creah (1999); Dahood (1965); deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014); Delitzsch (1982); Gillingham (2013); Goldingay (2006); Grogan (2001); Hilber (2009); Høgenhaven (2001); Kidner (1973); Kraus (1988); Leupold (1984); Mays (1994); McCann (1996); Perowne (1989); Raymond (2012); Smith (1996); Terrien (2003); VanGemeren (1991); Whiting (2013).

[43] There is no scholarly consensus concerning the unidentified human author of Psalm 1, due in part to the absence of a superscription or title (hence, it is called an 'orphan' psalm). This journal article surmises that the writer was a godly Hebrew male scholar of the Torah who may have lived in postexilic Judah.

[44] As Cohen (1992:1) observes, it is possible that due to the linguistic and thematic connections between Psalms 1 and 2, they together serve as gateway sacred songs to the Psalter. For an historical survey and critical appraisal of the scholarship dealing with this topic, cf. Cole (2013). For an assessment of how Psalms 1 and 2 have been received in divergent ways within Jewish and Christian traditions, cf. Gillingham (2013). For an examination of the thematic relationship between these two texts, cf. Høgenhaven (2001). For a consideration of Psalms 1 and 2 as a point of entry to the Psalter, cf. Whiting (2013).

showing two divergent roads at the headwaters of human existence—the way of righteousness and the path of wickedness. The writer did not use the Hebrew noun, *ṣăddîq* (which is translated as 'righteous' in v. 6) to describe godly behaviour, though it is clear this is what he had in mind; rather, the writer used the noun,*'ăšrê*, which is translated 'blessed', and which could more literally be rendered 'blessedness[es]'.[45] Perhaps the noun is not found in the singular in the Hebrew text due to the fact that there is no such thing as a single blessing; instead, wherever there is one blessing from God there is another from him, too.[46]

The Psalms arose from a long tradition of Hebrew poetry. This is a valid observation, since most books of the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis, contain at least some fragments of poetry. Hebrew poetry is flexible in form and rhythm; however, most Hebrew poetry exhibits a distinguishing characteristic called parallelism. This term simply means that two (or sometimes three) lines of poetry are, in one way or another, parallel in meaning. Psalm 1:1 is a prime example. The writer used a dramatic threefold parallelism to note what divinely blessed people avoid doing. Specifically, they shun the thinking, practices, and fellowship of those who are ungodly.

Noteworthy is the literary progression to 'walk', 'stand', and 'sit', which possibly denotes successive downward steps in evil activities. On the one hand, there is merit in affirming, as Craigie (2004:60) observes, that the 'three parallel lines' in Psalm 1:1 are 'poetically synonymous'; on the other hand, he seems unnecessarily dismissive of the view that these 'three lines' describe 'three distinct phases in the deterioration of a person's conduct and character'. The same critique can be made of VanGemeren (1991:54), who espouses that the psalmist's 'three descriptions' are not emblematic of either 'three kinds of activities of the

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[45] Cf. n 3.
[46] Cf. Pss 2:12; 34:9; 41:1; 65:4; 84:12; 89:15; 106:3; 112:1; 127:5; 128:1; 144:15.

wicked', or a 'climactic development from walking to sitting', or an 'intensification in the depraved activities of the wicked'.[47]

In agreement with the view that a literary progression is operative in verse 1, what begins as a seemingly innocuous association morphs into brazen participation. There is also a threefold collection of wicked contemplations: 'counsel',[48] 'way', and 'seat'.[49] Finally, three words describe the character of the ungodly: 'wicked', 'sinners', and 'mockers'. The three clauses with their respective cluster of interrelated terms emphasize that people characterised by rectitude and piety shun all association with evildoers and their wicked ways. Also, the upright do not adopt the mores of reprobates as a rule of life. Furthermore, those who are prudent do not persist in the practices of notorious offenders. In short, God's people refuse to associate with those who openly scoff at the Creator, his Word, and his children.[50]

deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:60) draw attention to the sharp numerical disparity in verse 1 between a sole upright person versus the collective mob of the 'wicked', 'sinners', and 'mockers'. From a literary standpoint, it is a 'mismatched equation' in which the 'righteous' individual makes an ongoing, courageous effort to go 'against the traffic' of innumerable evildoers. In fact, it is a lifelong 'struggle' that necessitates 'buffeting against the currents of peer pressure and group-think'. Despite the personal sacrifices that are made, the people of God experience a life filled with temporal joy and eternal fecundity.

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[47] For a detailed affirmation of the 'synonymous parallelism' view and critique of the 'climactic progression' view, cf. Anderson (1974).
[48] Or 'advice'; cf. KJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, NET, Lexham.
[49] Or 'assembly'; cf. NET, Lexham; Ps 107:32.
[50] Cf. Prov 1:22; 9:7–8; 13:1; 14:6; 15:12; 19:29.

The psalmist next focused attention on the 'law of the Lord' (v. 2),[51] and said it is to be the believer's rule of conduct. The Hebrew noun, *tôrâ*, is often rendered as 'law'. While in some contexts this legal nuance is present, it is too narrow and rigid to insist on it in all places where *tôrâ* occurs. The more basic meaning of the noun is 'instruction' or 'teaching' and denotes a way of life, that is, one characterised by piety and virtue.[52] The purpose of the Torah, then, is not merely to present a fixed number of ordinances, edicts, and decrees embedded within it; instead, as divinely revealed instruction, the Torah presents God's will for his children on how to live in an upright manner. Accordingly, God's law is not an irksome restriction, but rather the object of the upright's love and constant study. Virtuous people find true happiness in the revealed will of God, as recorded in his Word.

The implication, then, is that the Hebrew phrase translated the 'law of the Lord' can refer to either teaching or instruction (or both). It is also used of a body of laws, especially the laws of Moses recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament. In verse 2, the writer made the phrase synonymous with the Word of God and stressed that it served as the believers' guide for life. The upright engage scripture in two specific ways. First, they 'delight' in it. The underlying Hebrew noun does not refer to a mere external formalism, but rather to an obedient heart.[53] Second, believers constantly immerse themselves in scripture. The

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[51] Cf. the use of the strong adversative particle כִּי אִם in Ps 1:2 (translated as 'but', 'rather', or 'instead'); Putnam (2002).

[52] In the Septuagint, *tôrâ* is frequently translated using the Greek noun, *nomos*; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Enns (1997); Hartley (1980b); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Liedke and Petersen (1997); López (2006:611); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Swanson (2001b).

[53] *ḥĕ'pĕṣ*; cf. Ps 37:31; Botterweck (1986a:92–3); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Gerleman (1997); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Swanson (2001b); Wood (1980); Talley (1997).

psalmist was referring to thoughtful reflection and study in an attitude of prayer and worship.[54]

Verse 3 contains a vivid simile that is reminiscent of the Edenic garden to describe godly people. They are comparable to flourishing, fruitful trees deliberately placed near and nourished by constant supplies of water.[55] The writer possibly had in mind the desert date-palm tree, due to its craving for water, its stately growth, its evergreen foliage, and its valuable fruit. The Hebrew phrase rendered 'streams of water' could denote either natural streams or irrigation channels. Regardless, without this constant and reliable supply of life-sustaining hydration, a desert tree would quickly wither and die under the sun's scorching heat. The biblical truth being communicated is that the upright are sustained by bountiful supplies of God's grace. Such is drawn from their vital union with him through worship, prayer, and fellowship.[56]

Not only are the righteous filled with joy and able to stand up under hardship, but also their multitudinous endeavours flourish. The Hebrew verb translated 'prospers' (v. 3) denotes outcomes that are successful and thriving.[57] In a manner of speaking, believers regularly produce 'fruit', like a well-watered tree. The psalmist may have been thinking about such material benefits as a large family, influence in the community, and a robust income. The ancient Israelites, living centuries before the time of the Messiah, did not have a complete understanding of eternal life. So,

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[54] The Hebrew verb, *hgh*, which is translated 'meditates' (Ps 1:2), denotes reading Scripture attentively, including the reciting of verses in a low or barely audible voice; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Negoiță (1978); Swanson (2001b); Van Pelt and Kaiser (1997); Wolf (1980).

[55] Cf. Ps 92:12–14; Jer 11:19; 17:7–8; Ezek 17:5–10; 19:10; 47:12.

[56] Cf. Pss 52:8; 92:12.

[57] *ṣlḥ*; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Hartley (1980a); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Luc (1997); Sæbø (1997); Swanson (2001b).

they tended to think that rewards and punishments were always given in this life.[58] From a New Testament perspective, the faithful discern that sometimes justice has to wait until the next life; nevertheless, it remains true that the righteous would prosper—if not now, then eventually in the eternal state.[59]

In verses 4 through 6, the psalmist sets forth an acute disparity between the righteous and the 'wicked'. The latter translates a Hebrew noun that refers to those guilty of criminal, impious activity. Additionally, the term points to an unrelenting, brazen way of life.[60] As noted above, the godly are like firmly rooted, verdant, and bounteous trees. In contrast,[61] evildoers—who shamelessly scorn the Lord, the Tanakh, and the upright[62]—are like the lifeless and rootless 'chaff' (v. 4) on a threshing floor and which is swept away by the slightest breeze. Worthless, insubstantial husks of grain scattered by an afternoon 'wind' provide a common Old Testament figure for the sudden destruction of reprobates.[63] Moreover, chaff describes both their disposition and demise.

Verse 5 declares that the real character of the godless would be revealed in a future time of 'judgment'. In point of fact, since they were unstable and ephemeral, the 'wicked' would be powerless to hold their ground when the Creator separated them from the upright in the eschatological day of reckoning.[64] It is important to note that the psalmist was not just referring to the Lord's end-time decree of condemnation, but also to all

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[58] Cf. Gen 24:35; Josh 1:8; 1 Kings 3:11–13.

[59] Cf. Hab 2:2–3; 3:16; Matt 6:33.

[60] *rāšāʿ*; cf. Carpenter and Grisanti (1997); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Livingston (1980); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Ringgren (2004:1); Swanson (2001b); van Leeuwen (1997).

[61] Cf. the use of the strong adversative particle כִּי אִם in Ps 1:4 (translated as 'but', 'rather', or 'instead'); Putnam (2002).

[62] Cf. Ps 1:1.

[63] Cf. Job 21:17–18; Pss 35:5; 83:13; Isa 17:13; 29:5; Hos 13:3; Zeph 2:2; Matt 3:12.

[64] Cf. Prov 2:22; Eccl 12:14; Nah 1:6.

temporal acts of divine justice against earth's miscreants. Included in this determination of guilt were their unrelenting efforts to exploit and maltreat God's people.

The wicked would have no weight, or influence, in the proceedings of the community of the faithful, which the psalmist referred to as the 'assembly of the righteous' (v. 5). In keeping with an ancient Near Eastern cultural context, evildoers would be unable to gather at the city gate with the community leaders to decide issues of justice. Neither could the profane worship in the temple with the people of God. Those guilty of committing vile acts would become known, making them perennial outsiders.

Verse 6 is literally translated, 'for the Lord knows the way of the righteous', in which the focus is on an established pattern of behaviour.[65] 'Righteous' translates the Hebrew noun, *şăddîq*, which refers to individuals whose conduct is characterised by rectitude and virtue, as well as integrity and blamelessness. Because their behaviour conforms to God's ethical standard, as revealed in the Torah, they enjoy an upright status in his presence.[66] The Septuagint translation uses the Greek adjective, *dikaios*, which approximately reflects the general semantic range of meanings assigned to *şăddîq*.[67] *Dikaios* is derived from the

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[65] Instead of recognizing the Hebrew particle, *kî*, as being explanatory in force (i.e. translated as 'for'; cf. KJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, Lexham), it is grammatically possible to treat it as asseverative (i.e. a solemn affirmation or declaration rendered as 'surely', 'indeed', or 'certainly'; cf. NET; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze 1999).

[66] Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Johnson (2003); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Reimer (1997); Stigers (1980); Swanson (2001b).

[67] Cf. Danker (2000); Hoogendyk (2014); Liddell and Scott (2010); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schneider (1990); Schrenk (1964); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Swanson (2001a).

noun *dikaiosynē*, which is commonly translated 'righteousness' and refers to what is in accordance with established moral norms.[68]

In a legal sense, righteousness means to be vindicated or treated as just. From a biblical perspective, God's character is the definition and source of righteousness. As a result, the righteousness of human beings is defined in terms of God's holiness. Because the Lord solely provides righteousness, it cannot be produced or obtained by human efforts. God makes his righteousness available to all people without distinction. Just as there is no discrimination with the Creator in universally condemning all people as sinners, so he does not show partiality by offering righteousness to one particular ethnic group. The Lord freely gives it to people—regardless of race or gender—when they trust in the Messiah.[69]

In the New Testament, the Greek verb, *dikaioō*, which is commonly rendered 'justified', signifies a court setting, with a judge declaring an individual 'not guilty'. The idea of justification comes from a judge pronouncing someone to be righteous or innocent of a crime. The word has a technical forensic application of a one-time rendering of a positive judicial verdict. In Paul's letters, he used the term to refer to God's declaration that the believing sinner is righteous because of the atoning work of the Messiah on the cross.[70]

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[68] Cf. Danker (2000); Hoogendyk (2014); Kertelge (1990); Liddell and Scott (2010); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schrenk (1964); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Swanson (2001a).

[69] The literature dealing with the concept of 'righteousness' from a biblical and theological perspective is extensive. In addition to the pertinent lexical sources cited throughout this section, the following are representative, summary treatments from various ecclesial and doctrinal perspectives: Diehl (2001:1033–4); Erickson (2013:883–90); Horton (2011:637–43); Mueller 1934:367–83); Seifrid (2000:740–5); Toon (1996:687–9).

[70] Cf. Danker (2000); Liddell and Scott (2010); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schrenk (1964); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Swanson (2001a).

On one level, God's knowledge of the 'righteous' (Ps 1:6) concerns his perceiving and taking note of their demeanour, priorities, and actions and recompensing them accordingly;[71] yet, on another level, it is possible to extend the lexical nuance of the Hebrew verb, *yd'*, to include such concepts as 'watch over', 'guard', and 'protect'.[72] In this case, greater interpretive weight is given to the trajectory of their temporal existence, along with the felicitous outcome of their eternal future.

The above option corresponds well with the second half of verse 6, particularly its declaration that the fate of the 'wicked' terminates in desolation. deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:64) aptly surmise that the 'road' of one's 'own choosing leads only' to one's 'own destruction'. Concededly, malcontents eventually die and because of their villainy are permanently cut off from the upright;[73] even so, the destiny of evildoers goes beyond just the idea of perishing to include that of eternal ruin.[74]

5. A Descriptive Analysis of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

The preceding section undertook a descriptive analysis of Psalm 1. The investigation continues in the present section with a descriptive analysis of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. At the outset of Jesus' public ministry, He announced that God's kingdom was drawing near (Matt 4:17). What attitudes and actions were appropriate for a citizen of God's

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[71] Cf. KJV, NASB, ESV, Lexham; Josh 3:4; Job 21:14; Ps 67:2; Isa 42:16; Jer 5:4–5.

[72] Cf. NRSV, NIV, NET; Job 23:10; Botterweck (1986b:468–9); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Fretheim (1997); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Lewis (1980); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schottroff (1997); Swanson (2001b).

[73] Cf. KJV, NRSV, NASB, Lexham; Prov 12:26; 15:9.

[74] Cf. NIV, NET; Ps 146:9; Prov 4:19; Jer 12:1.

kingdom? The Messiah answered this question in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount (or SOM; chaps. 5–7).[75] Although Jesus' primary audience would have been his disciples, there was a larger crowd of people who listened to him teach (7:28). The ethics Jesus taught in his address contrasted sharply with the sterile, inert legalism of his religious critics. Because the Pharisees and scribes coveted external forms of righteousness, Jesus launched his oration by decrying such an approach to life.[76]

There are two views regarding when and where the SOM was preached. One group asserts that it is a compendium of various teachings that were given on different occasions in several places. A second group maintains the address was delivered at one time early in Jesus' ministry and in one location (e.g. on the slope of a mountain near Capernaum). Portions of the SOM are similar to Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (or SOP; Luke 6:20–49). Some conjecture these passages signify two different messages given on separate occasions, while others surmise the two passages represent the same message. According to the second view, Luke

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[75] The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the discourse in this section dealing with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12: Davies and Allison (1988); Betz (1995); Blomberg (1992); Bock (1994); Boring (1995); Carson (1984); Culpepper (1995); Ellis (1983); France (2007); Geldenhuys (1983); Guelich (1982); Hagner (2000); Hendriksen (1973); Holladay (2012); Howell (2011); Keener (1999); Lenski (1964); Liefeld (1984); Luz (2007); Marshall (1983); McNeile (1980); Morris (1974); Nolland (2005); Osborne (2010); Plummer (1982); Powell (1996); Turner (2008); Witherington (2006); Zimmerli (1978).

[76] Guelich (1982:60, 66) draws attention to the scholarly debate concerning whether the SOM should be interpreted as either 'kerygma' or 'didache', 'law' or 'gospel', and 'ethical' or 'eschatological'. In this essay, such sharp, binary distinctions are not emphasized; instead, it is affirmed that a dynamic interplay between each of these elements is at work within the literary matrix of the SOM.

presented an abbreviated version of the longer oration recorded in Matthew.[77]

Presumably, the 'crowds' of Matthew 5:1 who came to hear Jesus' sermon are the same as the 'large crowds' of 4:25 who accompanied Jesus.[78] The throng journeyed from at least a 100-mile radius of the territory to listen to Jesus (5:2). As the Master Teacher, Jesus employed the normal sitting posture of a Jewish rabbi.[79] God's supreme Old Testament revelation—the law—was given by Moses, accompanied by thunder and lightning, from Mount Sinai.[80] Jesus, who is infinitely greater than Moses,[81] also delivered the SOM from a mountain region; yet, it remains unclear exactly where Jesus gave his oration.[82] A traditional site, however, is on a hillside near Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. If so, then, part of the 'crowds'

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[77] For a detailed synopsis and assessment of the scholarship concerning the relationship between the SOM and SOP, cf. Bock (1994:931–44).

[78] Osborne (2010:165) envisions the presence of an 'inner circle' of Jesus' disciples (esp. the Twelve) functioning as 'active' listeners. In contrast, the throng comprised an 'outer circle' of 'passive' listeners.

[79] Cf. Matt 13:1–2; 23:2; 24:3; 26:55; Luke 2:46; 4:20–21. Also, compare Luke 6:17, which depicts Jesus as standing while He ministered to large numbers of people.

[80] Cf. Exod 19:9, 16–19; 20:18; Deut 5:4–5, 22, 23, 26; Heb 12:18–19.

[81] Ellis (1983:111) draws attention to various 'Jewish traditions' that portrayed the 'Messiah' as an authoritative 'interpreter of the Torah' or Mosaic legal code. This individual was also depicted as the premier disseminator of a 'new Torah', in which the divine oracles were clarified. This is the same law that Jesus said he came to fulfill, not abolish (cf. Matt 5:17), and which finds its culmination in him (cf. Rom 10:4). Jesus perfectly obeyed the law and brought to pass its types and prophecies. Also, in Jesus, the law finds its significance and continuity. Jesus emphasises the true meaning and spirit of the law, which is a reflection of God's righteous character. Through the Saviour's ministry of teaching and his redemptive work on the cross, those who are united to him by faith are able to understand and apply the precepts of scripture, as expressed in the law.

[82] As elsewhere in Matthew, the Evangelist literally referred to 'the mountain' (i.e. by using the definite article), yet without specifically identifying either its name or location; cf. 14:23; 15:29; 28:16.

(4:25; 5:1) Jesus drew came from the thousands of people who lived in the cities and smaller settlements that dotted the Sea of Galilee's coastline during the first century CE.

At various times in history, there have been common misconceptions made about the SOM. One view is that it is nothing more than a call to social action. A second option regards the oration simply as a list of expectations to fulfill to secure happiness. A third stance asserts Jesus' address is not applicable for the present era, but only for a future kingdom age. These contrasting perspectives notwithstanding, the lexical data analyzed in section 2 suggests that both a present and future focus are in view. Moreover, it was surmised that believers experience God-given joy, regardless of whether the realms of existence are sacred or secular, and whether the context is temporal and physical or eternal and metaphysical.

As observed in section 1, the recurrence of the term rendered 'blessed' in Matthew 5:3–12 indicates that it is a central leitmotif of the passage. Keener (1999:165) clarifies that Jesus' maxims fit well within a 'Palestinian Jewish milieu'.[83] To recap the analysis appearing in section 2, 'blessed' conveys the idea of being the privileged recipient of God's favour and enjoying a happier end than the wicked. Betz (1995:94) labels the marcarisms as anticipatory, 'eschatological verdicts'. On one level, the believers' experience of God's favour and approval is a potential, present reality; yet, on another level, the believers' state of blessedness serves as a prelude to the full and complete manifestation of 'divine justice' in the kingdom age.

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[83] Cf. Ps 2:12; 32:1–2; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4–5, 12; 94:12; 112:1; 119:1–2; 128:1; Prov 8:34; Isa 56:2; Jer 17:7; Dan 12:12; Bar 4:4; 1 En 99:10; 2 En 42:6–14; 44:5; Ps Sol 4:23; 5:16; 6:1; 10:1; Sir 25:8–9.

The Messiah pronounced his first blessing on the 'poor in spirit', in which the prepositional phrase is a dative of reference or sphere.[84] Accordingly, Jesus directed his attention to the realm of the human spirit as the place where a humble attitude is manifested.[85] These are believers who, having been stripped of their own securities, feel deeply their need for God.[86] The Saviour's redemption, not their own presumed goodness, is the basis for their present and future citizenship in heaven. In Greek thought, humility tended to be a negative trait that suggested weakness and a lack of worth or dignity. Jesus, however, in concert with Second Temple Judaism,[87] made it a cornerstone of Christian character.[88]

The attitude and lifestyle Jesus enjoined in the first Beatitude is foundational to all the other virtues he commended in the subsequent Beatitudes.[89] For instance, believers cannot mourn without recognising how unable they are to handle life in their own strength (v. 4). They cannot be meek unless they humbly acknowledge their need for gentleness (v. 5). Believers cannot long for righteousness if they proudly view themselves as already righteous (v. 6). They cannot be merciful without recognising their need for God's mercy (v. 7). Believers cannot be pure in heart if their thoughts and emotions are filled with pride (v. 8). They cannot be peacemakers if they arrogantly assert that their way is always right (vs. 9). Finally, they cannot stand up under persecution without Christlike humility (vv. 10–12).

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[84] Greek: *tō pneumatic.*
[85] Cf. Luke 6:20, which narrows the focus to those who are materially impoverished.
[86] Cf. Isa 57:15; 61:1; 66:2.
[87] Cf. Prov 3:34; Isa 57:15; Zeph 2:3; Zech 9:9; Ant 3:212; Sir 3:17.
[88] Cf. Matt 18:4; 23:12; Luke 18:14.
[89] Despite numerous approaches to determine the genre, structure, and number of the Beatitudes, no consensus has emerged among specialists. It is beyond the scope of this essay to resolve these longstanding, debated issues.

Jesus pronounced his second blessing on the mournful, whom he promised would receive God's comfort both now and in the eschaton.[90] 'Those who mourn' (v. 4) weep, not only due to the presence of injustice throughout society, but also because they have transgressed against the Lord.[91] Furthermore, they cry in confession and repentance, which are a reflection of their humble spirit. These believers do not look to unsaved humanity to right all wrongs and defend the downtrodden. Similarly, human rulers are not seen as the linchpin for establishing eternal satisfaction, joy, and comfort; rather, these verities are only found in baptismal union with the Saviour. For this reason, the mournful come to Jesus in humility and faith, confessing their sins. In turn, he enters their lives and abides there with the assurance of his forgiveness and the promise of his vindication.

Jesus gave his third blessing to the 'meek' (v. 5) and pledged to give them the renewed earth as an eschatological inheritance.[92] Meekness has two aspects. On the one hand, the meek bear up under provocations, control their feelings, and refuse to get even; on the other hand, they are courageous, generous, and courteous. They put others first, not themselves. Here readers find Jesus explaining the values of the end-time kingdom he announced. Relationships, possessions, information, prayer, money, and power are a few of the categories he redefined from God's perspective. Jesus showed that following him involves radical change. For many believers this means undoing the way they have always acted and reconsidering traditional sources of wisdom from their family, friends, and culture. To become like Jesus requires believers to do a toughminded review of their moral values and lifelong goals and dreams.

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[90] Cf. Isa 61:2; Rev 7:17; 21:4.

[91] Cf. Luke 6:21, in which the reference to those who 'weep' at this moment in time parallels the mournful in Matthew 5:4.

[92] Cf. Ps 37:9, 11, 29; Isa 61:7.

Jesus next blessed those who longed for 'righteousness' (v. 6) and promised to fulfill their desires at the end of the age.[93] Matthew's Gospel does not use *dikaiosynē* ('righteousness') in the strictly forensic sense of being declared not guilty in the sight of God. Admittedly, the Matthean nuance does not contradict the notion of imputed righteousness found in Paul's writings. Even so, consonant with the statements conveyed in section 4, the primary focus here is on attitudes and actions that align with God's holy character. On one level, the emphasis is on desiring God above all things and seeking to be in a harmonious relationship with him and others; on another level, while greed, injustice, and violence consume the unsaved, believers yearn for God to bring about social justice and goodness both temporally and eternally.

In the preceding Beatitudes there seems to be a fourfold logical progression. First, believers admit their spiritual bankruptcy (v. 3). Second, recognising themselves as 'poor in spirit' causes them to 'mourn' (vs. 4) their condition. Third, because they grieve over their sorrowful state, they come to a correct notion of themselves, which is to be humble and meek (v. 5). Fourth, by accepting the appraisal arrived at in verses 3 through 5, they are ready to 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' (v. 6).

Given the above, it is appropriate that Jesus blessed the 'merciful' (v. 7) and declared they would one day be treated with 'mercy'. This verse is referring to the presence of a gracious disposition toward others, even when mistreated.[94] Specifically, the merciful are kind, charitable, and ready to sympathise with the sufferings of the afflicted. They long for the vindication of the righteous, but are not harsh and cruel. Also, they seek to be generous to all by showing the love of God without partiality or

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[93] Cf. Luke 6:21, which restricts Jesus' declaration to those who experience hunger in the present.
[94] Cf. Matt 6:12; Luke 6:36; 11:4; Jas 2:13; 1 Clem 13:2.

preconditions. The merciful receive God's favour in the temporal and eternal realms, for they are the beneficiaries of his mercy.

Jesus focused the sixth Beatitude on the 'pure in heart' (v. 8)[95] and promised that eventually they would 'see God'.[96] The focus here is on being genuine and honest in all one's dealings. Such purity requires spiritual discipline, self-control, and a single-minded focus in renouncing self-love for the love of God. Sin is the enemy of moral purity, and popular ideas and activities conspire to undo it. Furthermore, the world ridicules and taunts the virtuous for not seeking pleasure; but rather than amusement, in the eternal state the pure receive the greatest gift of all, namely, a personal encounter with the living God. When the penitent come to know the Father through faith in the Son, they are truly fulfilled.

In the seventh Beatitude, Jesus pronounced God's approval on the 'peacemakers' (v. 9).[97] In referring to them as 'children of God', Jesus meant they already were beloved members of the Creator's everlasting family.[98] Peacemakers do not merely stay cool, calm, and collected, but

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[95] Cf. Ps 51:10; 73:1; Prov 22:11; 2 Bar 9:1; 2 En 45:3; Test Ben 8:2; Test Jos 4:6.

[96] As Hendriksen (1973:277–8) clarifies, the experience of seeing God is technically known as the 'beatific vision' (in Latin, *visio beatifica*; cf. Exod 24:9–11; Job 19:26; Pss 11:7; 17:15; 24:3–6; 42:2; 63:2). Although the Mosaic law is holy (cf. Rom 7:12), it could only provide an incomplete understanding of God (cf. Heb 1:1–2). In addition, He who 'lives in unapproachable light' (1 Tim 6:16) has never been seen in the fullness of His glory by human eyes (John 1:18; cf. Exod 33:20; 1 John 4:12). The only exception is Jesus (John 6:46). All that the law anticipated and declared is embodied in the Messiah. He is both the 'one and only son' (1:18), but also 'God' made in his 'human likeness' (Phil. 2:7). John 1:18 uses the Greek noun, *kolpos* to declare that the Son abides in intimate relationship with the Father (as well as the Spirit). Accordingly, the Son has made the Father known to humankind. Only the Son, then, could reveal the essential being of the Godhead, for the Messiah alone is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), the 'exact representation of [God's] being' (Heb 1:3), and the One in whom 'all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form' (Col 2:9). For this reason, Jesus said to Philip, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

[97] Cf. Ps 34:14; 2 En 52:11.

[98] Cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:4–7; Eph 1:5.

also proactively work for peace within their families, schools, churches, businesses, and communities. Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker,[99] for he destroyed the enmity between sinners and God.[100] Jesus not only brings believers peace with God, but also heals their broken relationships.[101]

In the final Beatitudes, Jesus declared that God's favour abided on the 'persecuted' (v. 10) and promised them the eschatological divine 'kingdom'.[102] This outcome repeats the promise Jesus made in verse 1 to the 'poor in spirit'. Together, verses 1 and 10 function as an inclusio (or bracketing) for the intervening verses. Furthermore, verses 3 through 6 primarily concern the believers' relationship with God, whereas verses 7 through 10 deal with their interactions with other people. This thematic emphasis parallels the Decalogue, in which the first half of the Ten Commandments spotlight the proper way to relate to the Creator and the second half shifts the focus to one's fellow human beings.[103]

Verses 11 and 12 elaborate further on what Jesus' broached in verse 10. Specifically, he taught that when believers upheld truth, rectitude, and goodness, they would be slandered and insulted (v. 11). Such persecution arises because of taking a stand for righteousness and being known as a follower of the Messiah. Jesus gave two reasons his harassed followers could accept their circumstances with an attitude of joy (v. 12). First, they ought to realise that their eternal reward would exceed their wildest

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[99] Cf. Isa 9:6.
[100] Cf. 2 Cor 5:18–19; Eph 2:13–18.
[101] Cf. Rom 5:1.
[102] Cf. the parallel rendition of Jesus' statements in Luke 6:22–23, 26.
[103] For a comparative analysis of the Ten Commandments and the Matthean Beatitudes, cf. Chan (2012). The author utilizes virtue tradition as his mode of exposition. He also engages such luminaries as Aquinas and Calvin, along with the Confucian tradition, to round out his disquisition.

expectations. Second, they could recall that God's enemies also mistreated his 'prophets'.[104]

6. The Conceptual Connections Between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

The preceding two sections embark on a descriptive analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12, respectively. This pivotal information, in turn, provides the basis for discerning the conceptual connections between these two seminal passages in the Judeo-Christian canon. To begin, Psalm 1 describes what it is like to walk in the way of the Lord. Similarly, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 relate what it means to live as a follower of the Saviour. In keeping with the observation made by Powell (1996:460), these two texts augur 'eschatological rewards for the virtuous', as well as 'reversals' for the impious.

Furthermore, common to both passages is an awareness that a flourishing life is deeply rooted in the soil of God's Word. Psalm 1 uses the intensive masculine plural construct of the Hebrew noun, *'ăšrê*, which can be rendered 'blessedness[es] to indicate that wherever there is one blessing from God there is another from him. Correspondingly, in the Beatitudes, Jesus does not restrict his discourse to highlight only one form of blessing; rather, he accentuates a series of interconnected blessings graciously bestowed by the Creator on the righteous.

Psalm 1 draws a sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The former enjoy God's favour, both temporally and eternally. In contrast, the impious experience the Creator's judgment, especially for

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[104] Cf. 1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14; 2 Chron 24:21; 36:15–16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30; 20:2; 26:20–24; Ant 10:38; Asc Isa 2:16; 5:1–14; 2 Bar 52:6; 4 Bar 9:21–32; Jub 1:12; 2 Macc 7:9; 14:38; 4 Macc 9:29; 18:3; Matt 23:32–37; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15.

their maltreatment of the upright. Even if this dire outcome is not evident in this life, it is inescapable in the eschaton. Similarly, the Beatitudes reveal that the destiny of the Messiah's followers is characterized by unspeakable delight, both in the present and at the end of the age. Not even evildoers can rob believers of the Saviour's abiding and sustaining presence. He graces them with fecundities that can neither be purchased with money nor wiped out by malevolent forces.

The above observations indicate that both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 are concerned with the past, present, and future aspects of God's reign. This includes the way in which the Creator enables his spiritual children to flourish both temporally and eternally. For instance, they experience unfathomable joy and peace, even when their circumstance is dominated by loss and grief. Furthermore, they have the God-given assurance that in the eschaton the Lord would vindicate the upright and judge the wicked.

The time horizon, then, in these two portions of scripture is not limited to any specific period of human history. Indeed, each passage, respectively, takes into account the entire arc of God's redemptive plan and kingdom program. There is a sense in which both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 signify apocalyptic manifestos, wherein the aspirations of the upright for a better world are affirmed. The scope and scale extend far beyond the confines of earth to encompass the entire cosmos. This awareness of salvation history incentivizes the believers' valuation and pursuit of such virtues as humility, holiness, and rectitude.

Given what has been conveyed, it is not surprising that both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 articulate a complementary, cohesive, and coherent view of reality. With respect to Psalm 1, there is a stark, binary description of what the end would be for the righteous and the wicked. Specifically, the Creator bequeaths blessedness to the former and

decrees wretchedness to the latter. Likewise, Matthew 5:3–12 discloses that even when the upright encounter hardship and heartache in the present, the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, along with divine consolation, forgiveness, and joy. Concisely expressed, each of these passages envisions an eternal future in which God's people luxuriate in His sacred presence.

7. Conclusion

This journal article undertakes a comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. One incentive for doing so is to advance the field of scholarship concerning the intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments by examining two seminal passages in the Judeo-Christian canon. A second motivation is that this topic has received only a cursory consideration in the academic literature.

The major claim affirmed by the study is that there are discernible connections between the above two passages at the linguistic and conceptual levels. In turn, recognising the latter helps to clarify the meaning and significance of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 for ministers of the Gospel. Admittedly, the overriding premise of this essay cannot be established with mathematical precision. Even so, the candid and objective assessment of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 undertaken in the preceding sections indicates that strong intertextual connections between these two passages are recognisable.

Moreover, there are several ministry-related implications arising from a comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. To be specific, when believers put their faith in the Son, they begin a new life in baptismal union with him. Even after death, this existence centred in the Messiah continues, yet within the glorious heights of heaven. Such

an outcome is appropriate, for those who trust in the Redeemer for eternal life are destined to remain forever in the sacred presence of the triune Creator. In contrast, those who reject God's offer of love may travel down their own road of earthly life as long as believers do on theirs; yet, after that, the wicked receive a sentence of terrible finality leading to eternal doom in unending separation from the Lord.

Furthermore, as the comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 discloses, Jesus' followers should not be shocked when they are slandered, physically harmed, or targeted for malicious rumours. Although believers feel the intense pain of such injustices, they can persevere by holding fast to the promise of God's richest blessings. After all, Jesus said that heaven belongs to the persecuted righteous. By this he meant they would have a place of distinction in the kingdom of God. Concededly, in this present world, many of the Lord's disciples are harassed and abused by others for the cause of the Son. Even though the world may regard them as nobodies, the Father considers them as people of honour to whom he gives nothing less than unending bliss within his glorious temple in heaven.

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Assessing the Normative Value of Selected Narratives from the book of Acts Utilising the Five Hermeneutical Principles of the INCUR Model: How Normative is Acts?

Noel Woodbridge[1]

Abstract

Over the centuries, numerous major theological errors, based on a faulty interpretation of the book of Acts, have crept into the teaching of the church. These errors have had and continue to have a detrimental effect on the church. For this reason, when interpreting the book of Acts, it is important for Bible scholars to pose the following key questions: Should the practices of the early church serve as the norm for our church practices today? Should we derive our key doctrines from the early church history alone? After discussing the nature and purpose of biblical narratives and some general guidelines for interpreting the narrative portions of scripture, the article examines Luke's purpose for writing the book of Acts. In this article the author proposes the INCUR model for assessing the normative value of narrative passages in the Bible. The proposed model covers five hermeneutical principles derived

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

from the work of recognised theologians. When placed together, these hermeneutical principles form an acronym that spells out the word INCUR: (1) Intent: Is the biblical narrative intended to serve as a historical precedent? (2) Non-contradiction: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative contradicted elsewhere in Scripture? (3) Command: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative a command or a description? (4) Uniqueness: Does the biblical narrative describe a unique event in church history? and (5) Reinforcement: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative reinforced elsewhere in scripture? The author chose to use the INCUR model to assess the narratives in the book of Acts, because many false doctrines have arisen during the course of church history, based on the incorrect interpretation of the normative value of certain narratives in this book. However, these hermeneutical principles are equally valid for assessing the normative value of all biblical narratives. After explaining the meaning of each of the five hermeneutical principles of the INCUR model, these principles are then utilised to briefly assess the normative value of selected narratives from the book of Acts. As a result of the assessment, it was concluded that Bible scholars need to be extremely careful when interpreting biblical narratives.

1. Introduction

Jesus warned against false doctrine. In Matthew 7:15 he said, 'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.' Acts 15:1 describes one of the major false doctrines that plagued the early church: 'Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are

circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved'.

The false teachers (sometimes called Judaizers) taught that in order to be saved, Christians also had to observe certain rites of the Jewish Law. They claimed that circumcision and the Law of Moses were still binding on Christians (Williams 2015).

Over the centuries numerous major theological errors, based on the faulty interpretation of the scriptures have crept into the teaching of the church. These errors have had and continue to have a detrimental effect on the church. Since early times false teachers have infiltrated the church, causing divisive and destructive disputes over correct doctrine. In fact, doctrinal disputes have plagued the Christian Church throughout her history (Rogers 2005). In particular, the incorrect interpretation of several narratives from the book of Acts, has led to numerous false teachings. A good example of a false doctrine based on a narrative in the book of Acts is when Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake and he shook it off and did not die (Acts 28:3–5). Wellman indicates that this was a sign that Paul had been sent by Jesus to present the Gospel to others. Those present expected Paul to die (Acts 28:6). However, when he did not die, they knew that he was sent from God. However, nowhere in scripture does it say that Christians should handle snakes and drink poison and not die in order to prove that they are sent by God. Nevertheless, numerous false teachers have taken this verse to build an entire theology around it. In doing so they have erred greatly (Wellman 2014).

In view of such doctrinal errors, the serious Bible scholar needs to ask the following questions: How normative is Acts? Is the book of Acts merely a record of early church history or does it present a model for the church today? Is the book of Acts an interesting narrative of how Christianity began, or can it still be regarded as a normative for today's

church? Should we read the book as 'mainly prescriptive or purely descriptive? 'How relevant is Acts for the life of the 21st century church'? (Voorwinde 2010:33)

According to Osmer, the *normative task* in practical theology asks the question, 'What ought to be going on?' This *normative task* includes 'using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from "good practice"' (2008:4). Practical theology is *normative,* since it has as its goal the formulation of ethical norms, especially the norms of Christian ethics derived from the Bible. It deals with the 'application of God's revelation [The Bible] to the individual and the church' (Duce and Strange 2001:76, 77).

A cursory survey of the book of Acts reveals to the reader 'the problem of normativeness … on almost every page' (Voorwinde 2010:33–34):

- In chapter 1 the apostles had to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot. The names of Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias were presented and they selected the replacement by casting lots (v. 26). Is this the way we should choose church leaders today?
- Chapter 2 opens dramatically with the coming of the Holy Spirit accompanied by physical phenomena: a sound like a *violent wind* blowing and what seemed to be *tongues of fire* came to rest on each of them and they 'began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance' (v. 4). Should we still expect these phenomena today wherever the Gospel breaks new ground or whenever a revival takes place?
- In Acts 2 we are told that the believers shared everything they had: 'They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need' (v. 42). Does this imply that sharing our possessions is an obligation for believers today?

- In Acts 5 the severity of Ananias and Sapphira's judgement is disturbing for us today (v. 1–11). Does God still judge those who lie to a church leader today?
- In Acts 19 when Paul visited Ephesus, he found 12 former disciples of John the Baptist. He 'placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied' (v. 6). Does this imply that tongues and prophecy are a typical experience for Christians sometime after conversion?
- In Acts 28 when Paul was on the island of Malta, 'a snake fastened itself on his hand' (v. 3), but he 'shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects' (v. 5). Should today's Christians be expected to handle snakes in the same manner?

Fee and Stuart (2003:113) point out the danger of trying to derive normative practice from narratives in the book of Acts. When attempting to interpret the teachings of Acts we often lack 'hermeneutical precision'. Several diverse practices, which have been supported on the basis of the book of Acts, have led to much division in the Church, such as infant baptism, believer's baptism, congregational and episcopalian church government, observance of the Lord's Supper every Sunday, the selection of deacons by means of congregational vote, and the selling of all one's possessions (Fee and Stuart 2003:113).

Buchanan (2004) claims that if we only had the book of Acts to teach us what the church should be doing today, we would have such little information that it would be 'prone to widely divergent interpretation'. The problem of deriving norms from narratives is largely due to the fact that it is impossible to determine whether something in a narrative is right or wrong, unless the text includes a clear, explanatory statement in this regard. Hence, it can be concluded that 'narrative is the least-best source

for doctrine or practice'. There are better sources for finding normative doctrine and practice, namely, the epistles (Buchanan 2004).

When studying the book of Acts, it is usually with the intention of observing how the Holy Spirit operated in the lives of the early Christians and how the early church operated. In this regard, Wood (2010:14) asserts that 'The best title for Acts may be the Acts of the Holy Spirit', since in the book of Acts Luke refers to the Spirit more than fifty times.

When interpreting the book of Acts, it is important to pose the following key questions: Should the practices of the early church serve as the norm for our church practices today? Should we derive our key doctrines from early church history alone?

It is beyond the scope of this article to respond to all of the above-mentioned questions. Its purpose is not to present comprehensive solutions for all of the problems raised, but rather to provide biblical hermeneutical principles for interpreting the historical narratives and biblical precedents in the book of Acts that can be used by readers to answer these questions for themselves. This in turn should provide guidelines for interpreting the historical narratives in other portions of scripture.

In this article the author has designed the INCUR model for assessing the normative value of narrative passages in the Bible. The proposed model covers a set of five recognised hermeneutical principles derived from the work of recognised theologians. When placed together, these hermeneutical principles form an acronym that spells out the word INCUR: (1) **I**ntent: This principle relates to the question: Is the biblical narrative intended to serve as a historical precedent? (2) **N**on-contradiction: This principle relates to the question: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative contradicted elsewhere in Scripture? (3) **C**ommand: This principle relates to the question: Is the practice or

doctrine in the biblical narrative a command or a description? (4) **U**niqueness: This principle relates to the question: Does the biblical narrative describe a unique event in church history? and (5) **R**einforcement: This principle relates to the question: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative reinforced elsewhere in scripture? The author chose to use the INCUR model to assess the narratives in the book of Acts, because many false doctrines have arisen during the course of church history, based on the incorrect interpretation of the normative value of certain narratives in this book. However, these hermeneutical principles are equally valid for assessing the normative value of all biblical narratives.

The aim of this article is to assess the normative value of selected narratives from the book of Acts utilising the INCUR model. After explaining the meaning of each of the five hermeneutical principles of the INCUR model, these principles are then utilised to briefly assess the normative value of selected narratives from the book of Acts.

In the next section, attention will be given to the nature and purpose of biblical narratives.

2. The Nature and Purpose of Biblical Narratives

'Narrative is the most common type of literature or genre in the Bible' (Vlach 2012). Over forty percent of the Old Testament consists of narrative. A large portion of the New Testament is also written in the narrative genre (the gospels and Acts) (Fee and Stuart 2014:93) This has led some people to describe the Bible as 'The Story of God' (Bratcher 2013).

Why is there so much narrative in the Bible? Firstly, narratives are easier to remember than learning individual verses. Secondly, narratives teach us what God is like: 'how He deals with people, how people respond to Him in both positive and negative ways, and the consequences of their responses' (Understanding the genre of the books of the Bible 2016). Thirdly, stories are powerful learning tools. Stories provide much pleasure and inspire imitation. They make a great impact on character and conduct. They encourage greater commitment to God (Habenicht and Burton 2004:122).

What are narratives? 'A narrative is a story told for the purpose of conveying a message through people and their problems and situations' (Zuck 1991:128). Fee and Stuart (2014:94) describe narratives as 'purposeful stories retelling the *historical events* of the past that are intended to give meaning and direction for a given people *in the present*'.

A narrative consists of three basic elements: setting, characters, and plot. These elements are not in themselves the purpose of the narrative (Bratcher 2013); they are simply 'the vehicles chosen to communicate the larger purpose … of a narrative' (Vlach 2012).

Besides reporting on the events that occurred, Fee and Stuart explain that the purpose of biblical narratives is to demonstrate how God works in his creation and among his people. They glorify him, assist us to appreciate him, portray his providence and protection, and teach us many lessons about how we should live (1993:79).

The next section will provide some general guidelines on how to interpret the biblical narratives.

3. General Guidelines for Interpreting the Narrative Portions of Scripture

Vlach (2012) points out that 'narratives often do not teach doctrine directly'. This does not mean that 'one cannot learn doctrine from biblical narratives'. He then explains the proper way to interpret biblical narratives: 'Instead of teaching doctrine explicitly and directly like New Testament epistles often do, biblical narratives often illustrate what is taught clearly in other portions of Scripture' (Vlach 2012).

Perez (2010) indicates that, although biblical narratives do not teach doctrine directly, it does not mean that one cannot learn doctrine from them. Although they do not teach doctrine explicitly and directly like the New Testament epistles, they often provide an illustration of what is clearly taught elsewhere in scripture.

Furthermore, narratives do not necessarily prescribe behaviour. It should be remembered that the people in the biblical narratives did not always set a good example. Sometimes the authors simply reported what happened. With a few rare exceptions, such as Joshua, Daniel, and Jesus, most of the key Bible characters had serious flaws. For example, Samson was carnal; David committed adultery; Elijah retreated as a coward from Jezebel; Abraham lied when he said that his wife was his sister; Jacob deceived his father for the birth-right (Vlach 2012). In view of the poor example set by these Bible characters under adverse circumstances, it is advisable not to apply directly their conduct, unless another biblical passage explicitly instructs us to do so.

Parlett (2003) states that when interpreting Old Testament narratives, one should remember that 'narratives are stories of real people who experienced both mistakes and successes'. While sometimes they set

good examples, at other times they set poor examples. Parlett (2003) provides the following guidelines when making a practical application from a narrative section:

- Where they did well, discern what timeless Biblical principles were practised.
- Where they did not do so well, avoid those attitudes that contributed towards their mistakes.
- Where the narratives and the teaching sections correspond, confidently imitate the example that was set.

Vlach (2012) presents the following examples of how to interpret narratives from the Old Testament:

Example 1: 'When Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife, because she wanted to commit adultery with him, it was illustrating the principle of "flee from idolatry" (1 Cor 10:14).'

Example 2: 'In Daniel 3, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the golden image, they were illustrating the principle of "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod 20:3).'

Vlach (2012) maintains that narratives do not provide answers for all of the theological questions that we might have. It should be remembered that 'biblical narratives are not biographies'. They have a specific purpose; they focus 'what the divinely inspired authors wanted to emphasize', for example:

- 'Genesis 1–11 covers thousands of years, Genesis 12–50 covers a few hundred years.'
- 'The gospels spend a disproportionate amount of space on the passion of Jesus.'

- 'John freely admits that in his gospel there were "many other things which Jesus did" that were not recorded (see John 21:25).'

The next section will give attention to Luke's inspired intention for writing the book of Acts.

4. Luke's Purpose in Writing the Book of Acts

It should be remembered that 'the biblical narratives were written by divinely inspired authors who had a purpose in writing their narratives' (Perez 2010). One should therefore avoid interpreting biblical narratives apart from the overall purpose of the authors.

According to Fee and Stuart (2014:115), a comprehensive exegesis of Acts should not only include historical questions such as 'what happened?', but also 'what was Luke's purpose in selecting and shaping the material?'

When studying the book of Acts, the issue of Luke's purpose is important. Fee and Stuart explain why. If it can be shown that the intention of Luke in Acts is to provide a pattern for the church, then that pattern would become normative for all times, namely, what God requires under all circumstances. However, if his intention was something else, then it would require us to pose the hermeneutical questions differently (2014:115).

Trying to discover Luke's intent is particularly difficult, because it is not clear who Theophilus was, and hence we do not know why Luke wrote to him, and secondly because Luke appeared to have varied interests (Fee and Stuart 2014:115).

What was the inspired purpose of Luke for writing the book of Acts? The following observations are important for determining Luke's intention (Fee and Stuart 2014:118–119):

1. The key to understanding Acts revolves around the interest of Luke in the *movement* of the Gospel, 'orchestrated by the Holy Spirit … from its Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented beginnings to its becoming a worldwide, Gentile-predominant phenomenon.'
2. Luke's interest in the *movement* is further confirmed by what he leaves out of the book of Acts. It is clear that he does not have any interest in the 'biographies of the apostles'. Furthermore, once the movement to the Gentiles is in progress, Peter drops almost entirely from the scene and 'Luke's interest in Paul is almost completely in terms of the Gentile mission.'
3. 'There is no other geographical expansion except the one from Jerusalem to Rome.' Other geographic areas are simply ignored.
4. It appears that the interest of Luke is not to standardise everything. For example, usually only two elements are included in conversions: 'The gift of the Spirit and water baptism', but without regard to the order. Luke does not provide a specific example as a model for Christian experience.

Zaspel (2016) briefly explains how Luke's purpose for writing the book of Acts directed his style. His purpose was to record how the early church spread from Jerusalem to the 'uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The fact that his purpose was not doctrinal but historical explains why he failed to explain the differences that arose in the description of 'patterns' in doctrine and practice in the narratives of the book.

The next section will briefly assess the normative value of selected narratives in the book of Acts using the five hermeneutical principles of the INCUR model.

5. A Brief Assessment of the Normative Value of Selected Narratives from the Book of Acts in Terms of the INCUR Model

In the sections below the meaning of each of the five hermeneutical principles of the INCUR model will first be explained, and then utilised to briefly assess the normative value of at least one selected narrative from the book of Acts.

5.1. Intent: Is the biblical narrative intended to serve as a historical precedent?

The normative value of a biblical narrative as a historical precedent is dependent on its intent. It is therefore important for the intent of a biblical narrative to be established, before it can serve as a historical precedent for Christian practice and doctrine today.

MacArthur points out that Acts was never intended to be the main foundation for teaching doctrine in the church. The main intention of the book of Acts was to record the early history of the church and to demonstrate how the traditional church progressed from the old age into the new (MacArthur 1991).

The question arises: Should the details of all the narratives in Acts serve as normative models? Fee and Stuart (2014:126) explain that this is unlikely, 'because most such details are incidental to the main point of the narrative and because of the ambiguity of details from narrative to narrative.'

For example, if Luke intended Acts 6:1–7 to serve as a precedent for the church in selecting leaders, then this practice should be followed by Christians today. However, if it can be established that precedent was not

the intention of the narrative, then its normative value for Christians today should be treated with caution (Fee and Stuart 2014:127).

5.2. Non-contradiction: is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative contradicted elsewhere in scripture?

The Law of non-contradiction is one of the basic laws in classical logic. It states that 'something cannot be both true and not true at the same time when dealing with the same context. For example, the chair in my living room, right now, cannot be made of wood and not made of wood at the same time' (Dictionary of Philosophy 2016).

In terms of this principle one cannot claim to have found an absolute in the book of Acts, if it involves a contradiction (in doctrine or practice) in other passages in the same book or elsewhere in scripture. Voorwinde (2010:38–39) provides the following examples relating to the principle of non-contradiction in the book of Acts:

(1) *How should the church select its leaders?* (practice)

- In order to replace Judas, the apostles cast lots (Acts 1:26).
- The church chose seven deacons. The apostles ratified their choice by laying hands on them (Acts 6:1–6).
- After prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23).
- All of these approaches are 'very different and mutually exclusive'. One cannot cast lots, delegate and appoint leaders simultaneously. Hence, none of these approaches should be 'elevated to an absolute'.

(2) *What shall we do to be saved?* (doctrine)

- After Peter's preaching at Pentecost, the crowd responded, 'What shall we do?' Peter answered, 'Repent and be baptised … and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). Peter's instructions are: First repent and be baptised; then receive the Holy Spirit.
- However, in Acts 10 the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household, 'while Peter was still preaching' (Acts 10:44). Subsequently, 'they broke out in tongues and started praising God'. Only after that did Peter instruct them to be baptised (Acts 10:48).
- Since these two cases are very different one needs to be cautious. 'It's always dangerous to base a doctrine on isolated proof-texts from Acts.'

5.3. Command: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative a command or a description?

In terms of this principle, Fee and Stuart (2014:124) raise the following crucial hermeneutical question: Do the biblical narratives simply provide a *description* of 'what *happened* in the early church' or do they also serve as *commands* (norms) intended to prescribe 'what *must happen* in the ongoing church'?

For good reasons, therefore, Fee and Stuart (2014:124) make the following assumption that unless the Bible explicitly tells us to do something, 'what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way', unless it can be proved that the author intended it to function in that way, based on other grounds.

Based on the above assumption it can be argued that: (a) Narratives don't necessarily prescribe behaviour. Sometimes they're just reporting what happened' (Interpreting biblical narratives 2016); and (b) 'When an

action is commanded, it is far more likely to be normative than when it is merely described' (Voorwinde 2010:38–39; Fee and Stuart 2014:124).

There is clearly a need to distinguish between *descriptions* and *commands* in the book of Acts. In this regard, it is appropriate for Bible scholars to pose the question: Are there examples in the book of Acts of which one may aptly either conclude, 'We must do this,' or 'We may do this'? (Fee and Stuart 2014:124).

(1) *Examples in the book of Acts where action is simply described*

Voorwinde (2010:39–40) notes that in the book of Acts it is recorded that:

- In every town Paul visited he made the synagogue his first stop, provided they had one. However, he never commanded others to do the same.
- After Pentecost the believers sold their property and possessions to alleviate the needs of the poor. However, they were never commanded to do so.

(2) *Example in the book of Acts where action is commanded*

There are several examples in the book of Acts in which people are *commanded* to repent (Voorwinde 2010:40–41):

- At Pentecost Peter calls upon the Jerusalem crowd to repent (Acts 2:38).
- In his sermon in Acts 3:19 Peter issues the same command: '*Repent*, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out and that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.'
- In Samaria Peter presents the same challenge to Simon Magus: '*Repent* of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart' (Acts 8:22).

- In Athens Paul declares: 'God now commands all men everywhere to *repent*' (Acts 17:30).
- From the above verses in the book of Acts it is clear that the call to repent is a universal command to all people everywhere. Hence it cannot be denied that the command is 'as normative as you could possibly wish it to be'.

5.4. Uniqueness: Does the biblical narrative describe a unique event in church history?

In the book of Acts, there is a need to establish whether the Pentecost event was a unique event or a pattern for the Church today. Traditional Pentecostalism stated that 'The baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to salvation and is always identified by speaking in tongues.' Some would rather say, 'Often identified by speaking in tongues' (MacArthur 1991). However, upon closer examination of the book of Acts, this pattern of Spirit-baptism does not hold true. In this regard, Zaspel (2016) compares the following two scenarios. (1) Acts 2 records that the apostles were baptised in the Spirit subsequent to their salvation. (2) However, three thousand others were baptised in the Spirit at the same time as their salvation. Hence the following questions arise: Which of these two narratives is normative? Which example should be the pattern for today?

Is it imperative that receiving the Holy Spirit should be accompanied by speaking in tongues? Biblical evidence reveals that this is unlikely, since in the book of Acts, Spirit-baptism is followed by speaking in tongues on three occasions only (Acts 2:4, 10:44–46, and 19:6). It is clear from 1 Corinthians 12:29–31 that not every believer speaks in tongues. Furthermore, Piper points out that there are at least nine conversion stories recorded in the book of Acts, which never mention a two-step sequence with tongues (8:36; 9:17–19; 13:12, 48; 14:1; 16:14; 17:4, 34).

'This shows how difficult it is to establish a norm from the way things happened back then' (Piper 1984).

Furthermore, several New Testament passages teach that that 'all believers in this age have the Holy Spirit and are regenerated, baptized, indwelt, anointed, and sealed as God's own forever, the moment saving faith is exercised" (Unger 1974:25). In addition, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves of free and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' This verse indicates that all Christians received the baptism of the Spirit, when they believed. 'There is no indication that it is subsequent to salvation' (MacArthur 1991).

The book of Acts clearly covers a unique period in the history of the church – a period of historical transition. Acts 2 describes a unique and unrepeatable act of Spirit-baptism. The uniqueness of this event is supported by the manifestation of 'tongues of fire' on each believer in the pre-Pentecost church (2:2–3). This miracle was not repeated when the Spirit came upon other groups in Acts 8, 10, and 19 (Ross 2011:15).

Zaspel (2016) confirms that Pentecost was an unrepeatable and unique event for the following reasons:

- It marked the birth of the church: as at the beginning of a new era there can be only one day of birth.
- It marked the Spirit of Christ taking residence in his church.
- By virtue of the uniqueness of the event, what happened at Pentecost cannot be the norm for Christians today.
- This unique event was a necessary part of the transition period. Hence these circumstances can never be repeated.

5.5. Reinforcement: is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative reinforced elsewhere in scripture?

There is a need to reinforce commands and practices in the book of Acts by supporting them using other passages from the New Testament. Voorwinde (2010:41) explains this principle as follows: A command or a practice in the book of Acts will carry more weight if it repeats itself in another New Testament passage, such as in Jesus' teachings or in the Epistles. In such cases we are more likely to encounter eternal truths and normative commands.

This principle is confirmed by Stott (2006:21), when he states that we should seek the purpose of God in the Bible mainly in its didactic rather than its descriptive passages. In particular, we should look for it in Jesus' teaching, and in the apostles' sermons and writings, rather than in the pure narratives in the book of Acts.

In his book, *Introduction to the Old Testament historical books*, Howard (1993:50) states that, generally speaking, there is almost no text in the Bible that will contain the whole range of what scripture teaches on a particular topic. 'Scripture must be checked with Scripture'. This applies especially to historical narratives in the Bible, because they usually teach doctrine indirectly. Hence, there is a need to compare what is being taught in individual narratives with the teachings in other portions of scripture.

In terms of this principle, what Scripture describes as having happened to people does not necessarily apply to Christians today. On the one hand, passages that are descriptive are valuable only to the degree that they are interpreted by the didactic passages of the New Testament. On the other hand, it is evident that historical narratives from the Bible are not completely worthless with regard to didactic value.

(1) *An example of where a practice in Acts is reinforced in an Epistle*

The last requirement of the Jerusalem Council was that gentile believers should 'abstain from food sacrificed to idols' (Acts 15:29). This command is raised again by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:1–13. Rather than appealing to the decision made at the Jerusalem Council, Paul uses a more pastoral approach by asking the Corinthians to consider those with a weaker conscience. This example of the Jerusalem decree reveals a very important principle: 'A command or a practice in Acts can only be considered normative if is reinforced elsewhere in the New Testament' (Voorwinde 2010:43).

(2) *An example of where a practice in Acts is not reinforced in an Epistle*

Luke reports that 'all the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need' (Acts 2:44–45). This appears to have been the standard practice in the Jerusalem church, since in Acts 4:25 we read that 'they distributed to each as anyone had need'. It seems that there were no needy persons among them. Is this a model for the church today? In 2 Corinthians 8:1–7 and 9:6–15 Paul provides clear instructions to the Corinthians about giving. He tells them to give 'systematically, generously and cheerfully'. He does not instruct them to sell private property (Voorwinde 2010:45).

6. Conclusion

In this article an attempt was made to answer the following questions: How normative is Acts? Is it prescriptive or descriptive? Are some passages in Acts prescriptive (being normative for all time) and other passages in the book simply descriptive (of historical interest only; stories to be enjoyed, revealing God's sovereignty), but not relevant to the life of the church today? (Voorwinde 2010:55).

In particular, this article conducted a brief assessment of the normative value of selected narratives from the book of Acts, utilising the five hermeneutical principles of the INCUR model: (1) **I**ntent: Is the biblical narrative intended to serve as a historical precedent? (2) **N**on-contradiction: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative contradicted elsewhere in Scripture? (3) **C**ommand: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative a command or a description? (4) **U**niqueness: Does the biblical narrative describe a unique event in church history? and (5*) **R**einforcement: Is the practice or doctrine in the biblical narrative reinforced elsewhere in scripture?

As a result of the above assessment, it can be concluded that Bible scholars need to be extremely careful when interpreting biblical narratives, especially from the book of Acts. In fact, when interpreting a command or practice from any book in the Bible, it would be helpful if scholars could conduct a thorough assessment of the normative value of the relevant biblical narrative, using recognised hermeneutical principles, such as those included in the INCUR model. Failure to apply these recognised hermeneutical principles, when interpreting biblical narratives, could cause the church to incur some of following consequences: dangerous false doctrines, confusing church practices, and damaging church divisions and splits. Most importantly, it could dishonour the Name of Jesus and grieve the Holy Spirit. The INCUR model has therefore been proposed by the author as a contribution towards countering untruth and disunity in the Church.

It should be noted that even if it can be demonstrated that large portions (the narrative sections) of the book Acts are not prescriptive for doctrine, they are still more than just 'interesting narratives'. Since the book of Acts is part and parcel of inspired scripture, even if its narratives are not prescriptive for doctrine, they still hold greater value than merely being

interesting. Reading about the exploits of great preachers and missionaries like Billy Graham, Hudson Taylor and William Carey can be interesting, enjoyable and illustrate the sovereignty of God. However, the book of Acts holds far more spiritual benefits for us than this.

In fact, the book of Acts is of great value to the Christian for many reasons. It is a record of early church history, it has a strong missionary emphasis, it contains many biographical details, and it is of great spiritual value. 'To read the book of Acts will send us to our knees. It will give us a deeper love for the Lord, fire us with new zeal, and stir us to be active in the Lord's service' (Dixon 2016).

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Review of Lioy, *Facets of Pauline Discourse in Christocentric and Christotelic Perspective*

Annang Asumang[1]

> Lioy Dan 2016. *Facets of Pauline Discourse in Christocentric and Christotelic Perspective*. New York: Peter Lang.

1. Introduction

Dan Lioy is Senior Research Manager in the Postgraduate School of South African Theological Seminary, and also Professor at the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University, both in South Africa. As an ordained minister in the North American Lutheran Church and faculty member of the Institute of Lutheran Theology, he writes from a Lutheran perspective to contribute to the Publisher's *Studies in Biblical Literature* Series. This book is the latest of Prof. Lioy's prodigious publications that span studies in both Old and New Testaments and the wider fields of theological and theo-scientific disciplines. In his preface, the Series Editor describes the work as part of a series aimed at making 'available to scholars and institutions, scholarship of high order, and which will make significant contribution to the ongoing biblical

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

discourse' (p. ix). With its enormous breadth and depth of excellent scholarship, the book does not disappoint in fulfilling this objective.

In terms of genre, the monograph belongs to the burgeoning category of high quality studies in Biblical Theology which are at the same time also keenly attuned to contributing to contemporary reflections in Christian pastoral and ecclesiological circles. The monograph makes its contribution to these recent endeavours with its unique focus on the key themes in Paul's theological discourse. Its primary thesis is that Paul regarded Christ as the central and defining goal of his discourse. Yet, this simplicity of thesis belies the profound depth of the theological arguments and the astute exegetical judgements which the author brings to bear on the biblical texts in order to unearth the scriptural, conceptual, cultural and socio-historical basis upon which Paul builds this Christocentricity and Christotelicity. Furthermore, Lioy's intricate investigation into some of the facets of Paul's discourse enables him to draw out a number of implications for contemporary reflections on Pauline theology.

The book has eleven chapters, the first acting as a prologue and the last as its epilogue. Though portions of some of the chapters are revised iterations of articles published previously in peer-reviewed scholarly journals, the overall tone of the monograph is one of erudite freshness combined with its critical engagement of the current intellectual and ecclesial discourse on the nature of Pauline theology. There is also an extensive forty-page bibliography, followed by separate indexes categorised according to subjects and ancient sources.

This extended review aims to provide a précis of the various insights of this important contribution to Pauline studies, and will also at some points engage a number of the key issues it raises for the purpose of exploring their further implications. What follows then is a section

summarising the main contours of its argument, contributions and thoughts. I shall then conclude by highlighting a couple of the key strengths of the book.

2. Summary of the Argument of the Monograph

2.1. Prologue

Lioy's prologue provides the scholarly context for his study followed by a general overview of his thesis. As a way of introducing the unique features of his methodology and distinctive contribution, he first surveys some of the recent scholarly discussions on Christology and its place in Pauline theology. Fee's landmark study (2007, 1) in which he adopts a combination of exegetical and theological analyses to argue that 'Christ is the beginning and goal of everything for Paul, and thus is the single great reality along the way' serves as Lioy's starting point. While some of Fee's conclusions are similar to Lioy's, the latter additionally adopts a 'narrative approach' (p. 3) in his analysis, thus bringing the features of Paul's conceptual line of logic to bear on, and augment insights gained from the apostle's explicit statements. This perceptive move by Lioy more likely yields a richer appreciation of Pauline theology.

In contrast to Fee, Tilling's study (2012) points to the complicated context of polytheistic Greco-Roman pagan religion and monotheistic Jewish Second Temple Judaism as the key milieu for understanding Paul's divine-Christology. While Lioy also takes this complex religious background into account, he regards it as occupying a less primary role in favour of the wider hermeneutical context set by the Old and New Testaments' theological trajectories within which Paul more closely interacted. Lioy concludes the survey by pointing to his thesis that in Paul's view, 'Jesus is the nexus, apex, and consummation of the

redemptive-historical, narrative arc of Scripture' (p. 5). With this canonical and biblical theological methodological approach of his study laid out, Lioy proceeds to provide an account of how each of the subsequent chapters contributes to his thesis.

2.2. Chapter Two

The second chapter provides a biblical foundation to the study by exegetically examining the creation narrative of Genesis 1–3. Lioy's premise for this chapter is that 'To more fully appreciate the Christological, eschatological, and apocalyptic themes found in the Pauline discourse, it is vital first to consider what Genesis 1 through 3 reveals about the old, Adamic creation' (p. 15). This is because that narrative provides the background for the apostle's Christocentric and Christotelic theology. While Lioy reflects on some of the implications of scientific advances for interpreting this portion of scripture, his biblical and theological exegesis makes traditional conclusions in line with his conservative hermeneutics. Thus he underlines the *Imago Dei* nature of human beings, the fall of Adam and its immense consequences both for humans and all of God's creation, God's remedy for sin and the promise of the Messiah in the proto-evangelium. Lioy concludes the chapter by arguing that at its root, the creation narrative in Genesis is theocentric, and underlines the creative power of God, whereas Pauline creation theology was essentially Christocentric.

In my view, this conclusion could have received a bit more in-depth exploration as to the exact terms in which Paul viewed the Genesis creation account as was available to him and is reflected in passages such as Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. To be fair to Lioy, it is noteworthy that these passages have already received his closer attention elsewhere (Lioy 2011a; Lioy, 2011b, 89–127). His interest in this particular monograph evidently lies in examining the wider conceptual field of

Paul's creation theology, which thus receives more extensive examination in the next chapter.

2.3. Chapter Three

Chapter three examines 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2 with the aim of exemplifying Lioy's thesis that New Creation Theology serves as the major premise of 'Paul's Christocentric and Christotelic discourse' (p. 54). Lioy begins by summarising some relevant conceptual data on Old Testament Jewish eschatology to furnish a backdrop to Paul's discourse. He surveys passages in the Major Prophets such in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, passages which highlight God's promise of eschatological redemption and the renewal of his covenant community, ultimately resulting in the reversal of the effects of Adam's fall.

Lioy further examines relevant passages in Literature of Second Temple Judaism such as 2 Baruch 32:6, Tobit 15:5, 1 Enoch 72:1, 4 Ezra 7:75 and the Apocalypse of Abraham 9:9 to demonstrate, along with a number of authors he cites, that Paul's new covenant theological discourse was within a context of lively Jewish eschatological theological reflections of his time. In this regard, Lioy's specific interest is to highlight Paul's distinctive view of this eschatology of which Christ is both its centre and telos. The redemption of the eschatological community no doubt plays a role in Pauline discourse as it did with his contemporaries. Even so, for Paul, Christ sums up the fulfilment of these eschatological expectations.

This uniqueness of Pauline eschatological discourse in his new creation theology is fleshed out in Lioy's subsequent exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2. This new creation is effective through the power of God in the Christ event of his death and resurrection. The cross achieved three divine objectives as part of the new creation enactment, namely, the defeat of Satan, the appeasement of God's wrath, and the furnishing of

moral example of divine love to reconcile rebellious sinners. In Lioy's view then, this passage shows that Paul understood himself as not just a propagator of this Good News but also as a pastor imbued by its new realities to shepherd the new covenant community, in contradistinction to his opponents who were seeking to distance the Corinthians from the apostle.

2.4. Chapter Four

Chapter four of the monograph delves deeper into some of the specifics of Paul's new creation theology by focusing in particular on his apocalyptic theology as espoused in Ephesians 1:15–23. The chapter argues that 'Paul's eschatological outlook exercised a controlling influence on the Christocentric and Christotelic facets of his discourse' (p. 79). Lioy introduces the reader to the broad building blocks of first century apocalyptic worldview and asserts that in this regard, Paul's thinking was ingrained in its Jewish variety that was inherited from the prophetic reflections on God's covenant. Paul was, however, also very conversant with the prevailing Greco-Roman cosmologies as well as their pervasive influences in Roman imperialism, and interacts with these in his letters. Lioy thus affirms a particular school of thought in current Pauline scholarship which argues that Pauline discourse contains significant anti-imperial rhetoric.

That said, however, Lioy's specific slant to this line of scholarly discourse is that Paul's apocalyptic worldview imbued by his Christocentric and Christotelic theology made his counter-cultural opposition to Rome's 'pagan pretensions' (p. 85) not just inevitable, but obligatory. His exegesis of Ephesians 1:15–23 serves to underscore how this was so. Lioy's conclusion affirms the traditional conservative view regarding Christ's triumph over the powers through his death and

resurrection, and that this serves as the basis of the present victory of believers who are in union with Christ.

On reflection, Lioy is certainly correct in underlining the anti-imperial implications of Paul's apocalyptic discourse. This view could well be complemented by highlighting the fact that Paul envisaged these evil powers as existing in wider categories such as in demonic spirits, idols and general astrological and cosmological entities as indeed is evident in his language in Ephesians 1. The first Christian readers of Ephesians would certainly have viewed these other spiritual powers in equally sinister terms as they would have regarded the imperial cults. I note, however, that a later chapter of the monograph is devoted to Paul's reflections on the powers in Ephesians 6:10–20.

2.5. Chapter Five

Chapter five of the monograph focuses even further on an element of Paul's apocalyptic theology, namely, his theology of the cross as evidenced by 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10, asserting that 'an understanding of Paul's theology of the cross helps clarify his apocalyptic view of reality' (p. 101). By 'theology of the cross' Lioy does not only mean the salvific achievements of Jesus on the cross, but also encompasses its pastoral implications for Christian cruciform existence. Thus for Lioy, Paul's theology of the cross is not only restricted to his Christology but also his pastoral reflections on Christian existence – 'On one level, believers *take part* in the cruciform narrative; yet, on another deeper level, the Cross *becomes* their personal defining narrative (p. 105; his emphasis).

It is here in this chapter also that Lioy sets his reflections within his Lutheran ecclesial tradition by interacting with scholarship from that confessional stance. Starting with Luther's 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*,

Lioy provides a synopsis of the debates within the tradition on the nature of Pauline theology of the cross. Of key relevance are Lutheran theological ideas on Paul's view of Christian suffering in the light of his theology of the cross. This serves as the basis for Lioy's exegetical analysis of his chosen passage. He demonstrates that for Paul, Christocentric cruciform living evident in his attitude to afflictions and weaknesses 'functioned as a heuristic device' (p. 123) that shaped his response to his opponents. In so doing Lioy advances the conversation within the Lutheran tradition regarding some of the pastoral implications of Paul's theology of the cross.

2.6. Chapter Six

Chapter six of the monograph compares the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 with Paul's speech to the Athenians as recorded in Acts 17 as means of highlighting the biblical-theological foundations of Paul's Christocentric and Christotelic discourse. Lioy provides a number of reasons for conducting this exercise, chief among them being the evidence that Paul's speech to the Athenians engages the Mosaic speech at 'literary, conceptual and linguistic' levels (p. 125). Moreover, Lioy sees Acts as playing a somewhat similar literary function in relation to the gospels and the rest of the New Testament in the way Deuteronomy functions in parallel fashion in relation to the Pentateuch and the Old Testament as a whole. This inevitably invites a canonical comparison capable of shedding light on both passages. After demonstrating the intricacies of these parallels, Lioy proceeds to validate how Paul's polemic in Athens against idolatry and his Chriostocentric proclamation draw on the Mosaic passage.

This chapter is particularly interesting for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it rightly underlines the potential for Acts of the Apostles to make key contributions to the construction of Pauline theology. While this

approach is not in itself new, certainly not in conservative scholarship, it is nevertheless not as commonly adopted within recent Pauline scholarship. The tendency in the academy by contrast has been to distance Acts of the Apostle from the construction of Pauline theology in general, choosing rather to regard Acts as charting a separate Lukan theology. Lioy's astute move then demonstrates that this excessive juxtaposition of the Paul of Acts against the Paul of the Epistles is ultimately counterproductive. More positively put, Lioy demonstrates that a serious consideration of Acts of the Apostles as one of the sources for generating the apostle's theology does yield rich tokens.

Secondly, even though not explicitly articulated by Lioy himself, the chapter lays a foundation for his subsequent argument in chapter nine which asserts that Paul, not Jesus, should be regarded as fulfilling the Jewish expectation of the 'Second Moses'. More will be said on this particular link later, but I raise it here to highlight the possibility that placing this chapter in closer proximity to chapter nine would have enhanced Lioy's argument regarding the parallels between Paul and Moses.

2.7. Chapter Seven

The seventh chapter of the monograph focuses on another aspect of Paul's apocalyptic theology, which is regarding Jesus' triumph over Satan. Lioy is aware that while Paul refers to the evil powers on numerous occasions in his letters, the scholarly literature on this specific subject is disproportionately limited. His aim then is to highlight how Paul's discourse on the evil powers relates to his Christocentricity, but also through this make some contributions to scholarly reflections regarding its role in Pauline theology. Lioy fulfils this objective by first surveying the scriptural account on Satan, and then exegete how Ephesians 6:18—

20 exemplies Paul's teachings on Christ and the believers' triumph over Satan in union with Christ.

2.8. Chapter Eight

The eighth chapter might at first glance appear to be out of place in a monograph examining Paul's Christocentric and Christotelic discourse. This is because it is devoted to arguing for the continued theological relevance of the Epistle of James and not primarily focused on a Pauline passage as are the other chapters. Yet, Lioy's decision to include an exploration of James in what is after all a study of Pauline theology is incisive and is in the end proved justified. In the first place, he demonstrates that Jamesian theology is completely compatible with Pauline theology. To put this in a different way, the chapter demonstrates that the pillars of Pauline theological discourse were widely shared by his first-century Christian contemporaries: 'a careful and thoughtful reading of James challenges the notion that it goes against Paul's Christocentric discourse about justification by faith' (p. 173).

Lioy nevertheless underscores some of the key theological distinctives of the Letter of James, pointing to the letter's stress on the role of the new covenant as well as the Torah in the lives of the redeemed. James also draws heavily on Jesus' teachings to underline the moral and ethical implications of justification by faith. But essentially, James' Christocentric and Christotelic emphases are shared in common with Paul. In this regard, Lioy's reflections in the chapter achieve two theological objectives with one stroke, namely, he underscores that James has a lot to contribute to our understanding of New Testament theology, and that Paul and James share a common theological agenda even if expressed with different theological idioms and syntax.

2.9. Chapter Nine

As pointed out earlier, chapter nine makes the argument that contrary to the scholarly school of thought which argues that at least some among the New Testament writers regarded Jesus as the 'second Moses' who fulfilled the eschatological prophecies, it is Paul rather who fits this accolade. Lioy begins by briefly surveying the contributions of some of the scholars who have dissented from the common notion of Jesus as 'new Moses'. He proposes to build on this trajectory by arguing that several parallels point rather to Paul as 'the more likely New Testament counterpart to Moses' (p. 195). Lioy argues that in addition to Paul being identified by others as a prophet (Acts 13:1–2), the apostle on several occasions explicitly and implicitly also indicated a self-understanding as an eschatological prophet. Lioy further argues that given Jesus' absolute supremacy indicated by how the New Testament portrays him as transcending Moses, a notion which Lioy exegetically demonstrates with a number of passages; Paul would appear to be a far more suited candidate for this accolade.

This chapter opens up a promising research trajectory within the wider field of the current academic discourse on the bases and implication of what is being termed 'early divine Christology' (e.g. Fletcher-Louis 2015). By addressing one of the major flaws in the school of thought which equates the 'second Moses' or 'eschatological prophet' to Jesus, and proceeding to suggest that Paul, rather than Jesus, fits that accolade, Lioy furnishes further potential evidence weakening objections to 'early divine Christology'. As he rightly points out, other scholars have also argued against Jesus as the 'second Moses' line of thought, but they have often stopped short of proposing a substitute candidate who fulfilled the prophecy of Deuteronomy 34:10. Lioy's contribution then is to offer this substitute candidate in the form of Paul.

This chapter thus lays down a good foundation for subsequent investigations into the specific question as to whether Paul would have or indeed did articulate cues which indicated that he considered himself as this eschatological prophet. Lioy does not go as far as to make such a claim, even though, given his argument in chapter six of the monograph that Paul drew from the Song of Moses in crafting his speech of Acts 17 in Athens, that could well be the ultimate implication of Lioy's thesis.

2.10. Chapter Ten

Chapter ten of the monograph summarises two contrasting scholarly views on the historical authenticity of the Adam character in the Genesis creation narrative. In particular, the two chosen writers who are contrasted disagree on whether Adam and Eve existed as progenitors of the human race, or whether the narrative reflects an ancient mythological conception on the origins of the world not fixed in real existence. Lioy declares himself to 'favour a predominately classical, evangelical, and orthodox interpretive approach to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures' (p. 258) but nevertheless employs the chapter to demonstrate the sharp differences in scholarly approaches to the passage.

This chapter then is not directly related to Pauline theology as much as demonstrating how two scholars have attempted to reconcile their hermeneutical interpretation of the creation accounts with their understanding of current scientific views. Even so, Lioy from time to time generates a conversation to establish how the two authors have interacted with and framed Paul's theology of creation as mirrored in his letters.

2.11. Epilogue

The epilogue is devoted to summarising the findings of the study and raising a number of its implications. Lioy concludes (p. 259):

[T]he way in which Paul interpreted and applied the Old Testament aligns with the apostle's Christocentric and Christotelic perspective. Specifically, Paul considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the heart of the metanarrative in the Judeo-Christian canon. From that vantage point Paul taught that the Son came to earth to fulfil the salvific promises the Father made to His chosen people through such luminaries as Abraham, Moses, and David...as a result of the cross-resurrection event, the Son bridged the infinite chasm of separation between Creator and those whom He created.

3. The Strengths and Implications of the Monograph

In addition to my evaluative statements in the above summary, a couple of general comments seem to me to be in order as part of rendering my deep appreciation for the excellent scholarship of this monograph. One of the key strengths of Lioy's contribution is his detailed attention to exegesis as the bedrock of developing his theological argument. While most biblical theologians would claim to develop their theological ideas and mapping of concepts from exegesis, the tendency has been the harvesting of insights from scattered texts throughout the Pauline corpus for the purpose. There may be some advantages to this approach, but one of its drawbacks is that it fails to demonstrate the depths to which Paul's theology affected the minutiae of his discourse and praxes. As a result, exactly how Paul employed his theology to address the different socio-pastoral problems which he contextually sought to address with his letters is often left unexplored.

Lioy's thoroughly exegetical approach in contradistinction grounds Paul's theology in his apostolic and pastoral enterprise evident in his letters. In this way, Pauline theology becomes better appreciated within the exact contextual milieu in which it is applied, whether literary,

conceptual or socio-historical. This is a key strength that readers will very much appreciate from Lioy's monograph.

I am also impressed by Lioy's charting of new avenues for further exploration of the contours of Pauline theology within the scholarly guild. I am here thinking of my earlier point regarding the role of the book of Acts in the construction of the Apostle's theology. While Lioy does not work out the details of this avenue of research in this study, his demonstration that within appropriate literary and contextual conventions, Paul's statements and activities that are recorded in Acts of the Apostle do shed light on the apostle's overall theological ideas and so must be considered as one of the sources for the construction of Pauline theology, is thoroughly valid.

A similar judgement may be made of Lioy's argument regarding the inter-relationship between Pauline and Jamesian theologies. As he argues, that these shared a common Christocentric and Christotelic theological outlook is beyond question. Demonstrating the directions in which James, and for that matter, other New Testament inspired authors applied this Christocentricity and Christotelicity is the inevitable implication and challenge to scholarship. That challenge potentially makes this monograph exceptionally pivotal in advancing future directions of New Testament Theology in integrative fashion. For this and other reasons argued above, I have no hesitation whatsoever in wholeheartedly commending this monograph to biblical scholars of all stripes.

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Review of Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*

Robert D. Falconer[1]

1. Introduction to the Author

Nicholas Wolterstorff is an American Philosopher with wide-ranging philosophical and theological interests in aesthetics, epistemology, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and philosophy of education, and is the Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University. Previously he was professor at Calvin College, the Free University of Amsterdam, and the University of Notre Dame. Wolterstorff, together with Alvin Plantinga and William Alston developed and expanded upon a view of religious epistemology that later became known as reformed epistemology. Among the countless articles he has written, his recent book publications include the following: *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (2008), *Justice in Love* (2011), *The Mighty*

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

and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology (2012), and *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (2015).

2. Background to the Book

Wolterstorff's book, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology,* forms a part of the *Kantzer Lectures in Revealed Theology (KLRT)* which are meant to be something like the evangelical equivalent of the Gifford Lectures in natural theology. This series features prominent theologians who are committed to the project of faith seeking understanding, and who make this understanding practical.

Other projects on liturgy I have read and feel are important to the discussion are (1) Joseph Ratzinger's (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (2000). He purposed to assist a renewal of understanding of the liturgy and offer an aid to the understanding of faith within the Roman Catholic tradition and give faith its central form of expression in the (Catholic) Liturgy. (2) From a very different perspective are the works written by the Reformed Philosopher, James K. A. Smith. (i) *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Cultural Liturgies; 2009). Here Smith explores cultural liturgies in shopping malls, stadiums, and universities which, as he says, are actually liturgical structures that influence and shape our thoughts and affections. In this book he focuses on the themes of liturgy and desire, desiring the Kingdom, God's Kingdom, and makes the powerful statement, 'We are liturgical creatures'. (ii) In his next book, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Cultural Liturgies; 2013), Smith demonstrates how worship works in shaping us through liturgical practices. Lastly, and most recently, (iii) *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (2016), Smith offers an accessible version of *Desiring the Kingdom* employing contemporary culture to highlight his

arguments and discussions. He also proposes (liturgical) practices for shaping the Christian life for individuals and communities.

The God We Worship is somewhat different from Ratzinger's *The Spirit of the Liturgy* and the works written by James K. A. Smith on liturgy, focussing on the implicit theology of God that we find in liturgy. Though I do find it somewhat strange that Wolterstorff does not engage with either, both being prominent voices of our time! Granted, it is quite a different project. Further, I also find it rather fascinating that of the three scholars I mentioned, two of them are academic philosophers, rather than theologians. Be that as it may, Wolterstorff explores in his book the implications of the traditional elements of liturgy and that our assumptions in worship and liturgy are significant in observing the depths of understanding of God in historical Christianity. Navigating across the Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Reformed liturgies, he points out the theological features of God that have been neglected. It is these neglected features of God implicit in liturgy that interest Wolterstorff, and with which this book, *The God We Worship* is concerned.

3. Summary of the Book

Wolterstorff starts off his book by articulating his literary project in liturgical theology. As he says, this is not a development in systematic theology whereby at the end he might say something like, 'This is the God we Christians worship'. The book is, however, primarily about 'making explicit the understanding of God implicit in Christian worship' and then making that understanding clear by explaining it, developing it, elaborating on it and defending it. An important point is made by Wolterstorff, that liturgical theology considers firstly the self-understanding by the church of the theology that is both implicit and

explicit in its liturgy, rather than the church's self-examination of its liturgy. In this way he argues that liturgical theology is more akin to creedal theology. This of course offers a unique way of considering liturgical practice and theology in a way that is perhaps very rare among liturgical theologians.

One can appreciate that Wolterstorff likens liturgy to music in that one acquires the 'liturgical know-how', obviously by observing others and participating with them. And like music, he believes, liturgy can be enacted either correctly or incorrectly. Though he fails to mention that even music has different genres, but giving him his due, he does reference a wonderful variety of liturgical traditions throughout his book. While acknowledging liturgical worship as a communal activity I appreciated the good mention of liturgy in personal devotion.

Even in so called non-denominational congregations it is pointed out that they too have some sort of liturgy, even if there is not a liturgical text. There is a certain know-how of worship in such contemporary churches. Here, Wolterstorff touched on a significant aspect in contemporary churches today, and while it was only touched upon briefly it would have been helpful if he had developed this issue further in light of his overall project, perhaps even in a subsection of a chapter. He does not. Though later he makes mention of traditional liturgies and their depth, richness and beauty which in his opinion, and I think he is right, the alternative contemporary liturgies lack. He highlights the problem asking relevant questions, but offers no suggestion of a way forward for such 'reductive flattening-out' alternative liturgies.

Central to the book is the idea that while the church enacts its liturgy in such a way as to actualise and manifest herself; God also acts. God acts in liturgy. When Wolterstorff talks about making explicit in liturgy what is implicit, he is asking questions like: (1) What would God have to be

like for it to make sense for us to bless God? (2) What would God have to be like for it to make sense for us to address God, whatever the content of our address? (3) What would God have to be like for it to make sense to worship God in the way Christians do? Such questions, he says, point us to the theological logos of the liturgy.

The book then moves on to a discussion on *God as worthy of worship.* Of course, when Christians gather to worship, they gather in the hope that we ourselves will be changed, that we could be energised or guided in our everyday life, and more than this, central to our worship is our enactment of liturgy to worship God. Therefore, what is implicit in the liturgy is that God is to be worshipped. The orientation of such worship is *Godward* in what we say and sing and in the actions, kneeling, bowing or raising our hands. Such actions naturally should also include the attitude of adoration, awe and reverence.

Liturgy is therefore, as Wolterstorff explains, 'a particular mode of Godward acknowledgement of God's unsurpassable greatness', which is why our appropriate liturgical stance should be awe, reference and grateful adoration. This is also expressed in physical posture, kneeling, silence, and even in church architecture and church art.

While the Christian life should be an acknowledgment of who God is and what he has done, Wolterstorff rejects the idea that the Christian life as a whole is worship. While liturgy might be one important part of worship, I feel he is too restrictive here. And again, one wonders why he has not consulted his colleague, James K. A. Smith, where he talks of people being 'liturgical creatures', and then developed the idea of liturgy in everyday life. As important and beautiful as I think liturgy is, I argue that worship is broader than traditional liturgy: we see this in the Psalms, in the life and ministry of Jesus and in many of the New Testament epistles.

In the next chapter, *God as One Who is Vulnerable,* Wolterstorff again comes across too strongly, I think, saying, 'The application of these points is that if one has the right understanding of love, of obligation, and of the relation of love to obligation, one will have no hesitation in saying that enacting its liturgy is not just a good thing for the church to do but obligatory'. Assuming he is talking about traditional liturgy, I agree it is a good thing for any church to do, but just how obligatory it is I think is up for discussion, and I certainly don't think Scripture offers detailed doctrine on the issue of church liturgy.

It is argued that should the church be guilty of wrongdoing in not worshipping God through liturgy, the usual way in which the church should enact liturgy, God is being vulnerable in being wronged. I don't find his argument here particularly convincing, though. He does have a point, however, when he talks about the part in the liturgy when our sins are confessed, this liturgical enactment does presuppose that God is vulnerable in being wronged, because he certainly has been, for that is what sin is. As Wolterstorff put it, 'Our sin against God takes the form of depriving God of the obedience that is due God'.

I found the chapter on *God as One Who Participates in Mutual Address* enlightening. Wolterstorff explains that Christians address God through liturgy with the purpose that God will listen to what we are saying with an expectation that God would offer a favourable response. The implicit understanding here, according to Wolterstorff is that our liturgical enactment in addressing God is that God is one who listens *and* responds to us, and this means that he is one who participates in mutual address. God is, of course, also free to respond as he wishes. Liturgy is not a manipulation tool. He says it succinctly like this, 'The enactment is *for* that mutual address and listening. The people enact the liturgy *in order* that mutual address and listening may take place; this contributes to giving our liturgical adoration of God its distinctive character'.

Following on from the previous chapter, the next, *God as One Who Listens,* we are reminded that many theologians and Christian philosophers, Wolterstorff himself included, have spoken about God as speaker or as revealer, but not many have explored the idea of God as one who listens. This is perhaps the most significant contribution that this book makes. At this point the book explores the speech-act theory – locutionary and illocutionary acts, and so on. One might have expected to see reference to Kevin Vanhoozer's (2005) work, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* here. I believe Vanhoozer would have added considerable theological depth on the speech-act theory to the present work.

He points out that 'the very same speech act that we address to God is the one that God listens to'. Not surprisingly, Wolterstorff is awed by the fact that God who is ineffably great, has an interest in our 'puny, transitory, circumscribed, and defective' speech act! And that by listening to what we say to God, this puny speech act of ours becomes the connection between us and God. In this way, the One who is exalted above all, humbles himself and simultaneously elevates us.

The book develops the discussion with the question, *What Are We Saying When We Say That God Listens?* Rightfully, Wolterstorff acknowledges the problem that we make God into *our* image (anthropomorphising) when we talk of him as listening and speaking. Solving this apparent dilemma, he distinguishes between various terms. A term, Wolterstorff argues, can be used (1) figuratively, (2) metaphorically or (3) by analogical extension. Neither figurative nor metaphor is being employed here, he proclaims, rather when one talks about God as one who listens and speaks, and so an analogical extension is being used. He explains that analogical extension sits between both figurative and metaphorical, it is 'to say of God that God attends to and grasps what we say to God or does

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something a great deal like that'. Wolterstorff provided detailed discussion here with several examples to bring his point across.

God as One Who Hears Favourably, is the topic of the following chapter. Wolterstorff asks the question, 'What are we asking God to do when we ask God to hear favourably our address to God? How are we to understand this liturgical act?' By asking God to hear our address favourably, we are assuming that he can respond to our praise and thanksgiving, that he is able to accept it and can respond to our petition for forgiveness. In the liturgical part where the Lord's Prayer is said, particularly with reference to 'Your kingdom come' which Wolterstorff explores in depth, he highlights that this offers an implicit understanding of God. When we ask God to hear favourably here he becomes actively involved in bringing the full expression of his kingdom. After a serious discussion of N.T. Wright's work on God's kingdom and its coming, Wolterstorff suggests that all our petitions should be understood as having, as their overarching context, our prayer for the coming of God's kingdom. The implicit theology in 'your kingdom come' is now obvious, Wolterstorff explains:

> We understand God, unsurpassable in glory, holiness, and love, as engaged in bringing about the full manifestation of God's kingdom. In what we do in our daily lives, and in our enactment of the liturgy, we align ourselves with God's bringing about of God's kingdom; in our prayer, that God hears favourably what we say, we give voice to our longing for the coming of God's kingdom.

God is one who listens, but he is also as the next chapter argues, *God as One Who Speaks.* In many churches, extended listening as Wolterstorff points out, occurs when we listen to a sermon preached. God comes down to our level and listens to us favourably *and* speaks to us in such a way that we can understand. What is implicit in Christian liturgy is that God is one who both listens and speaks. No doubt, Wolterstoff also argues

that the minister speaks on behalf of God, speaking to a particular people here and now. In this chapter he engages with Karl Barth, who is emphatic that the Bible is not God's Word, Christ alone is, Christ alone is God's speech. Wolterstorff offers a counter-argument. Being the Reformed Philosopher that he is, he looks to John Calvin who in turn had held that 'in church proclamation, the minister speaks in God's name, speaks on behalf of God. The minister is an ambassador of God, a deputy, a representative'. The question is, who is right, Karl Barth or John Calvin?

Lastly, the chapter, *The Understanding of God Implicit in the Eucharist,* offers a fascinating development to the whole argument. The Eucharist is an enacted memorial of Jesus, it's a memorial meal. This is neither listening nor speaking. Without developing a Eucharistic theology, Wolterstorff adheres to John Calvin's view of the Eucharist. He argues that the Eucharist is the highest form of liturgical communion between God and his people. By taking the elements we receive Christ into ourselves. Wolterstorff proclaims, 'This is a form of communion that goes far beyond that which takes place in mutual address; indeed, it has no close analogue in human interactions'. What is implicit then in the Eucharist, He explains:

> God who is of unsurpassable excellence does not only stoop down to listen to us, to hear us, and to speak to us; God stoops down to dwell and work within us in the person of Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. In mutual speaking and listening, there remains a certain distance between the interlocutors; in the communion that takes place in the Eucharist, all distance is removed.

4. Evaluation of the Book

Asides from the weaknesses already mentioned, I will list some additional weaknesses: (1) one could not help noticing whole sections, sometimes a list almost a page long of questions. Perhaps one might expect such from a philosopher. (2) The author's introductions and conclusions were far from subtle, and were repetitive. (3) I did not think chapter 6, *What Are We Saying When We Say That God Listens?* fitted well into this volume. The tone and content of the rest of the book was very readable at a semi academic level, chapter 6 however was perhaps too philosophical and academic for most lay readers. (4) Acknowledging that *The God We Worship* is a different sort of work from that of James K. A. Smith, I would have liked to have seen more on how this applies in post-modern Christianity and to see the book engaging with churches who perhaps despise traditional liturgies, for example, mega churches, Charismatic churches and the like.

Overall *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* is well worth a read for those interested in liturgy. I note the following strengths: (1) Wolterstorff offers a significant contribution to liturgical theology, he presents us with a new perspective, God is a speaking God, he is a God who communes with us, but he is *also* a God who hears and listens. No one, to my knowledge, has offered a sustained discussion on this idea of God listening. (2) The book is readable throughout, though chapter 6 may be difficult for some. (3) The author engages well with scripture throughout, grounding his arguments in biblical theology. (4) I appreciated Wolterstorff's generous references to traditional liturgies from a variety of liturgical traditions, including those from the Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Reformed churches. Lastly, (5) *The God We Worship* is a God-centred volume, rather than man-centred— God is the one who listens and acts!

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Editorial Policy

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Since *Conspectus* is a scholarly publication that is evangelical in its theological orientation (i.e. predominately classical and historically orthodox in its interpretive approach), submissions entirely void of a theological component (i.e. engagement with the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures), along with submissions that deny, either directly or indirectly, the key tenets put forward in the SATS statement of faith, will not be considered for publication. It is in the discretion of the editorial board to make the decision, and their decision is final. *Conspectus* is a refereed evangelical theological e-journal published biannually by the South African Theological Seminary (www. satsonline.org). The journal is a publication for scholarly articles in any of the major theological disciplines.

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The purpose of *Conspectus* is to provide a forum for scholarly, Bible-based theological research and debate. The journal is committed to operate within an evangelical framework, namely, one that is predominately classical and historically orthodox in its interpretive approach, and that affirms the inspiration and authority of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The journal seeks to publish well-researched essays and reviews on a broad range of suitable biblical and theological topics

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Conspectus aims to combine sound scholarship with a practical and readable approach. Submissions must present the results of sound research into a biblical, theological, or practical problem in a way that would be valuable to scholars, pastors, students, missionaries, or other Christian workers.

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The article is provisionally evaluated by the senior editor or assistant editor of the journal to determine whether it is in line with the type of articles the journal publishes, and is of sufficient academic quality to merit formal review. If in the opinion of the editor the submission is not suitable, the author is notified and the article is not sent to reviewers. If the editor sees some potential in the article, he proceeds with the remainder of the review process.

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Based on the recommendations made by the reviewers, the editor compiles the feedback for the author, indicating any changes that are required prior to publication. The final decision as to which changes are required lies with the senior editor. When the required changes are substantial, the revised submission is returned to the reviewers so that they can confirm that the deficiencies which they raised have been adequately addressed.

In the case of conflicting reviews, the decision to publish or not publish lies with the senior editor. If the senior editor sees merit in the recommendations of both reviewers, he may forward the article to a third referee.

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- 28/29th of February for the March issue

- 31st of August for the September issue