Conspectus

The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary

Volume 23

March 2017

ISSN 1996-8167

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SOUTH AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Bible-based · Christ-centred · Spirit-led

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Perfection of God's Good Work: The Literary and Pastoral Function of the Theme of 'Work' in Philippians

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Abstract

One of the reasons for the demise of the partition theory of Philippians is the identification of several integrating themes running through the letter. It is thus surprising that the repeated occurrence of lexemes and morphemes allied to the concept of ἔργον (work) that is initially broached at the letter's beginning has not received the deserved attention. This article contributes to the current state of scholarship in three ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that Paul's expression of confidence as part of his thanksgiving-prayer report, that God who began ἔργον ἀγαθὸν (a good work) in and among the Philippians (1:6) will perfect it by the day of Christ, commences a consistent theme on 'work' that spans the letter, and thus further buries the partition theory. Secondly, it argues that this theme integrates four theological ideas, namely, (a) God's gracious ongoing inner transformation of

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

the believers, (b) its practical moral and social outworking in the unity of the fellowship, (c) their steadfast rejection of the false teachers who perverted the Gospel and (d) their continued missional partnership with Paul. The article concludes that in this way, the theme of 'work' directly engages the situational context behind Philippians and so plays a fundamental pastoral function in the letter.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Problem

The scholarly debate over the literary integrity, or contrarily stated, the partition of Paul's letter to the Philippians, appears now to be all but settled in favour of integrity. Apparently originating with Le Moyne (1685)[2], those who preferred the partition theory based their notion on a number of difficulties posed by the text in its current canonical form. Firstly, they argued that Paul's travel plans in 2:19–30 appear uncharacteristically early in the letter, and so generate the possibility that the travelogue section belonged to a separate communication. Secondly the apostle's use of Τὸ λοιπόν in 3:1 (traditionally translated as 'finally' in KJV, ESV, ASV, NRSV among others), gives the impression that Paul was at that point about to bring his letter to a close, something which fails to materialize for a couple more chapters. Thirdly, there is a discernible change in tone, from an effusive

[2] This attribution to Le Moyne is itself hotly disputed, dismissed by some as legendary (Cook 1981:138–142), by others as mythological (Smith 2005:38) and yet by others as a misunderstanding of Le Moyne's argument (Koperski 1993:599–603). Alternatively, Heinrichs (1803:38–87) has been put forward as the theory's original initiator in 1803. All the same, Le Moyne at least identified the difficult transitions in the letter as a problem.

'eirenical calm' (Houlden 1970:41) in 3:1 to a severe language in 3:2 in which Paul berates his opponents, leading some scholars to postulate two different contexts for 3:1 and 3:2. Fourthly, it is claimed that the differences in Paul's strident depiction of his opponents in Philippians 3, in comparison to those described less harshly in Philippians 1, suggest that these sections may well have been written under different circumstances. Finally, it has been argued that there is an apparent break in the flow of the apostle's argument between 4:9 and 4:10, from where Paul begins to specifically express thanksgiving for the gift from the Philippians.

Taken together, these difficulties persuaded some scholars to theorise that the present canonical form of Philippians is a combination of a number of separate notes written under different circumstances which have been pieced together either by Paul himself or posthumously, by one of his disciples (Bauer, 1920; Gnilka, 1968; Murphy-O'Connor, 1997; Schenk, 1984; Schmithals, 1972; Reumann, 2008; Vincent, 1902).

Various methodological approaches have been adopted by scholars who believe in the letter's literary integrity to address these challenges.[3] Furthermore, the specific difficulties related to the translation and interpretation of 3:1 and 4:10 have also received convincing exegetical (Thrall 1962:28), rhetorical (Heil 2010; Watson 1988) and socio-theological (Asumang 2012a:1–50; Still 2012:53–66; Stowers 1991)

[3] These approaches include Dalton's verbal and thematic analyses (1979:97–102), Watson's rhetorical analysis (1988:57–88), Alexander's formal epistolary analysis (1989:87–101), Wick's structural analysis (1994), Black's text-linguistic discourse analysis (1995:16–49), and Holloway's genre analysis (2001). While some methods have proved more successful than others, the cumulative force of their findings has been the general weakening of the attractions of the partition theory (cf., Bockmuehl, 1998:23; Garland, 1985:141–173; Witherington, 2011).

explanations, thus strengthening the argument in favour of integrity. The remaining vestige of the problem is establishing the literary and conceptual coherence of the letter as specifically aimed at addressing a putative socio-historical pastoral situation. The present article contributes to the efforts at addressing this outstanding question.

1.2. Current developments towards a solution

Two major developments in contemporary scholarship have synergised to generate a relatively high degree of consensus in addressing this vestigial problem. These developments are, namely, (a) the historical-critical construction of a plausible situational context or *sitz im leben* which accounts for the variegated features of Philippians, and (b) the identification of coherent literary-theological themes[4] spanning the sections of the letter, and which directly address this situational context. Given their fundamental importance to the present enquiry, a brief summary of these developments is in order.

1.2.1. The situational context behind Philippians

With regards to the situational context behind Philippians, most interpreters are in agreement that the immediate trigger for the writing of the letter was Paul's receipt through Epaphroditus of the Philippians' generous gift in support of his missionary activities. Paul, who was imprisoned, most likely in Rome[5] uses the opportunity of Epaphro-

[4] For the purposes of this article, I adopt Vang's (2011:173:n.2) definition of a theme as 'a main idea in a literary work, which shows up in recurrent verbal elements. These components may be phrases, words, or metaphorical terms'. I also follow the literary procedures suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003:85–109) for identifying themes in literary works.

[5] A minority favours Ephesus or Caesarea (cf. Hellerman 2015:3; Reiher 2012:213–233).

ditus' return to Macedonia after the latter's recovery from a near fatal illness, to pen this letter of friendship and thanksgiving in which he also updates his partners about his situation.

Paul also uses the letter to address a number of urgent socio-pastoral problems within the congregation. Some elements of the socio-pastoral problems at the time and their causes are still debated by interpreters, even if their outline is discernible in the letter. It certainly included moderate levels of unseemly internal rivalries between influential personalities within the fellowship, which threatened to divert their focus from the gospel. This situation also appears to have been aggravated by, or perhaps incited by, persecution of the believers in the community. Paul's continued imprisonment may also not have helped matters in Philippi and perhaps played a role in nurturing the interpersonal angst in the Church. Despite his ebullient tone, the apostle himself was anxious about a potentially imminent arrival of false teachers in the region, prompting him to issue warnings about the intentions, methods and theological commitments of these opponents (cf., Asumang 2012a:1–3; Ascough 2003; Briones 2011:47–69; Hansen 2009; Ogereau 2014b; Peterman 1991:261–270; Smith 2005).

Some interpreters may quibble with one or two aspects of the minutiae of this narrative of the context behind Philippians. Marshall (1993:357–374) for example, posits that Paul appears not to be deeply conversant with the details of the situation in Philippi, and thus this neat account, while plausible, may not reflect the exact situation. Marshall's objection is, however, difficult to sustain, if it is granted that Paul had received the Philippians' gift through their emissary prior to writing. In any case, Marshall's protest is largely marginal, as most commentators subscribe to the general outline set out above as adequately explaining the letter's variegated features (cf. Fee 1995:28–34; Fowl 2005; Hull Jr 2016:3–7;

O'Brien 1991:35–37; Peterlin 1994:207–210; Silva 2005; Witherington 2011).

1.2.2. Integrative themes in Philippians

With regard to the second major scholarly development, several interpreters have pointed to a number of coherent integrative themes running throughout the letter and which address this situational context, thus jettisoning the partition theory. An obvious example of this phenomenon is the consistent occurrence of terminologies related to χαίρω (rejoice, be glad) and its cognates in all sections of the letter (1:4, 16, 18, 25; 2:2, 16–18, 28–29; 3:1, 3, 18; 4:1, 4, 10).[6] This feature has led many interpreters (e.g. Alexander 1989:95; Bickel & Jantz 2004; Holloway 2001; Hooker 2000; Smith 2005:44) to argue that Paul sought to employ this linguistic strategy to reassure and encourage the Philippians in their difficult situation. As Bloomquist (1993:138) asserts, Philippians is 'primarily an authoritative letter of comfort in which Paul reassures the Philippian believers of the gospel's advance in the light of Paul's imprisonment'. While not all interpreters agree with this explanation of how Paul addressed the complex socio-pastoral situation, most agree that there certainly is this consistent literary theme of 'joy' within the epistle, thus calling into question the validity of the partition theory.

Another example of this integrating literary phenomenon is the consistent use of terminologies allied to φρονέω (think, reflect, understand) on as many as ten occasions, and in all sections of the letter

[6] Nouns and verbs related to joy, as Witherington (2011:2; cf., Fowl 2005:13; Heil 2010:1–4) rightly points out, is 'the singularly most frequent word group in Philippians' and spans all its sections. Moreover, the whole letter is suffused with a joyful tone, even in the brief section of 3:2–3 in which Paul scolds his opponents.

(1:7, 12–26; 2:2, 5, 3:15–19; 4.2, 10; cf., Jewett 1970b:51). So Fee (1995:184), for example, notes: the φρονέω word group 'dominates the imperatival moments of the letter'. This feature is further heightened by the five occasions that the similar word group, ἡγέομαι (consider; 2:3, 6; 3:7-8), occurs in the letter (Pollard 1966:65). Fowl (2005:27) thus postulates that given the prominence of this theme, Philippians could be considered as Paul's theological reflections on his own imprisonment and its ramifications for the Philippians. Meeks (2002:333; cf., Rooms, 2015:81–94) extends this view by also arguing that Philippians was aimed at 'the shaping of Christian *phronesis,* a practical moral reasoning that is conformed to [Christ's] death in hope of his resurrection'.

A third example of this verbal phenomenon is the preponderance of lexemes and morphemes allied to military[7] (1:7–12, 20; 2:19–24, 25–30; 3:12–15; 4:3, 10–19; cf. Mueller 2013), civic[8] (1:27–30; 3:20–21; 4:5–8; cf., Edwards, 2013:74–93; Karyakina 2013; Ogereau 2014a: 360–378) and athletic[9] (1:27–30; 3:12–14; 4:3 cf. Arnold 2012, pp:243–252; Arnold 2014; Sisson 2005) metaphors within the letter. Some interpreters regard these three as overlapping each other, and so

[7] For example ἔργον (1:6; 2:30), πραιτωρίῳ (1:13), σωτηρίαν (1:19), κέρδος (1:21), προκοπὴν (1:25), στήκετε (1:27), συναθλοῦντες (1:27), ἀντικειμένων (1:28), πτυρόμενοι (1:28), πάσχειν (1:29), ἀγῶνα (1:30), συγχαίρω (2:17), λειτουργὸν (2:25), συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην (2:25), κερδήσω (3:8), κατελήμφθην (3:12), φρονῶμεν·(3:15), σκοπεῖτε (3:17), στέφανός (4:1), στήκετε (4:1), συνήθλησάν (4:3), συνεργῶν (4:3), εἰρήνη (4:7), and φρουρήσει (4:7).

[8] For example, πολιτεύεσθε (1:27), δοκιμὴν (2:22), πολίτευμα (3:20), and Καίσαρος οἰκίας (4:21).

[9] For example, ἐπιποθῶ (1:8), συναθλοῦντες (1:27), ἀγῶνα (1:30), ἐπέχοντες (2:16), ἔδραμον (2:16), διώκω (3:12, 14), καταλάβω (3:12), κατελήμφθην (3:12), κατειληφέναι· (3:13), ἐπεκτεινόμενος (3:13), σκοπὸν (3:14), and βραβεῖον (3:14).

belonging to a single motif[10] spanning the letter. So Krentz (1993:265–286; cf. Krentz 2003:344–383) for instance suggests that athletic metaphors such as συναθλοῦντες (1:27) and ἀγῶνα (1:30) were consistently used by Greco-Roman writers contemporaneous with Paul for characterising military contests and thus belong to the same military *topos*.

Similarly, Geoffrion (1993:81–82; 220–222) has argued that civic terminologies in the key passage of 1:27–30 such as πολιτεύεσθε (1:27), ἀπωλείας (1:28), have military undertones and combined with other civic terms elsewhere such as πολίτευμα (3:20) and Καίσαρος οἰκίας (4:22) expand on the motif of military steadfastness in Philippians. He further asserts that the relatively common κοινωνία terminology in Philippians also had military associations. The letter, he thus suggests (1993:220), is built 'chiefly upon a broad inclusive political/military concept of citizens/soldiers working together, working for each other, working for the advancement of the goals of their commonwealth (*politeuma*)'. Interpreters who argue for the military *topos* postulate that Paul uses it to shore up the united commitment and resolve of the

[10] Even though they both identify a recurring pattern in a text, some writers make distinctions between a 'theme' and a 'motif': a theme 'stresses more [the pattern's] organisational function in a text while the term motif conveys more the idea of a recurring pattern' (Aubert 2009:16). This fine distinction is, however, more technical than pragmatic, and so the two terms, together with the term 'leitmotif' (which technically refers to musical motifs but is often semantically used also for literary works), are employed interchangeably in this paper. A *topos* refers to a category of 'stereotyped recurring motif' (Brunt 1985:496) used across different genres of literature.

Philippians to continue their partnership in the Gospel despite their difficult situation (cf. Mueller 2013; Schuster 1997).[11]

A nuanced variation to this lexical approach emphasizes the presence of thematic ideas within the letter instead of focusing on particular word groups. So, for example, some have noted that the idea of κοινωνία (communion, fellowship, or partnership) spans and holds the letter together (1:5, 7; 2:1; 3:10, 20; 4:14–15; cf. Bockmuehl 1998:2; Fowl 2005:8–9; Hartog 2010:478; O'Brien 1978:9–18; Swift 1984:234–254). It is further argued that Paul's use of terminologies and cognates for εὐαγγέλιον (gospel; 1:5, 7, 12, 14, 27ab; 2:16–17, 22; 4:3, 15) in Philippians forms part of this partnership theme. Paul's objective was thus to renew and shore up the resolve of the Philippians who co-shared this partnership in modelling and advancing the Gospel (Asumang 2012a:12).

Others have pointed to the 'Christ hymn' of Philippians 2 as providing an integrative leitmotif for the whole letter (cf. Karyakina 2013; Martin 1997; Perkins 1991; Pollard 1966:57–66). In the words of Meeks (2002:111–112), '[T]he hymn's story of Christ is the master model that underlies Paul's characterization of his career and of the mediating Epaphroditus. This model sets the terms of thinking and acting expected of the Philippians in the face of conflict inside and hostility from outside the community'. A similar argument has been made by Kurz (1985:103–126) who asserts that the hymn serves as the centrepiece of

[11] Not all interpreters are convinced about the merits of this particular proposal. Marchal (2006:63) for instance, questions whether Christians of non-military and lower social classes who presumably would have been in the majority in the Philippian Church, would have appreciated the nuances of the technical military language that are postulated to span the letter. However, given the fact that the city itself was historically founded for resettlement of Roman army veterans, it is most likely that this military motif would have resonated with the average Philippian.

the letter enabling Paul to employ it in his exhortations towards kenotic imitation of Christ. The message of the Christ hymn is allied to the related emphases on humility in the letter, expressed through Paul's modelling of Christ (e.g. 1:12–26; 2:17–18; 3:3–12; cf., Asumang, 2011:1–38; Garland 1985:141–173), exemplified in his co-workers whom he commends (e.g. 1:27–30; 2:19–30; 4:3) and which the recipients were exhorted to emulate (2:1–4; 4:2–3; cf. Asumang 2012a:1–50).[12]

The overall picture of the state of scholarship, then, is that Philippians contains several cords of integrative themes spanning and tying all its sections together, with each cord directly addressing aspects of the situational context. This literary feature suggests that it was a single purposely-constructed letter aimed at addressing the variegated socio-pastoral problems in Philippi at the time. This no doubt makes subscription to the partition theory untenable.

1.3. The present proposal

One more cord of integrating theme may now be added to this picture. Several interpreters have rightly pointed out that, as it does in most of the apostle's other letters, the thanksgiving-prayer report in Philippians is fundamental in shaping the overall message of the letter (Black 1995:16–49; Conzelmann 1974:412; Jewett 1970b:40–53; Schubert 1939; Swift 1984:234–254). After all, even though it is primarily directed to God, the thanksgiving nevertheless has 'a didactic function' encapsulating the apostle's pastoral purposes and writing strategy (O'Brien 2009:13–14). Some interpreters have further argued that the

[12] Not all suggested themes are persuasive. For example, Lohmeyer's (1954) suggestion that the theme of martyrdom spanned the whole letter does not convince, as it requires an unusual definition of the martyrdom terminology.

themes which are introduced in the thanksgiving-prayer report of Philippians are consistently repeated in the rest of the letter, suggesting that it somewhat serves as the letter's 'table of contents'. As Wiles (1974:206–207) puts it, 'although couched in elevated and carefully structured language, and confined by liturgical idiom and epistolary convention for the most part to generalized statement, [the thanksgiving] nevertheless functions as a prologue to a drama, setting the tone and anticipating some of the major themes that ... bind the whole letter together'.

Jewett (1970b:53) similarly opines: 'the most powerful indications of unity [of Philippians] are found in the epistolary thanksgiving which, as Paul Schubert demonstrated, is a formal device, serving to announce and introduce the topics of the letter. The epistolary thanksgiving in Philippians 1:3–11 is intimately connected with each succeeding section of the letter'. He (1970b:53) specifically identifies the 'themes of suffering (1:7), joy (1:4), and mental attitude (1:7)' as serving to bind Philippians together.

Agreeing with the view that the verses of Philippians 1:3–11 'not only introduce the central theme, but they also foreshadow all the other significant motifs that are developed in the letter', Swift (1984:236–237) proposes that 'Verse 6, when properly interpreted in relation to verse 5, provides a summary statement of the entire epistle'. Swift's precise focus, however, was on the theme of the Philippians' partnership in the Gospel, and so he does not identify how other concurrent themes in the same verse contribute to Paul's pastoral strategy. Moreover, Swift does not demonstrate exactly how Paul's explicit expression of his proposition in 1:27–30 relates to the themes he broaches in his thanksgiving-prayer report.

Though he criticizes Jewett's assertion that the thanksgiving-prayer report serves as the letter's 'table of contents', as an overstatement, and chooses rather to read Philippians as 'a letter of friendship', Fee nevertheless comes closest to the present proposal in recognizing the thematic importance of Paul's reference to ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in 1:6. He states: 'Paul is concerned throughout the letter with [the Philippians'] present behaviour as reflecting the effective work of the gospel. Here [in 1:6] he reports on his prayer for them in this regard' (1995:73). Fee does not, however, detail exactly how the theme of 'work' features in the lexical flow and pastoral-theological argument 'throughout the letter'.[13]

The fact is the ἔργον (work) word group and its synonymous cognates occur on as frequently as eighteen occasions[14] in Philippians. This interesting literary feature is further buttressed by twelve other occasions[15] that glosses within the semantic domain of ἔργον are used (Louw, Nida, Smith, and Munson 1989). This phenomenon of frequent repetition and wide distribution of lexemes and morphemes allied to

[13] Interpreters who have similarly highlighted the theme of work in the thanksgiving-prayer report but have not analysed its literary and pastoral function in the whole letter include Bockmuehl (1998:62), Garland (1980:327–336), Gundry (2010), Heil (2010:42), O'Brien (1991:64), and Reumann (2008:112–115).

[14] These are ἔργον (1:6; 1:22; 2:30), κατεργάζεσθε (2:12), ἐνεργῶν (2:13a), ἐνεργεῖν (2:13b), ποιεῖτε (2:14), ἐκοπίασα (2:16), λειτουργίᾳ (2:17), συνεργὸν (2:25a), λειτουργὸν (2:25b), ἐργάτας (3:2), λατρεύοντες (3:3), σύζυγε (4:3a), συνεργῶν (4:3b), πράσσετε· (4:9), ἰσχύω (4:13a), and ἐνδυναμοῦντί (4:13b).

[15] These include δοῦλοι (1:1a—slaves), διακόνοις (1:1b—deacons), ἐπιχορηγίας (1:19—inner support), συνέχομαι (1:23—hard pressed), συναθλοῦντες (1:27—striving together), ἀγῶνα (1:30—wrestle or struggle), δούλου (2:7—slave), ἐδούλευσεν (2:22—slaved), διώκω (3:12—vigorously pursue), κατελήμφθην (3:12—apprehended, captured), ἐπεκτεινόμενος (3:13—stretching forward), συνήθλησάν (4:3—struggled together). Unless otherwise stated all translations are from the NRSV.

ἔργον together with their detailed applications in the argument of successive pericopae indicate the importance of the concept of work to Paul's overall pastoral strategy. It suggests a consistent literary theme spanning the letter and relating to the epistolary purpose and strategy. I therefore hypothesize that Paul's expression of confidence in Philippians 1:6 that God will perfect ἔργον ἀγαθὸν (a good work) he began in and among the Philippians by the day of Christ, commences a consistent literary and pastoral theme throughout the letter acting as a cord holding its sections together.

For the sake of precision, it is worth stating that the theme of work is only one of several thematic cords through Philippians and so does not, on its own, constitute the letter's 'uniting theme'. All the same, the concept of the perfection of God's good work through God's ongoing transformation of the believers, particularly evidenced in their adoption of appropriate actions and attitudes towards achieving unity and steadfastness in the face of persecution, and in their resistance of false teachers, and their continued gospel partnership with Paul, plays a fundamental role in addressing the socio-pastoral problems in Philippi. It certainly adds another nail in the coffin of the partition theory of Philippians. In what follows, I shall examine how the theme unveils itself in the various sections of the letter with particular emphasis on how it relates to the situational context.

2. Paul's Thanksgiving-Prayer Report (Phil 1:3–11)

As is common with many of his letters,[16] Paul begins Philippians by expressing thanks to God followed by a report of his prayers on behalf

[16] The exceptions are Galatians, 1 Timothy and Titus. The thanksgiving is replaced by specialised *berakah* in 2 Corinthians and Ephesians (cf. O'Brien 2009; Silva 2005:37).

of the congregation (1:3-11). The thanksgiving is offered for three specific items, namely, (a) the memory of the Philippians – 1:3–4, (b) their partnership in the gospel ministry—1:5, and (c) Paul's confidence in God's perfection of his good work in and among them—1:6. As I now explain, these three items are arranged in a progressively graded fashion from the most specific to the most general. This feature makes the reference to ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in the third item pivotal to Paul's overall pastoral strategy in the letter.

2.1. The memory of the Philippians (1:3-4)

With regard to the first item of thanksgiving in 1:3–4, interpreters are evenly divided as to its specificity, since the phrase ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ ὑμῶν (1:3b; literally—on all the memory you) is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be taken as temporally referring to the frequent occasions of Paul's memory or remembrance of the Philippians, as Paul similarly states in passages such as Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, and Philemon 4. The NRSV, in tandem with all the major translations, indeed renders 1:3ab as 'I thank my God every time I remember you' (so also, Fee 1995:77; Hansen 2009:45; Heil 2010:39; Silva 2005:42).

On the other hand, and on perhaps more explicit grammatical grounds, the second person pronoun, which is plural, is better taken as a subjective genitive and the ἐπὶ also taken as causal, as it plainly does in its apparently formulaic repetition in 1:5. Moreover, though Paul's six other uses of μνείᾳ elsewhere in his letters are all objective to himself, that is, they refer to Paul's memory, the peculiar linguistic features of the phrase in Philemon 1:3 makes μνείᾳ here different from its other Pauline uses and better taken as subjective. These grammatical considerations render the phrase in 1:3ab as referring rather to the Philippians' memory of Paul as one cause for the apostle's thanksgiving

– 'I thank my God for all your memory' (so also, Garland 1980:329; Hawthorne and Barker 1983:16; Martin 1976:63–64; O'Brien 2009:22–23; Peng 2003:415–419; Peterman 1997; Witherington 2011:36).

This preferred causal rendering of 1:3ab also makes more contextual sense, as it underlines Paul's thanksgiving as first and foremost specifically related to the gift he had recently received. Paul gives thanks to God because the Philippians had not forgotten him and in fact expressed their memory of him in sending the gift. That is why later in 4:10, Paul commends the Philippians that they have 'now at last' revived their φρονεῖν· (concern or thoughts), that is, revived their memory towards him. As Hansen (2009:45; cf. Peterman 1991:261–270) puts it, 'This thanksgiving [in 1:3] is directly related to the close of the letter where Paul writes what reads like a formal receipt'. Indeed, there are several other verbal parallels between this opening thanksgiving and the thank you note in 4:10–20,[17] indicating that Paul's expression of appreciation for their gift comes far earlier than is assumed by some interpreters.

2.2. The Philippians' partnership 1:5

The second item of the thanksgiving is in relation to the Philippians' partnership with the apostle in the gospel ministry. This κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (partnership or communion in the gospel) refers to their participation in the ministry 'through their prayers, their friendship, and their provision of material support' (Asumang 2012a:21), and no doubt therefore includes their recent gift. It refers to

[17] θεῷ μου (1:3), χαρᾶς (1:4), κοινωνίᾳ (1:5a), εὐαγγέλιον ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν (1:5b), φρονεῖν (1:7a), and συγκοινωνούς (1:7b), respectively correspond with θεός μου (4:19), Ἐχάρην (4:10a), συγκοινωνήσαντές (4:14), ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (4:15), φρονεῖν (4:10b), and συγκοινωνήσαντές (4:14).

'their participation in spreading the gospel in every possible way, which includes their recent partnership in the gospel in sending him a gift while he is imprisoned for the defense of the gospel' (Fee 1995:84; cf. Fowl 2005:22). That this second item expands on the first is also indicated by Paul's extension of the time scale – that is, from their recent occasion of remembering him in the first item in 1:3, to their partnership 'from the first day until now' (1:5) in the second item. Paul is grateful to God for both.

2.3. Perfection of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in Philippi 1:6

The reference to the partnership is followed by thanksgiving for a third item which further extends the period covered, stretching now from the inauguration of Paul's mission in Philippi to the 'day of Christ' (1:6). Paul is grateful because he is πεποιθὼς (persuaded or confident) that God who had begun ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in and among them will ἐπιτελέσει (thoroughly perfect or complete) it by the day of Christ.

Interpreters have made different suggestions on the exact referent for ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. So, for example, finding parallels between Philippians 1:6 and Genesis 2:2 LXX, Martin (1976:65) and Janzen (1996:27–54) have suggested that ἔργον ἀγαθὸν refers to God's work of creation which will become eschatologically consummated with Christ's second coming. Yet, while the theological tenet of this interpretation is undoubtedly correct, it is nevertheless too general and in any case, rather remote from the immediate context of the verse, and so, at best, constitutes a strained reading.

At the other extreme end are those interpreters (e.g. Hansen 2009:49–50; Heil 2010:42; Murray 1998:316–326; Ware 2005:210) who narrowly restrict the meaning of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν to equate it to the specific partnership in the Gospel ministry which the Philippians shared

with Paul. For Hansen (2009:50) for instance, 'the good work that God began was the formation of a corporate entity: the partnership (*koinõnia*) in the gospel'. Similarly, in the view of Heil (2010:42), ἔργον ἀγαθὸν is 'believing in and committing themselves to the gospel within the fellowship they shared with Paul and one another'. Ware (2005:210) similarly asserts: '῎Εργον and its cognates are frequently used by Paul with reference to the work of spreading the gospel. Already in the thanksgiving period Paul has referred to the Philippians' partnership with him for the gospel as an ἔργον ἀγαθὸν (1:6)'. Interpreters who take this second view of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν thus regard the third item of the thanksgiving as seeking to underline the eschatological time frame of the partnership and not stating another item that instigated Paul's gratitude.

Admittedly, this restricted interpretation of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν rests on a reasonably wide definition of Paul's partnership with the Philippians as encompassing 'all aspects of [Paul's] relations with the Philippians' (Fowl 2005:22). And indeed something may be said in favour of the attractiveness of this second option over the former general view, as it is more specific and better fits the flow of the two verses. Even so, and given the manner in which Paul uses the ἔργον terminology in the rest of the letter, this second option appears to overly restrict the meaning of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. Since Paul stresses the theocentric and Christotelic nature of this ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, that it is God who commenced it and will finish it at the day of Christ, it is more likely that at ἔργον ἀγαθὸν Paul had a much broader concept in mind than his partnership with the Philippians. Thus O'Brien's (1991:64) distinction is apt: '[The Philippians'] eager participation in Paul's gospel ministry was not the good work itself, but clear evidence of this work of salvation'. Put another way, the partnership was a manifestation of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, but the two are not to be equated.

Most interpreters regard the meaning of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν as fitting somewhere between the two extreme views, as referring to 'God's specific work of salvation' (Fee 1995:87; cf. Bockmuehl 1998:62; O'Brien 2009:64; Silva 2005:45). And this should be taken as the correct interpretation of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, so long as the term 'salvation' is not restricted to the redemptive justification of individuals but to God's miracle of new creation of individuals and the community of believers as a whole within their social Philippian context. In other words, by ἔργον ἀγαθὸν Paul had in mind God's all-encompassing project of their Christian existence in Philippi, that is, their salvation as broadly conceived in terms of their spiritual rebirth, growth, sanctification, maturation, corporate witness in Philippi and eventual transformation into Christ's image at the eschaton.

Five sets of arguments may be offered here in support of the superiority of this definition of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. Firstly, the use of ἐπιτελέσει (perfected) in 1:6 indicates that ἔργον ἀγαθὸν refers to the all-encompassing nature of their Christian existence. For Paul's other use of the τελειόω terminology in Philippians 3:12, is also in direct relation to the completion of God's transformation of the apostle at the eschaton. There in 3:12, Paul avows that he does not regard himself to have been τετελείωμαι (perfected) and so he presses and strains forward to reach that eventual goal of his salvation. Paul is thus evidently thinking of the final end of all aspects of his Christian existence. In the words of Silva (2005:175), 'to be perfected consists of attaining the last and ultimate goal, blameless at the day of Christ'. Paul indeed repeats the same wish for the Philippians' perfection in his prayer in 1:10b, 'that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless'. Given this wide-ranging significance of ἐπιτελέσει in 1:6, ἔργον ἀγαθὸν should also refer to

every aspect of the transformative work of God towards that ultimate end.[18]

Secondly, the qualifying locative for the ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, that is, ἐν ὑμῖν, indicates that Paul also had the social ramifications of God's transformative work in Philippi in mind, and not just the salvation of individuals. The plural ἐν ὑμῖν more frequently meant 'among you, in your midst' (Martin 1976:65), and thus cannot be taken to restrictively refer to the salvation of individuals, even though the πάντων ὑμῶν (all of you) of 1:7 shows that the thought of the salvation of individuals is definitely assumed as an integral part of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. Accordingly, the NRSV's 'among you' is a better rendering of ἐν ὑμῖν than 'in you' (NIV, ASV, ESV, GNT, KJV, NASB) even though the more explicit rendering, 'in and among you', does better justice to the thought and is to be preferred. Certainly, the locative in 1:6 indicates that God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν includes the social communal consequences of His miracle of transformation of the believers.

Thirdly, and as will shortly be explicated, Paul's use of the ἔργον terminology in the rest of Philippians (e.g. 2:12–13; 2:25; 3:2–3) consistently refers to their Christian existence, both in the sense of God's spiritual transformation of the believers, as well as its consequential individual ethical and social communal manifestations. So for example, in 2:12–13, the Philippians are urged to κατεργάζεσθε (work out) their salvation on the basis of the fact that God is ἐνεργῶν (at work) in them to enable them to both will and ἐνεργεῖν (to work) for his good pleasure. The word ἔργον after all mostly described the outward practical manifestation of active energy (BDAG 390) and was

[18] See Jewett (1970a:362–390) for a proposal arguing that some Philippian believers were claiming to have already been perfected and that Paul aimed to correct such a view.

thus unlikely to describe just inner spiritual transformation of the believers without reference also to its tangible outward consequences.

Fourthly, Paul's prayer report in 1:7–11 which follows the thanksgiving underlines the same concerns for the Philippians to manifest the tangible consequences of God's transformative work in and among them. For instance, Paul prays that their salvation will bear ethical fruit (καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης 1:11; fruit of righteous conduct), specifically, in their love for one another, and in their increased knowledge and discernment, which would enable their progressive holiness to be completed 'on the day of Christ' (1:10). In other words, the prayer of 1:7–11 is another way of expressing his confidence in God's perfection of ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. Certainly, the correspondences between the prayer and the confidence expressed in 1:6 indicate that ἔργον ἀγαθὸν inextricably manifests itself in the ethical and social conduct of the Philippians.

The whole thanksgiving-prayer report itself is symmetrically arranged so that Paul moves from a focus on the Philippians' 'good work' (1:3–5), to God's 'good work' (1:6–8), and back to the Philippians' 'good work' (1:9–11). This mutual interplay between the Philippians' actions and God's work is a constant feature of the letter and demonstrates that while ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in 1:6 no doubt refers to God's miraculous work in and among the Philippians, Paul did not view it in exclusively spiritual terms, but also in its ethical and communal manifestations in the Philippians actions and attitudes. For Paul, no action of the Philippians in relation to their Christian existence fell outside God's work (cf. Wagner 2009:257–274; Witherington 2011:61).

Finally, by identifying the time of the perfection of the ἔργον ἀγαθὸν at the ἡμέρας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, (day of Jesus Christ), Paul was indicating the all-encompassing eschatological significance of the ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. It

could only be concluded when all of God's plans and activities to that end were completed. Thus with ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, Paul underscores the massive consequences of the planting of the gospel in Philippi, covering its spiritual, social and ethical manifestations. Indeed, it is in this broad sense that Paul would assert in 1:28 that even the Philippians' suffering and their steadfast resistance of their opponents' intimidation were evidence of God's activity among them. The eschatological context of 1:6 thus defines the ἔργον ἀγαθὸν as not just inner spiritual transformation, and not just outer ethical relational conduct, but also included the social dimensions of the work of God. It is in this broad sense that ἔργον ἀγαθὸν represents God's project of Christian existence in Philippi.

In a summary then, Philippians 1:3–11 identifies three key pastoral concerns of Paul as items for thanksgiving which would also serve to shape his didactic and pastoral agenda in the rest of the letter. These items are stated in a progressively graded fashion, so that the final item, ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, subsumes all three. Paul is grateful to God that he has given him the assurance that God's ongoing project of Christian existence in Philippi, in its spiritual, ethical and social manifestations, will be perfected at the day of Christ. And this ongoing project was demonstrated in the specific instance of the Philippians' monetary gift, and more generally in their gospel partnership from the beginning. These exemplify the theme of work in the thanksgiving, and, as I next demonstrate, Paul returns to it in the rest of the letter and exhorts the Philippians to adopt the requisite attitudes and actions as manifestation of the progress towards its perfection.

3. Theme of Work in the Rest of Philippians

3.1. δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ in Paul's salutation (Phil 1:1–2)

One of the two peculiar features of the salutation of Philippians (1:1–2)[19] has significance for the theme of 'work' in the letter. As commentators have routinely stressed, of all Paul's letters, it is only in the salutation of Philippians that Paul designates *both* himself and his co-writer Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ. This designation may have been intended in an honorific, or alternatively, in functional terms (Fee 1995:63; Hansen 2009:38). Even though the two connotations are not mutually exclusive, there are good reasons to take the view that in Philippians 1:1, Paul uses δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ as describing himself and Timothy as 'slave workers' of Christ Jesus, that is, in the humble functional sense (Asumang 2011:14–15; Fowl 2005:16–17; Heil 2010:33; Silva 2005:39–40).

One key reason for this conclusion is that in 2:22, Paul characterizes his and Timothy's ministry in a similar fashion, as ἐδούλευσεν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (slaved with me in the gospel). The functional designation of Paul and Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ in 1:1 moreover pre-empts the theme of slavery in the letter, which by semantic association, relates to the theme of 'work'. In Garland's words (2006:189; cf. Fee 1995:62), 'Introducing himself and Timothy as Christ's slaves at the outset must be intended to highlight lowly service and humility, an emphasis that echoes throughout the letter'. ΔοῦΛοι Χριστοῦ certainly sets the tone

[19] It may also be argued, albeit weakly, that the other peculiar feature of the salutation, that is, Paul's explicit call out of the ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις (overseers and servants) is intended to drive home his expectation for the leaders to take responsibility for participating in the good work of God by adopting the requisite humble attitude (Fee 1995:67–70; Selby 2012:79–94).

for the apostle's later exhortation to the Philippians to adopt the requisite slavery associated attitudes and actions pertaining to their relationships and so participate in the perfection of God's good work among them (2:1–13).

3.2. μοι καρπὸς ἔργου in Paul's missionary report (Phil 1:12-26)

The missionary report in Philippians is a detailed account of the apostle's current circumstances, and by its rather early placement, is somewhat also unique among Paul's letters.[20] With its insistence that the overall result of Paul's circumstances was 'that Christ is proclaimed in every way' (1:18), the missionary report is designed to reassure the Philippians. However, it is additionally also intended to paranetically address the situation in Philippi. Essentially, Paul reports that his imprisonment has in no way hindered the work of God, but, 'actually helped to spread the gospel' (1:12). Paul thus implies that his circumstances illustrated how God was perfecting ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in his context. The Philippians were therefore to take a cue and emulate his attitude of joyful surrender to God (1:18), and actions of courageous proclamation of the gospel (1:19; cf. Fee 1995:63; Heil 2010:67; Ware 2005:212).

It is in this context that Paul's specific reference to μοι καρπὸς ἔργου (fruitful work for me) in 1:22 should also be taken as a direct echo of the theme of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν and an encouragement for the Philippians to emulate Paul in adopting the requisite attitudes and actions towards its perfection. This is explicitly so because the fruitful work is stated as dependent on ἐπιχορηγίας (1:19; energetic support; cf., BADG 387) of the Spirit of Christ Jesus and the Philippians' prayer,

[20] The only parallel is 2 Corinthians 1:8–11 but the tone, brevity and detail there is drastically different from the account in Philipians 1:12–26 (cf. Silva 2005:59–60).

thus ultimately a result of God's activity (Fee 1995:133; Silva 2005:76). God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν (1:6; good work), yielded καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης (1:11; fruit of righteous conduct) among the Philippians, through Paul's καρπὸς ἔργου (1:22; fruitful work), the Philippians' own κοινωνίᾳ (1:5; partnership) in it, and the Spirit's ἐπιχορηγίας (1:19; energetic supply). Just as it was so for the Philippians' Christian existence, Paul's μοι καρπὸς ἔργου is thus also a product of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. The missionary report accordingly exemplified to the Philippians how to partake in God's perfection of his good work in their context by emulating Paul (Fee 1995:153; Heil 2010:70; Ware 2005:214).

3.3. καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ in Paul's proposition (1:27–30)

Paul's main proposition in 1:27–30 does not explicitly use the ἔργον terminology, even though the concept of the perfection of God's work shapes how its motivation is framed. Beginning with the emphatic adverbial transition μόνον (only), Paul employs 'one long convoluted sentence' in the Greek (Fee 1995:77) to directly address the situation in Philippi, urging the believers to adopt the requisite attitudes and actions which accord with the gospel. They were to stand firm in one Spirit, strive side by side with one mind and resist the opponents of the gospel. Paul then motivates this instruction by stating that its adoption will be evidence of their salvation as well as their opponents' destruction.

Of relevance is Paul's qualification of this motivation with, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ Θεοῦ (1:28c; literally, and this from God), a hanging clause which raises a number of grammatical and syntactical questions[21] the details

[21] Is the particle καὶ of cumulative or copulative force? What is the referent for τοῦτο? Is τοῦτο specifically identifying their σωτηρίας as from God, or also includes their suffering? What significance should be attached to the fact that the prepositional

of which cannot be fully pursued here. It is, however, worth discerning three pointers which directly link this hanging clause to the theme of the perfection of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. Firstly, Paul indicates in 1:27 that their unity should be forged ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι (in the one Spirit). This means they were to envisage their actions towards unity as consequence of the activity of God's Spirit. As Fee (1994:746; cf. Edwards 2013:74–93; Heil 2010:74; Samra 2006:154–155) puts it, 'Paul's obvious concern is that their being one in Christ is the direct result of the Spirit's presence in their individual and community life'. So, having asked the Philippians to pray that he would receive the Spirit's ἐπιχορηγίας (1:19; energetic support), Paul now indicates that it is also by the same Spirit's enablement that the Philippians would be able to persevere in unity. Their unity was not to be man-made, but Spirit empowered and framed. It was, in other words, a manifestation of the work of God among them.

Secondly, the explanatory conjunction, ὅτι (since, for, or because), which begins 1:29 indicates that Paul envisaged even the intimidations the believers faced in Philippi as an integral and unavoidable part of God's activity among them—'For (ὅτι) he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well'. In other words, 1:29 clarifies 1:28c, explaining that, both their salvation and its social consequences, including the intimidation by opponents, evidenced God's grace, and thus both were part of God's work among them.

Thirdly, it is apparent, given especially the clarification of 1:29 and the conceptual flow of the passage, that the neuter τοῦτο (this) does not narrowly refer to the Philippians' eschatological salvation (contra Heil

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phrase ἀπὸ θεοῦ occurs only once in the letter (1:2)? For analyses of these questions, see O'Brien, (1991:156–157) and Silva, (2005:89:90).

2010:76), even though that is the thought which immediately precedes the phrase. Instead, τοῦτο (this) refers to every aspect of their salvation including its social consequences. That is to say, τοῦτο (this) denotes everything that Paul indicates in the proposition to be 'worthy of the gospel of Christ'. In agreement with Silva (2005:83) therefore, it should be concluded that τοῦτο in 1:28c represents 'the whole complex of ideas: conflict, destruction, perseverance, and salvation. The true ground for the Philippians' encouragement was the profound conviction that nothing in their experience took place outside God's superintendence'. It is certainly on this basis of divine activity that in 1:30, Paul offers himself as a model of God's work by reminding them of his own 'struggles' (1:30) which they witnessed when the ἔργον ἀγαθὸν began (1:6).[22]

Putting these pointers together, it is evident that καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ Θεοῦ underscores the pivotal idea that the whole of the Philippians' Christian existence was God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν which Paul exhorts them to partake in by adopting the requisite attitudes and actions. Accordingly, the NRSV's translation of καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ as 'And this is God's *doing*' accurately captures the thought of the motivation for the proposition in Philippians 1:27–30. Paul was insisting that the Philippians' pursuance of unity, as well as their resilient perseverance against the external persecution, all form part of God's perfection of His ἔργον ἀγαθὸν which he had begun in Philippi.

[22] The Trinitarian frame of the single sentenced 1:27–30 further supports the conclusion that Paul envisaged his exhortation as reflecting God's good work among the Philippians. For an analysis of the role of the doctrine of the Trinity in Philippians, see Asumang (2012b:1–55).

3.4. Christ as δούλου in Philippians 2:1–11

As most recent commentators have emphasized (e.g, Fee 1995:204; Heil 2010:87; Hellerman 2009:779–797; O'Brien 1991:210–211; Silva 2005), the Christ hymn (Phil 2:5–11), regardless of its provenance, ought to be interpreted in the first instance in its immediate literary context (2:1–11), where it motivates the apostle's exhortation for mutual submission and self-sacrifice within the Church in Philippi. While no explicit lexical reference to the ἔργον terminology occurs in the pericope, there are ample indications that the theme of the perfection of God's good work conceptually undergirds the passage. For a start, the several verbal parallels between the thanksgiving of 1:4–7 and 2:1–2[23] indicate that the concept of the perfection of God's good work which is broached in 1:6 is also assumed in the latter passage. Moreover, the exhortation to 'be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind' (2:2) amplifies Paul's earlier command in 1:27 for them to stand firm 'in one Spirit', which, as already argued, reflects the theme of God's work. Furthermore, and as will shortly be demonstrated, the exhortation of Philippians 2:12–18 which is aimed at practically applying the message of the Christ hymn explicitly employs several έργον terminologies to identify the imitative obedience of the Philippians as their active participation in God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν.

Above all, however, the reference to Christ's adoption of μορφὴν δούλου λαβών (having taken the form of slave) echoes the theme of

[23] Χαρᾶς (1:4; joy), κοινωνίᾳ (1:5; partnership), φρονεῖν (1:7a; consider), and ἔχειν με ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς (1:7b; have me in your heart), respectively correspond to χαρὰν (2:2a; joy), κοινωνία (2:1a; partnership), φρονῆτε (2:2b; and φρονοῦντες—2:2e; of one mind), and εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί (2:1d; bowels of affection and sympathy).

work as it specifically exemplifies[24] the response which Paul was urging the Philippians to adopt as their participation in the perfection of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. By giving up his rightful claims, obeying and humbly sacrificing himself, Jesus exemplified the attitudes and actions which Paul exhorted the Philippians to adopt in 1:27–30, the same attitudes and actions that he underlined as derived from God's activity (cf. Asumang 2011:1–38; Eastman 2010:1–22; Gupta 2010:1–16; Heil 2010:88; Silva 2005:99; Wortham 1996:269–288). The reference to μορφὴν δούλου λαβών certainly furthers the theme of slavery which, as already stated, is semantically related to the theme of work in the letter.

3.5. Obedience as ἔργον and λειτουργία in Philippians 2:12–18

The exhortations of Philippians 2:12–18 take up the concept of the obedience of Christ in 2:8 and practically applies its implications to the Philippians. The argument of the passage moves in three steps and all three steps are framed by the theme of the perfection of God's good work. In the first step (2:12–14), Paul urges the Philippians to obey by κατεργάζεσθε (thoroughly working out) their salvation. He then explains with a γάρ clause in 2:13 that God, 'who is at work (ἐνεργῶν) in you, enabling you both to will and to work (ἐνεργεῖν) for his good pleasure', makes this κατεργάζεσθε (thoroughly working out) inevitable. God's work within them thus causes and necessitates human work of obedience. Phrased another way, Paul envisaged that the Philippians' obedience through their rejection of grumblings and murmurings was an active manifestation of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν (cf.,

[24] For an analysis of whether the passage primarily sets Jesus out as ethical Exemplar to be imitated, or rather as the grounds for Christian ethical behaviour, see Silva (2005:92–116). For the proposal that Paul parallels the Christ hymn with his experiences during the inaugural mission when the Church was first planted in Philippi, as recorded in Acts 16, see Hellermann (2010:85–102).

Wagner 2009:257–274; Ware 2005:248–249). The 'striking verbal correspondence between 1:6 and 2:13' (Silva 2005:120)[25] further makes the connection between 2:12–14 and the theme of perfection of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν first introduced in 1:6 patent. As Ware (2005:249) rightly states, 'The similarity of Philippians 2:12–13 to 1:5–6 is especially striking, in the notable way in which the activity of the Philippians and the activity of God in them are juxtaposed in each passage'.

In the second step of the argument (2:15–16a), Paul states that the ultimate goal of their obedience was that they become ἄμεμπτοι (faultless) in a sinful world, giving him grounds to boast at the ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ (day of Christ). Here, Paul does not explicitly use the ἔργον (work) or ἐπιτελέσει (perfect) terminology of 1:6. All the same, ἄμεμπτοι is semantically linked to ἐπιτελέσει (perfect) and so directly relates the thought here to God's perfection of his work among the believers. As already indicated, in his prayer report in 1:10, Paul prayed that the perfection of which he was confident in 1:6 will be manifested in their being ἀπρόσκοποι (blameless), a word which is a semantic variant of ἄμεμπτοι (2:15; cf., BADG 52). Thus the thought of 2:15–16a directly matches the thought of the perfection of God's good work in the thanksgiving-prayer report. The eschatological framing of ἄμεμπτοι (faultless) at the ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ (day of Christ) certainly makes this connection definite. The obedience of the Philippians was a manifestation of their participation in God's work, the ultimate goal of which was their blamelessness or perfection at the day of Christ.

[25] The divine ἔργον and ἐν ὑμῖν of 1:6 correspond with the divine ἐνεργῶν and ἐν ὑμῖν in 2:13; and the ὅτι of 1:6 corresponds with the γάρ of 2:13. Also the ἡμέρας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ of 1:6 corresponds with ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ which later comes up in 2:16.

In the third step of the argument of the passage (2:16b–18), Paul offers a further motivation for the Philippians' obedience by appealing to his partnership with them. He indicates that he will boast at Christ's return, because the Philippians' faultlessness will indicate that his ἐκοπίασα (labour or toil to the point of exhaustion) has not been in vain. He further characterizes the partnership as a joint project of participation in an offering to God, the Philippians' contribution serving as the main sacrifice and λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως (service of their faith), and Paul's life as its accompanying libation. These verbal features directly echo the theme of God's work. As in 1:5–6, and in his proposition in 1:27–30, Paul stresses that God's good work of Christian existence in Philippi bound him and the Philippians together in an ongoing project which will only be perfected at the return of Christ (cf. Luter 1988:335–344; Ware 2005:243–244).

Two further comments regarding this third step are in order. To begin with, Paul's use of ἐκοπίασα (toil to the point of exhaustion) to describe his work is a stylistic variation of the ἔργον terminology (BADG 558). Specifically, it is most likely that Paul preferred to use κενὸν ἐκοπίασα (toil in vain) here in 2:16b, instead of employing the ἔργον terminology, because of his deliberate allusion to Isaiah 65:22–23 LXX. Isaiah 65:22–23 indicates that in the eschatological new heaven and new earth, God's people will rejoice in their τὰ ἔργα τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν παλαιώσουσιν οἱ δὲ ἐκλεκτοί μου οὐ κοπιάσουσιν εἰς κενὸν (their works and painful service, and will not toil in vain; cf., Isaiah 49:3–4 LXX; O'Brien, 1991:300). Paul likely alludes to this and thus opts to use ἐκοπίασα (toil in vain) rather than ἔργον terminology which pervades in the passage.

In addition, Paul's depiction of the Philippians' work as θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ (sacrifice and service, or sacrificial service; so Heil

2010:101), though no doubt expressing the notion of the Philippians' participation in God's perfection of his good work, has also raised the question as to whether in this metaphor, Paul envisaged himself (so Ware 2005:271–272), or alternatively, the Philippians (so O'Brien 1991:310) as the priests officiating the sacrifice.

This question requiring a binary answer, however, misses the fundamental emphasis in 2:16b–18 on Paul's partnership with the Philippians. As he would later variously also express in 2:30, 3:3 and 4:18, Paul after all portrays the priestly service as part of their joint participation in the work of God. The question of which one of them was the officiating priest appears therefore not to have preoccupied the apostle. And given also that the term θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ (sacrifice and service) is often employed in the LXX (e.g. Exod 28–39; Num 1–2; Ezek 40–46) to describe the priestly service, it is most likely that Paul portrays both himself and the Philippians as co-celebrant priests who together participate in the work of God. In the words of Garland (2006:227; cf. Borchert 2008:144; Miller 2010:11–23; Wendland 2010:141–147), 'The image recalls their partnership in the defence and confirmation of the gospel (1:7) and suggests that both he and they are making sacrificial offerings'.

3.6. ἔργον in Paul's Second Missionary Report in Philippians 2:19–30

The epistolary function of Philippians 2:19–30 is debated by scholars. Some regard it as resuming the missionary report of 1:12–26, this time commenting on two of Paul's immediate associates whose movements were of keen interest to the Philippians. Other scholars see the passage as a typical Pauline 'travelogue' which, for hortatory purposes, is placed at an unusual point of his letter (Culpepper 1980:349–358; Funk 1967:249–268; Silva 2005:134–135; Snyman 2005:289–307).

Regardless of the merits of the various proposed epistolary functions of the passage, one of its most prominent features is how the ἔργον terminology with its cognates pervades Paul's commendation of both Timothy and Epaphroditus. In this way, Paul presents these associates as exemplars of the attitudes and actions that he wanted the Philippians to adopt in their manifestation and partaking of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν.

With regard to Paul's commendation of Timothy (2:19–24), the apostle asserts that in contrast to some who seek their own interest, Timothy was genuinely interested in the Philippians' welfare. In other words, Timothy exhibited the exact quality that Paul had earlier in 2:2–4 exhorted the Philippians to adopt as part of their participation in God's work (Asumang, 2012a, p. 33). Paul then affirms this commendation by vouching for Timothy's faithful service and partnership, that as a spiritual son Timothy had ἐδούλευσεν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (2:22; slaved for the gospel) with Paul. As noted earlier, this description not only practicalized the designation of both Paul and Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ (1:1; slaves of Christ) and underscores their modelling of Christ's example in taking the form of a slave (2:7); it also directly echoes the letter's theme on work. The verbal correspondence between πέποιθα δὲ ἐν Κυρίῳ (2:24; I am persuaded in the Lord) and πεποιθὼς αὐτὸ τοῦτο (1:6; being persuaded of the same) certainly supports the conclusion that Paul understood the service of Timothy and himself as manifestation of God's work (cf. Heil 2010:107).

In addition, the fact that Timothy slaved ὡς πατρὶ τέκνον σὺν ἐμοὶ (2:22; as father and son with me) associates Timothy's 'slavery' in the gospel with Paul's ἐκοπίασα (2:16; toil to exhaustion) in the preceding paragraph, and similarly exemplifies the kind of attitudes and actions the Philippians were being urged to adopt as the manifestation of God's

good work among them (cf. Heil 2010:105; Holloway 2008:542–556; O'Brien 1991:325; Park 2007:128).

A similar framing of Paul's commendation of Epaphroditus with the theme of God's work follows in 2:25–30. Paul explicitly refers to Epaphroditus as συνεργὸν (2:25; co-worker) and λειτουργὸν τῆς χρείας μου (2:25; a servant of my needs). Heil (2010:108) is thus correct when he asserts that Epaphroditus 'is a partner with Paul in the fruitful "work" (ἔργου) of advancing the gospel (1:22), the same good "work" (ἔργον) God had begun in the audience (1:6)'. Like Paul, Epaphroditus was willing to be expended in unselfish service for Christ (Bockmuehl 1998:174). Indeed, Paul indicates that Epaphroditus 'came close to death for τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ—the work of Christ'—making up for the Philippians' λειτουργίας (services) towards the apostle (2:30).

The phrase ἔργον Χριστοῦ (work of Christ) in 2:30 is in particular interesting for it expresses the sufferings of Epaphroditus not as primarily Epaphroditus' work, but rather as part of Christ's work. In other words, 'ἔργον Χριστοῦ here in 2:30 describes in general terms the "work" of the gospel (cf. 1:5) to which the Philippians, Epaphroditus, and Paul were committed' (O'Brien 1991:342). Thus in his second missionary report, Paul uses his commendation of his co-workers as a foil for his paranaetic didactic purposes to exemplify his call upon the Philippians to pay heed to their participation in God's perfection of his ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in and among them.

3.7. κακοὺς ἐργάτας in Paul's polemics in Philippians 3:1-4:1

Philippians 3:1-4:1 engages another facet of the situational context behind the letter, namely, the dangers posed by the false teachers who threatened to derail the gospel. The passage itself raises several

contextual[26], textual[27] and literary-theological[28] questions, but its general outline is much more straightforward. Paul first lays a foundation for the chapter by employing rhetorically-charged polemics to denounce these false teachers who had most likely not yet arrived in Philippi, even though judging by its prominence and biting nature, Paul likely envisaged their arrival to be imminent (3:1–6). This is followed by 3:7–14 which, in contrast to the preceding passage, sets out an account of Paul's theological ambitions, beliefs, attitudes and practices, but in such a manner that it also parallels the Christ hymn of Philippians 2, counters the opponents' teaching and so presents Paul as exemplar to be emulated by the Philippians. The chapter concludes with an exhortation (3:15–4:1) applying this theology to the Philippians and evoking Paul's earlier proposition in 1:27–30 to urge them to live worthily of the gospel, looking forward to their final transformation at Christ's return. In effect then, this polemical chapter is conceptually in tandem with Paul's overall pastoral purpose for writing. The Philippians were to reject the false teachers and emulate Paul in their Christian existence - to 'stand firm in the Lord *in this way*' (4:1).

In its linguistic details, the second and third sections of the chapter are framed much more by commercial, athletic and civic metaphors[29] rather than the ἔργον terminology. However, in the first foundational passage (3:1–6), the apostle significantly employs the ἔργον

[26] See Fredrickson (2008:22–28), Grayston (1986:170–172), Nanos (2013:47–91), O'Brien (1991:353–355) and Tellbe (1995:97–121).

[27] See Black (1995:16–49), DeSilva (1994:27–54), Price (1987:253–290), Reed (1996:63–90), Reumann (2008) and Watson (1988:57–88).

[28] See Asumang (2012b:1–55), Garland (1985:141–173), Keown (2011:28–44), Lively (2010:35–44), Snyman (2006:259–283), Standhartinger (2008:417–435) and Still 2014:139–148).

[29] For commercial metaphors in Philippians, see Ogereau (2014). On the athletic imagery, see Asumang (2011:1–38), Arnold (2014) and Pfitzner (1967).

terminology to counter the false teachers and thus indicates the crucial role of the theme of work in addressing the situational context behind the letter.

Here is how Paul achieves this pastoral purpose. In 3:2, he triply labels the false teachers, most likely Judaizers, as τοὺς κύνας (the dogs), οὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας (the evil workers), and τὴν κατατομήν· (the mutilators). Basically, these false teachers insisted that Gentile believers should also submit to ritual Mosaic laws on circumcision, observance of special food laws and holidays. In characterizing them as τοὺς κύνας (the dogs), Paul was not seeking to be 'derogatory' (contra Heil 2010:118) or even 'abusive' (contra Fee 1995:290 n. 21). Rather, he was ironically reversing the Jewish rhetoric of the time which used the term to brand Gentiles as ritually unclean. Paul in other words recognised the demands of the Judaizers as ethnically motivated and employs this reversed rhetoric to insist that the Judaizers, and not Gentile believers, were ritually unclean dogs.[30] A similar reversed rhetoric characterises Paul's labelling of the Judaizers as τὴν κατατομήν· (the mutilators) (cf. DeSilva 1994:34; O'Brien 1991:357).

Given this literary rhetorical style and logic, it is reasonable to assume, and a number of scholars indeed do, that in also labelling the Judaizers with the crisp but potent characterisation as κακοὺς ἐργάτας (evil workers) Paul likewise adopts this reverse rhetoric to technically 'refute the Judaizers' claims that they were doing the works of the law (*erga*

[30] According to O'Brien (1991, p. 355), '"Dogs" and Gentiles in some contexts were almost synonymous… As a religious term it was applied by Jews to Gentiles or lapsed Jews who were ritually unclean and thus outside the covenant. Here in Phil 3:2 the dogs' association with impurity and their being outside the people of God are the points of the comparison. But in an amazing reversal Paul asserts that it is the Judaizers who are to be regarded as Gentiles; they are "the dogs" who stand outside the covenant blessings'.

nomou; cf. Gal 3:10; 5:3; 6:13) (Silva 2005:147). Put another way, the Judaizers who claimed to be doing works to please God were in actual fact doing evil works which God detested. Indeed, this may well be 'a deliberate pun on the opponents' claim to be doing the so-called "works of the Law"' (Bockmuehl 1998:188; cf. Fee 1995:296; Garland 1985: 168).

Alternatively, and judging by the parallels between Philippians 3:2 and 2 Corinthians 11:13, κακοὺς ἐργάτας could be taken to be a stylistic variant of Paul's other characterisation of the Judaizers in 2 Corinthians 11:13 as ἐργάται δόλιοι (deceitful workers). If that is correct, it could be surmised that Paul was indicating that the missionary activities of the Judaizers (not their doctrine) was κακοὺς (evil). In other words, κακοὺς ἐργάτας was Paul's way of warning the Philippians to beware of the evil effects of the missionary activities of the Judaizers (Grayston 1986:171; Koester 1961:317–332; Martin 1976:125; Snider 2011:204).

Whether by κακοὺς ἐργάτας Paul intended to use a technical reverse rhetoric or he functionally characterised the negative consequences of the missionary activities of the Judaizers as evil, this labelling resonates with the theme of God's good work in Philippians. This is demonstrated even more so by the structure of the passage in which each of the three labels in 3:2 is directly countered by an opposite in 3:3 (Asumang 2012b:35–38; Garland 1985:168–169). This structure indicates that κακοὺς ἐργάτας is directly refuted by οἱ πνεύματι Θεοῦ λατρεύοντες (we worship or serve in God's Spirit). The word λατρεύοντες which is a synonymous cognate of λειτουργίᾳ (2:17) describes 'work for pay, be in servitude, and render cultic service' (BADG 587). It is used in the LXX to denote Levitical or priestly service, and elsewhere by Paul for general service rendered to God by His covenantal people (e.g. Rom 9:4). As Hess (1986:3.550) explains, λατρεύοντες describes 'the service

of God by the whole people and by the individual, both outwardly in the cultus and inwardly in the heart'.

Strathmann (1973:4.60) further clarifies that λατρεύοντες 'involves the demand for right disposition of the heart and the demonstration of this in the whole of religious and moral conduct'. In effect, λατρεύοντες describes the worshipper's total existence. Snider's (2011:206; cf. Jobes 1995:183–191) insight is thus correct: 'The characterisation in Phil 3:3 of true believers in general as *latreuontes*, then, is consistent for Paul—serving God in the *latreuö* sense involves a commitment of the heart that characterises the whole life. As a Christian, one is a servant-worshipper of the true God.'

In that case, the contrastive matching of κακοὺς ἐργάτας with οἱ πνεύματι Θεοῦ λατρεύοντες in Philippians 3:2–3 indicates that Paul intentionally designates the Judaizers as κακοὺς ἐργάτας so as to specifically characterise them as opposite to the Christian existence of Paul and the Philippians. Put differently, κακοὺς ἐργάτας is used as counter to God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν. It certainly evokes Paul's earlier characterisation of his and the Philippians' participation in God's good work as λειτουργίᾳ (2:17; cf. 2:25, 30) and thus their rejection of the false teachers as worshipful service. The Philippians should take the danger of the Judaizers extremely seriously and βλέπετε (beware).

Another indication that Paul's description of Christian existence in Philippians 3:3 directly juxtaposes it with the Judaizers' evil work is the Trinitarian framing of 3:3. True believers, Paul says, worship (or serve) in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus. This Trinitarian framing of the passage depicts the activities of the Judaizers as derived from the flesh, whereas the service of Paul and the Philippians was divinely derived and directed (Asumang 2012b:1–55). After all, the Christian existence of the Philippians was initiated by God (1:6), maintained

through the enablement of the Spirit of Christ (1:19, 27), retained through their service in the Spirit of God (3:2–3) and would be perfected by God at the day of Christ (Heil 2010:119). This was in sharp contrast with the Judaizers' evil work. It is on this basis that Paul proceeds in the rest of the chapter to explain how his own Christian existence exemplified this truth (3:7–14) and exhort the Philippians to practise it (3:15–4:1).

3.8. συνεργῶν in Philippians 4:2–20

The concluding chapter of Philippians is made up of a number of apparently discrete passages with little discernible connection between them, a feature that is not uncommon with the final sections of Paul's letters. Going by the literary markers, three sub-sections are apparent. It begins with a brief but direct exhortation of two influential leaders in the fellowship, namely, Euodia and Syntyche, to settle their differences and pursue unity (4:2–3). This is followed by a general paranaesis which urges the fellowship to rejoice and pursue God's peace through eschewing angst and anxiety (4:4–9).[31] The letter finally concludes, rather uniquely for Paul's letters, with a 'thank-you note' in 4:10–20[32]

[31]The emphatic Χαίρετε (rejoice) with which 4:4–9 begins, the passage's general paranaetic flavour, and the closer affinity of 4:2–3 with the preceding chapters, may suggest that though 4:4–9 also directly addresses the situation in Philippi, its focus is slightly different from that of 4:2–3. Alternatively, Heil (2010:142) divides the chapter into two sub-sections, namely 4:1–5 and 4:6–20.

[32] There are enough verbal correspondences between 4:10–20 and the thanksgiving-prayer report of 1:3–11 to support the rejection of the theory that the former was a separate note (cf. Silva 2005:2000–202). To be precise, θεῷ μου (1:3), χαρᾶς (1:4), κοινωνίᾳ (1:5; and συγκοινωνούς μου 1:7b), and φρονεῖν (1:7) respectively correspond to θεός μου (4:19), Ἐχάρην (4:10a), συγκοινωνήσαντές μου (4:14), and φρονεῖν (4:10b). These correspondences also support the likelihood that a connection exists between the theme of work in 1:6 and 4:10–20, perhaps through lexical pointers such as ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με (4:13; I am strong in the One who empowers

in which Paul acknowledges receipt of the gift and reflects on its theological significance to their partnership in the gospel mission (cf., Briones 2011:47–69; Peterman 1991:261–270; Peterman 1997).

Given that the anxiety and disquiet which 4:4–9 addresses likely derived from the same situation engaged in 4:2–3, some commentators (e.g. Silva 2005:191; Hansen 2009) reasonably divide the chapter into two sections, 4:2–9 and 4:10-20. Philippians 4:2–3 thus lays the foundation for Paul's other exhortations in the rest of the chapter, at least its first half. It also has several linguistic and conceptual links with the body of the letter, as it specifically urges Euodia and Syntyche to adopt the same attitudes and actions which are previously urged upon the readers (2:1–5), typified by Christ (2:6–11) and exemplified in Paul and his other co-workers (2:17–30).

These features indicate that though its exhortation is briefly stated, Philippians 4:2–3 plays a crucial function in Paul's pastoral strategy. It goes to the heart on Paul's demand of the Philippians to adopt the requisite attitudes and actions which would ensure that God's good work in and among them is perfected. Euodia and Syntyche were to

> [B]ury their differences by adopting the 'same mind-set', which in this case as in the immediately preceding imperative, is qualified '*in the Lord*.' Here is the evidence that we are not dealing with a personal matter, but with 'doing the gospel' in Philippi. Having 'the same mind-set *in the Lord*' has been specifically spelled out in the preceding paradigmatic narratives where Christ (2:6-11) has humbled himself by taking the 'form of a slave' and thus becoming obedient unto death on a cross, and Paul (3:4-14) has expressed his

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me). This phrase in 4:13 certainly evokes the thought of 2:12–13 which as argued is directly related to the theme of the perfection of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν.

> longing to know Christ, especially through participation in his sufferings so as to be conformed into the same cruciform lifestyle. The way such a 'mind-set' takes feet is humbly 'looking out for the interests of others' within the believing community (2:3–4)' (Fee 1995:392; his emphases cf. O'Brien 1991:478–480).

Given that 4:2–3 plays this crucial pastoral function in the whole letter, it is worthy of note that Paul explicitly identifies Euodia and Syntyche as among his συνεργῶν (co-workers). While this label is not unique in itself, it nevertheless unequivocally resonates with the theme of work in the letter. It should remind the two leaders that like Epaphroditus, Paul and Timothy, they were workers in God's project of Christian existence in Philippi and so ought to adopt the attitudes and actions commensurate with that. Indeed, they had previously done so when they ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλησάν μοι μετὰ (4:3; struggled with me in the gospel), a statement which appears to deliberately hark back to 1:27 where Paul urges the Philippians to strive together in the gospel, side by side in one mind. Euodia and Syntyche participated in the good work which God had begun in Philippi and are now being urged through this exhortation to resolve their differences and resume that work. The final chapter of Philippians thus engages the pastoral issue of Paul's partnership in the gospel with the Philippians as part of God's work, and impresses upon the leaders to ensure that it was not derailed through their conflict, whatever its cause.

Paul's pointed identification of a mediator in 4:3 as γνήσιε σύζυγε (loyal yokefellow) to help resolve the conflict buttresses this emphasis in the letter that what was at stake was God's good work in Philippi and that the resolution of the differences was an essential part of perfecting it. Several speculations have been made as to the specific identity of γνήσιε σύζυγε (loyal yokefellow), but that line of enquiry has rightly been deemed by recent scholarship as 'unnecessary' (O'Brien 1991, pp.

480-481). The possibility that Σύζυγε was a proper name of a Church leader within the fellowship or one nearby cannot be completely ruled out even though it would have been extremely remarkable within the literary context for Σύζυγε to represent a proper name, given the coincidence of the name and the function being commissioned for him to play. Such a 'name' was after all unknown (BDAG 954) and in any case, as Fee (1995:393n.44) points out, 'the qualifier "genuine" almost totally disqualifies it as a proper noun'.

An alternative and more acceptable interpretation is that Paul may well be using a 'nickname' for a well-known and influential person, perhaps 'an associate of Paul well-known within the Philippian community' (Heil 2010:145; cf. Verhoef 1998:209–219; Carls 2001:161–182). In that case, such a moniker would have been apt indeed. The word σύζυγε was after all used to describe fellow-soldiers, gladiators, or co-slaves sharing the same burdens (BDAG 954). In this respect σύζυγε could be a variant of συνήθλησάν (4:3; co-strugglers) or συνεργῶν (4:3; co-workers). Philippians 4:2–3 thus brings together very important personalities with the gifts and responsibilities for partaking in God's work of fostering peace in the fellowship.

Even so, and within a passage in which he deliberately 'names, names', Paul may well have had an additional pastoral purpose for using σύζυγε to identify the mediator. That pastoral purpose was the fact that the task being directed to γνήσιε σύζυγε (loyal yokefellow) was essentially the same task that the whole congregation was being urged to shoulder – that is, to take their share in adopting the attitudes and actions commensurate with their participation in the perfection of God's good work. Γνήσιε σύζυγε (loyal yokefellow) thus no doubt identifies a specific mediator, but it secondarily indicates that every believer in Philippi was also being called upon to show the genuineness of their

loyalty in sharing in the work of peace. It was 'in effect Paul's way of inviting the various members of the church to prove themselves loyal partners in the work of the gospel' (Silva 2005:193). In this way the theme of the perfection of God's good work acts as a foundation for the exhortations in the final chapter of Philippians.

3.9. Summary of exegetical findings

It would be an exaggeration to claim that the concept of work acts as the uniting theme of Philippians. It does not. All the same, the above exegeses have demonstrated that lexemes and morphemes allied to that concept span the whole letter, and run in parallel with several other themes. Moreover, the theme of work is not incidental to Paul's pastoral strategy, but prominently features in Paul's direct pastoral engagement of the *sitz im leben* behind the letter. In so doing the theme of work underscores the literary integrity of Philippians.

Even though implicitly introduced through Paul's self-designation of himself and Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ (1:1; slaves of Christ), the theme explicitly commences within the thanksgiving report where Paul expresses his confidence that God who began ἔργον ἀγαθὸν in and among the Philippians will perfect it by the day of Christ. That confidence and the prayer which it immediately generates indicates that by ἔργον ἀγαθὸν Paul had in mind God's all-encompassing project in the Philippians' Christian existence in Philippi, namely, their spiritual rebirth, growth, sanctification, maturation, corporate witness in Philippi and eventual transformation at Christ's return. It includes not just the inward spiritual transformation of the Philippians, but also its social consequence and the Philippians' synergistic active participation in it.

Subsequent passages explicitly use the ἔργον terminology, its cognates and other terms within its semantic domain to demonstrate this all-

encompassing nature of God's project. So, for example, the theme of the perfection of God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν is reflected in the exhortations urging adoption of appropriate actions and attitudes towards achieving unity of fellowship and steadfastness in witness in the face of persecution (1:12–2:11). It is also evidenced in the Philippians' obedience which is stimulated and energised by God's ἔργον in them (2:12–18), and in the examples of Paul and his co-workers' sacrificial service (2:19–30).

In chapter three, the false teachers whose possibly imminent arrival in Philippi was one of the triggers for the letter, are depicted as κακοὺς ἐργάτας (evil workers), in direct contrast to ἡμεῖς (we) who οἱ πνεύματι Θεοῦ λατρεύοντες (serve by the Spirit of God). This contrast directly pits the evil work of the false teachers in opposition to the Philippians' worshipful service of God. The false teachers worked against God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν, and so the Philippians are exhorted to regard their resistance of these teachers as their participation in God's perfection of his good work.

The final chapter similarly engages the pastoral issue of Paul's partnership in the gospel with the Philippians, underlying it as part of God's good work. He accordingly impresses upon the disputing leaders who are explicitly labelled as συνεργῶν (co-workers), and the rest of the congregation identified as γνήσιε σύζυγε (loyal yokefellow), to share in this work by adopting attitudes and actions that facilitate its perfection.

The theme of work in Philippians thus incorporates four theological ideas, namely, (a) it describes God's gracious ongoing inner transformation of the believers, (b) its practical social and moral out-working in the unity and witness of the fellowship in Philippi, even within the context of their persecution (c) their determined rejection of

the false teachers who perverted the Gospel and (d) their continued missional partnership with Paul. Together, these facets constitute God's ἔργον ἀγαθὸν which Paul was confident will be perfected by the day of Christ. Furthermore, the theme addressed the situational context behind Philippians and serves as another thematic cord which binds the letter's units together. It thus contributes to laying the partition theory to rest.

4. Conclusion

As Paul does in most of his letters, his thanksgiving-prayer report in his letter to the Philippians broaches several literary theological themes which he then employs in the rest of the letter to address the pastoral issues in the congregation. This article has demonstrated that Paul's expression of confidence that 'the one who began a good work in and among you will bring it to perfection by the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6) constitutes one of these integrative themes. In the subsequent argument of the letter, Paul stresses that the perfection of God's good work involves not only God's inner transformation of the Philippians, but also its moral and social consequences as part of the believers' Christian existence in Philippi. The Philippians are thus urged to be active participants in this good work by adopting the specific attitudes and actions that would ensure that this perfection proceeds until Christ's return.

A number of important implications naturally follow this conclusion. Literarily, it endorses the current scholarly consensus on the literary integrity of Philippians. Theologically, the theme of work in Philippians underscores the paradoxical complexities in Paul's theology of the merits of 'work'. On the one hand, Paul was convinced that 'by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast'.

Salvation in its entirety is thus the work of God. Yet on the other hand, it is also true for Paul that 'we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (Eph 2:8–10; ESV).

The two lines of logic are therefore perfectly compatible in Paul's theological reflections, even though New Testament scholars have always debated as to the exact nature of their intersection. It would appear, based on the foregoing, that one of the unique contributions of Paul's letter to the Philippians, certainly in terms of its contribution to the construction of Pauline theology, is how it demonstrates the manner in which the apostle systematically explicated and applied this paradoxically complex theology of 'work' to address a specific socio-pastoral problem.

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A Critique of the Patriarchalistic Paradigm as Practised in the Kingdom of Swaziland

Neville Curle[1]

Abstract

The Kingdom of Swaziland is inhabited, in the main, by a people who can trace their ancestry back to a limited number of Nguni clans with a common language – *SiSwati.* Those belonging to the Dlamini Nkosi clan rule within this hierarchical culture. Swaziland is also said to be a 'Christian country' where 80% of the population maintain that they are believers. As such, the country is unique as a case study in which to examine the impact of patriarchalism on the preaching of the Gospel.

The study investigates three aspects of patriarchalism, which are found to be in conflict with Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul effectively states that classism, sexism and racism have no place in the Kingdom of God (3:26–29). The article sets out the current position, and then theologically evaluates each of the three 'isms in question in the light of these, and other verses. It then investigates Paul's practical approach to

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

dwelling within the world but not being of it through his eschatological approach of living in the 'now' but 'not yet'. Finally, it comments on the wider Church's position on the outworking of the three 'isms within the Kingdoms – of God and of Swaziland.

1. Introduction

Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu is more fondly known to the world as Mother Teresa. Throughout the greater part of her life, her mission was to care for 'the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers; all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people who have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone' (1979:¶7). Numerous sources report that she also said:

> At the end of our lives we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made or how many great things we have done. We will be judged by: I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.
>
> Hungry not only for bread—but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing—but naked of human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks—but homeless because of rejection. This is Christ in distressing disguise.

In quoting the words of Jesus (Matt 25:31–40), Bojaxhiu omitted reference to thirst and race (p. 35), and sickness and incarceration (p. 36). Addae-Korankye (2014:151) summed up the current anthropological understandings of poverty. In doing so, they quote Massey and Denton who argue that 'most poverty can be traced back to

structural factors inherent to either the economy and/or to several interrelated institutional environments that serve to favour certain groups over others, generally based on gender, class, or race (1993)'. Over a period of time, these institutionalised environments form a culture as generation upon generation reinforces them.

Since *Umbuso weSwatini*[2] (the Kingdom of Swaziland) ranks 68th in the 2015 list of the world's poorest countries with 63 per cent of Swazis living below the poverty line (World Food Programme n.d.:¶5), it is prudent to study the country's culture relative to gender, class, and race. More important, to this researcher, is the Church's response to whatever shortfalls may be revealed.

The research will begin with class, then consider gender and finally focus on race. Having examined current realities within the culture, the research will focus on a theological critique of the culture, and finally probe the position of the Church in relation to its biblical calling.

2. The Patriarchalistic Heart of the Swazi Kingdom

The three pillars of any Swazi's life, (within the overarching discipline of *Buntfu*) are respect (*inhlonipo*), commitment (*kutinikela*) and responsibility (*umtfwalo*) (van Schalkwyk 2006:219; Whelpton 1997:149). Similar in nature to Plato's understanding, virtue has 'a special role—beyond goals, ambitions and dreams; beyond wealth and health; it was the controlling and defining element in one's life' (Annas 2009:88). A similar view is found in the traditional Swazi culture. The King is seen to be the most noble of all and, within Swazi culture, it is

[2] *Eswatini* = the indigenous name for the Kingdom of Swaziland. When determining the Swazi homeland name, the British adopted the Zulu word as opposed to the Swazi word for the country. It should be noted that there is no 'z' in the siSwati Language.

understood that he 'cannot lie' [*Umlomo longacali manga*]. Similarly, individual men are expected to rise in virtue, and these men are acknowledged as virtuous by referring to them as '*Babe*' [IsiZulu-*Baba*] – a term of great respect (Richter and Morrel 2006:1). Of the three pillars, respect is seen to be the most important, as it governs behaviour within the hierarchical community.

2.1. Class

As the country's name infers, Swaziland is theoretically ruled by a king. Currently, His Majesty King Mswati III is the reigning monarch or *iNgwenyama*. According to Swazi law and custom, as *iNgwenyama*, His Majesty personifies the Nation of the *Eswatini* (Kasenene 1993:93). Not only is he King, but also the nation's high priest (Kasenene 1993:93).

Whilst Mswati III is King, His Majesty's position cannot and should never be interpreted, as it too often is, as 'Africa's last absolute monarch' (CIA 2015:¶1). Nothing could be further from the truth. Whilst His Majesty is *iNgwenyama*, he is such 'in council'. This can be explained in a number of ways. By far the most understandable is that of a chief executive officer in a company. Whilst as CEO His Majesty appears to have 'executive power', he can be overruled by the shareholders. In Swaziland, these 'shareholders' or councils are summarised in Prince David's 2006 address to the Commonwealth (Section 13 and 231) (Dlamini D 2006:¶4–6):

> There are traditional councils and the modern system of government is to a large extent superimposed over this traditional arrangement. Immediately at the King's assistance is iNdlovukazi (the Queen Mother). As the real or surrogate mother of the iNgwenyama, iNdlovukazi exercises a moderating advisory role on

> iNgwenyama (Section 229[3]). There is also the Ligunqa (a council of paternal uncles and half-brothers of the King) which is also consulted by the King from time to time on important or sensitive matters or disputes of national interest. There is also the King's Advisory Council under the chairmanship of a Senior Prince.

This position is confirmed in Dlamini and Whelpton's Restatement of Swazi Law and Custom (First Report) (2013:35–36). Within the King's advisory council, there is an inner council commonly referred to as 'the faceless Labadzala'.[4] For all intents and purposes, this effectively makes the leadership of Swaziland an oligarchy where the interests of the Dlamini Nkosi family and, through marriage, clans allied to the royal family, are protected.

Over and above the oligarchy, the King is also subject to the nation in three forms though:

1. the Council of Chiefs;
2. the voting system of *Tinkundla* and
3. a National *Sibaya* (gathering of the Nation)—the last of which was held in the second week of August 2016. During the *Sibaya*, the people are free to speak their minds without fear of retribution.

[3] References to Sections in this speech refer to the 2005 Constitution of Swaziland which was drawn up under the Chairmanship of Prince David Dlamini.

[4] The Labadzala form the executive council of the *Liqoqo* (Councillors) (Dlamini and Whelpton 2013:35–36), but the identities of the Princes of the realm as well as the Inner Council who cause decisions to be made are never revealed to the public - hence the use by the media of the additional word 'faceless'. *Labadzala* literally translated means 'elder' but should be translated as 'Counsellor' or 'Overseer' (Langa 2011).

It is this researcher's opinion that if one were to examine the situations of Presidents Zuma and Mugabe, both have greater individual power than His Majesty. Yet the personal risks that Mswati III takes on an annual basis are comparatively extreme. If the ANC wished to punish President Zuma for non-performance, the maximum that could be done would be recall. When King Mswati dances *iNcwala*, which he is obligated to do every year, one of the requirements is to drink from a calabash over which he has no control.

The *Tinsila*[5], who would normally pre-taste anything and everything that passes his lips, are banished from his presence. Hence, every year, at *iNcwala*, King Mswati risks the fate of dying in a similar manner to that of his grandfather – Ngwane V (Bhunu). Therefore, while Mswati III is King and *iNgwenyama*, he is not an absolute monarch. In many respects, this authority of the councils has been diluted by two significant factors: (1) His Majesty controls the purse strings of the Royal Trust and (2) the obeisance that many counsellors afford His Majesty.

From His Majesty's position, authority over cultural affairs is delegated down through his chiefs to the village headmen. When community matters are discussed, the *indvuna* will chair the meeting. These meetings (*indabas*) are meetings between people, but they are far more than just that. An *indaba* is a process of open discussion to come to consensus. At the base of the hierarchical system are the *Bandla ncanes*

[5] *Insila (Tinsila:* Plural)—When the future king is nearing puberty, he enters into a blood-brother relationship with two boys of equal age from the Matsebula and Motsa clans. The joining of the blood is performed by the leading *Inyanga* of the Shiba clan (Kuper 1947:78–79). These 'blood-brothers' watch over him as bodyguards and pre-tasters of his food. As such they form his first line of defence against any person who would do him harm.

[village forums], where matters pertaining to the group are dealt with. Within a village setting, every adult male resident is free to participate (Curle 2012:81).

The extended household is headed up by the oldest male member of the clan. Below him are his sons and their sons. Until they reach the age of 35–40, the men are considered boys – no matter how many children they have fathered.

2.2. Gender

2.2.1. The Swazi hierarchy

Within the Swazi culture, male honour is seen through the amount of public respect that is given to the man. Areas where respect can be gained or lost are: control over wives and children; productivity – based on yields of crops and cattle; attendance at public functions where one is seen to be contributing to the community. This position of status is vital to the man, and to his ranking within the community. Typical of all hierarchical states is the position of women – on the bottom rung of the ladder. Only albinos, the physically disabled and homosexuals (Curle 2012:240) are lower.[6]

2.2.2. The position of women and children

To the traditional Swazi, marriage is primarily a union between families (*kuhlanganisa bukhoti*) (Van Schalkwyk 2006:181). The coming together of the two families also brings with it the payment of a 'Bride Price' (*Lobola*).

[6] The *de jure* equality of all persons in terms of the 2005 Constitution is recognised; however, the *de facto* reality falls far short of those lofty ideals.

This payment is clouded with controversy between the traditional and modernist view. In the eyes of many, the exchange of *Lobola* is said to signify *kutsenga sisu* (literally - the purchase of the uterus) (Women and Law 1998:175–176). The modernist view of the practice of *kulobola* is that it 'perpetuates the subordination of women by vesting rights in someone else, a man in his capacity as a father, a husband, brother, uncle or son' (181).

2.2.3. The impact of Western culture

In their study, Gorodnichenko and Roland compare the individualistic culture of the West to the collectivist approach of the Eastern and African worldviews. Whilst their study focusses on the long-term economical outworking in the two approaches, the study also highlights the differences and pros and cons of both views. Essentially, collectivist culture encourages only individual behaviour in which you are constantly aware of how others are viewing you, which is not the case in an individualist culture. People from individualistic cultures also have higher needs for 'self-enhancement' and have a stronger self-serving bias than people from collectivist cultures (n.d.:13).

Curle, in his 2009 study, identified this self-serving bias being inculcated into Swazi men during their time away from the stringent disciplines of traditional Swazi culture as they worked in the South African gold mines. Bereft of those disciplines and subjected to inhumane conditions, the men turned to alcohol and practising sex with multiple concurrent partners outside of marriage to relieve their physical and emotional needs (Lourie as cited by Schoofs 1999:¶6). The men returned home where they wreaked havoc in what was once a morally stable Swazi patriarchal cultural system, when their new individualism mixed with their traditional patriarch, male-dominant worldview in a potently destructive cocktail (Curle 2009:35).

An unfortunate by-product of this adoption of a Western life-style is the tendency of young girls to follow a practice that is very similar to prostitution (Curle 2012:111). They do this in an attempt to survive and advance out of poverty and acquire the trappings of a Western life-style. Unfortunately, there is a high prevalence of this within Southern Africa and the Kingdom[7] in particular. While the girls deny that they are 'women of the street', their actions can easily be misinterpreted. As their 'blessers' or 'sugar daddies' supply all their various financial needs, euphemisms such as 'Minister of Education', Minister of Transport', and 'Minister of Tourism' are used to describe the men who fund their advanced schooling, transport and vacation requirements - regardless of the consequence (Kaufman and Stavrou 2002:15) of HIV – possibly followed by AIDS.

Out of the need for young women to extricate themselves from poverty in times of severe economic conditions, a further patriarchalistic trait arose. As Western free love and equality culture made inroads into Swazi life, some men have chosen, albeit subconsciously, to exploit the feministic attack on the paradigm to their own sexual advantage. As women seek out equality between the genders, men are able to negotiate sex without commitment - bringing about a new set of living arrangements – cohabitation or a series of multiple-partner 'one night stands'.

The result of this has been an increase in families headed by a single mother with no support from the father. A case in point is found in the

[7] In 2006, the CIA rated Swaziland as having the 5th highest percentage (69%). of countries with people who live under the poverty datum line (CIA 2011). Compare this with Libya's 7.4% (Africa. The Good News 2011:¶4).

Industrial Town of Matsapha. Here many[8] women employed in the textile factories live in single rooms together with the children they have borne - the result of being unable to live without a second income[9] derived from transactional sex (Fakudze 2009:24–25; Selvester, Cambaco, Bié and Mndzebele 2012:26).

Thus, what was once a morally stable Swazi patriarchal cultural system is giving way to one in which men have so little respect for women that they will coerce 15-year-old girls into having penetrative sex (Curle 2012:112). Within traditional Swazi culture, such acts would have brought about serious sanction (Dlamini and Whelpton 2013:113–116). Today, because the checks and balances described by Curle (2012:81–83) are no longer in place, there is no cultural penalty (Dlamini and Whelpton 2013:114; 178; 239).

2.2.4. The resultant change in gender roles in traditional culture

This distancing from traditional custom has brought with it serious tensions against the monarchy. When His Majesty King Mswati III was enthroned in 1986, he announced to the people: 'A king is a king by his people' (Matsebula 1988:325). In so doing, he was espousing the spirit of *uBuntu*. Consciously or unconsciously, *iNgwenyama* understood the principle that *de facto* legitimate authority (Curle 2012:188–198) is given to him by the people. Such authority cannot be imposed through coercion from the top. Similarly, a husband and father's *de facto* authority can only be voluntarily granted to him by his wife and family

[8] No statistics exist that enumerate how many of the women live in this impoverished position. As such, the subject has been identified for further research. Current estimates are in the thousands.

[9] The garment sector in which these women work is 'characterised by "low wages" unhealthy and unsafe workplaces, substantial and often compulsory overtime' (Bond 2006:63).

(Curle 2012:218). Yet this legitimate authority is blatantly missing throughout much of Swaziland, where men beat women for issues as small as burning a meal (Swaziland Central Statistics Office 2007:16).

2.3. Race

By law (Constitution 2005:¶20), there is no classification by race, of Swazi citizens. Thus, whether one is black or white, one is seen to be a 'child'[10] of His Majesty. All Swazis, of whatever ethnic grouping, are subject to a local chief who must take 'ownership' of the person and that person must swear loyalty to His Majesty and the local chief.[11] Notwithstanding the *de jure* position of equality there are subtle distinctions between ethnic groupings within the hierarchical ladder.

Race differences in Swaziland are clouded by (1) class issues based on an economical variance between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'; (2) historical subjugation of Swazis by whites; (3) unlawful acquisition of citizenship by non-Swazis; (4) historical cattle rustling issues on the Kingdom's eastern border.

2.3.1. Economic variances

Economically, while Swazi citizens are protected from foreign competition, racial job discrimination is the order of the day. This has two underlying causes: (1) Class and (2) Education. With regard to class, Dlaminis (with royal affiliations) are preferred above everyone

[10] In the Swazi hierarchical understanding, those who fall within a man's sphere of protection are his 'children'. Thus, every Swazi citizen is seen as a child of the King.

[11] 'A person who is ordinarily resident in Swaziland and has been so resident for a period of at least ten years and whose application is supported by a Chief after consultation with *bandlancane* or supported by three reputable citizens may be registered as a citizen.' (Constitution 2005:¶ 45(3))

else; then other Swazis; and finally, Shangaans. This also impacts the level of education, as the higher one's class the greater is one's ability to afford a decent education and to obtain a degree.[12]

2.3.2. Whites

Apart from the economic variables which have been achieved through personal effort resulting in economically acquired (*lizinga*) status, there does also seem to be growing antagonism to the 'light skinned' Swazis. Much of this can be seen to emanate from the subjugation of the traditional Swazis by *firstly*, the Dutch, who annexed large portions of Swaziland through 'Concessions'; *secondly*, the British, who taxed the Swazi men for just owning a hut, and *thirdly*, the Afrikaners, who embroiled the Kingdom in South Africa's apartheid struggle (Dlamini, Dlamini, Hlatjwayo and Mabuza 2012:12–13).

2.3.3. Illegal citizenship

Illegal citizenship is rapidly becoming a problem. At issue is the fact that only Swazi citizens may legally own land (Constitution 2005:¶211). Since land is becoming a limited resource, the subject of land ownership is coming to the fore. For persons wanting to do business within the borders, this has serious legal and financial issues. Thus, a number of people are resorting to unlawful or devious means to accomplish this end through the acquisition of citizenship. Here, the focus is substantially on persons of Asian descent (Dlamini 2016:15). Asians – especially those of Indian or Pakistani extraction – are seen as a threat to the Kingdom and are actively discouraged from coming to the country (Dlamini 2006:15).

[12] The same can be stated about women whose function, to a large degree, is seen as childbearing (Curle 2012:183).

2.3.4. Shangaans

For their part, Shangaans are at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder and the word '*Shangaan'*[13] is often used as an expletive to denote anger or frustration towards another person (Langa 2016). This antagonism appears to have arisen out of historical disputes during the Mozambican civil war over cattle and car theft along the Mozambican border. An additional issue is the large numbers of illegal aliens who seek employment in Swaziland, thus taking away work opportunities from the locals (Irin 2003:¶5–13).

Although closely related to the SiSwati people grouping,[14] Shangaans were the tribe with whom the dispute arose. The rustling dispute escalated until it reached a level of enmity. Because persons of mixed ethnic origin take their social standing from that of their father, a person whose father was Shangaan will be culturally classified as such even if the mother was of royal descent.

3. A Theological Evaluation

Regarding the patriarchalistic paradigm, Curle (2012:69) concluded:

[13] This can include every black sub-Saharan person – Nigerians can just as easily be called '*liShangane*' as a Mozambican. However, West Africans are sometimes referred to as '*emangangawane'/'emanguza*'. Nonetheless, they share 'the bottom of the barrel position' with Shangaans (Langa 2016).

[14] During the purge of people antagonistic towards the Zulus under Shaka, Shoshangane (a general of Zwide—king of a Nguni tribe operating in KwaZulu), fled north through Swaziland. He, and his followers, finally settled in Mozambique. His men found wives among the locals—among them Tsongas—and thus the Shangaan people were established (South African Tourism 2016:¶4). It can thus be said that the Shangaans and the Swazis have a common Nguni ancestry as both the Zulus and the Swazis are directly related with similar dialects.

> Whether the paradigm brings in an autocratic or plutocratic rule, the patriarchalistic effect is the same. Firstly, the predatory elite take advantage of the illiterate poor in rising to power. Secondly, they gain at the expense of the poor. Thirdly, women continue to find themselves at the bottom of the economic rung. This is the true position of patriarchalism.

3.1. Class

The patriarchalistic paradigm has, as its ultimate goal, the reproduction of self. 'This goal (does) not only involve relationships between men and women, but between men and men, settlements, and entire nations in a hierarchical structured institution' (Curle 2012:35).

3.1.1. Oligarchic power

This patriarchalistic paradigm is certainly the position in Swaziland where one is confronted by a hierarchical system headed by the king (in council),[15] princes, chiefs, headmen and fathers (Curle 2012:84).

Ridley contends that the historical motivation behind this ancient structure was the accumulation of wealth. 'Not only could it buy wives directly; it could also buy "power"… Power is, roughly speaking, the ability to call upon allies to do your bidding, and that depended strictly on wealth (1993:1995)' which often requires violence to enforce. Winters describes this kind of arrangement as 'ruling oligarchy' (2011:35). According to Winters, the sustainability of such an oligarchy

[15] When the British government gave independence to Swaziland, it rewrote the constitution. In doing so, it acknowledged the power of His Majesty as supreme ruler (Clauses 76:1–3; 79). While the counsellors were all Members of Parliament (Matsebula 1988:241–242), in Swazi terms, the Constitution reduced their authority to being subject to the king. The Constitution was therefore voided as being unSwazi.

is dependent upon the collective – *firstly*, hiring public means of coercion; and *secondly* creating rules and mechanisms to secure the collective against any rogue oligarch who might try to turn the coercive means against the ruling oligarchy (2011:35).

Whilst the Swazi oligarchy is different from the norm, in that His Majesty is subject to the authority of the council, it can be argued that the purpose remains the same – the accumulation and maintenance of wealth for both king and council.[16]

3.1.2. Authority—overview

Piper and Grudem define 'authority in general as the *right* (Matthew 8:9) and *power* (Mark 1:27; 1 Corinthians 7:37) and *responsibility* (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10) *to give direction to another* … for Christians, *right* and *power* recede and *responsibility* predominates … Authority becomes a burden to bear, not a right to assert. It is a sacred duty to discharge for the good of others. The transformation of authority (from right and power to responsibility) is most thorough in marriage. This is

[16] The truth of this desire to control maintenance of wealth is borne out in the power struggle within the executive of the *Liqoqo* Council that occurred just before His Majesty Mswati III was appointed to the throne. At the centre of the controversy was the control of the immense wealth in *Tibiyo TakaNgwane* meaning 'wealth of the nation'. Magongo writes 'The disputes of the *Liqoqo* era have been presented as a power struggle within the ruling elite. In the words of Parks Mangena: "The fight was between themselves". *Tibiyo Taka Ngwane* was at the nexus of the feud. The establishment and expansion of *Tibiyo's* activities over the years had "served as the principal vehicle for capital accumulation by elements within the Swazi governing royalist alliance" in the period since independence. *Liqoqo* members were among those who allied themselves with *Tibiyo* and established close links with South African business which had managed to replace British investment and dominate the Swazi economy' (2009:76).

why we prefer to speak of leadership and headship rather than authority' (2006:78).

This immediately poses the question: 'Where does that authority come from?' Starting with Matthew 28:18, 'all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me (Jesus)'; *firstly*, it follows, all other authority is delegated; *secondly*, when one considers the manner in which Jesus' authority operates—one of servanthood (Mark 10:42–44; Greenleaf and Spears 1998; Malphurs 2003:31–48; Agosto 2005:48; Kelley 2011)—our perception is instantly widened; *thirdly*, if we 'touch (abuse) God's authority, we touch God Himself' (Nee 1998:19). Taking points two and three together, any person taking on a leadership position does so under caution (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). This is especially true of Church leaders who will be 'held accountable for your souls' (Heb 13:7). *Finally*, the writer to the Hebrews confirms that Jesus is the 'author and perfector of our faith' (12:2) giving us a sense that the manner in which Jesus uses power and authority is by way of creation and creativity. This origination and creativity on the part of Jesus should not be misconstrued as dominating power as modern man sees it—which is the 'ability to act or produce an effect' (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2011) or 'the exercise of continuous control over someone or something' (Louw and Nida 1988:37.16).

3.1.3. Legitimate authority

Regardless whether the State is in the form of an oligarchy or not, two fundamentals (authority to act and the ability to enforce) must be in place for effective government. However, authority can be legitimate or otherwise.

Max Weber, the 20th century philosopher, believed that there were three types of ideal (or legitimate) authority—raditional, Charismatic and

Rational-Legal (Uphoff 1989:308). This researcher concurs with Hall and Biersteker's argument that it is only when this social contract is recognised from the 'bottom-up' in the form of active, participatory submission that 'Legitimate authority' occurs.[17]

Most people agree that the authority of the National Party was illegitimate, yet it was able to govern South Africa for over 40 years through coercive power. The same cannot be said of the reign of Mswati III. It is generally accepted that his authority,[18] and that of the council, is legitimate. Even His Majesty's detractors[19] consider that the nation needs a king. However, their position is that his council should be replaced by a party political Prime Minister in whom all real

[17] This would not apply to God's authority, which he possesses through the fact that he is the Creator, and humans (he created).

[18] Much ill is spoken of His Majesty by persons who would wrest power from the ruling elite (Magangeni 2009). However, their words belie their Swazi nationality and understanding of its culture. Many raise the question of the illegitimacy of Mswati III's birth. From a western perspective, yes, His Majesty's parents were not married at the time of his birth nor at the time of his father (King Sobhuza II's) death. However, in Swazi culture: *firstly*, even though the marriage of his mother (Queen Ntfombi Tfwala) was not yet finalized on Sobhuza II's passing, she went through a relatively common practice of posthumous marriage; *secondly*, marriage is a process from the time of engagement (red ochre), through the birth of a child to the final consummation of Lobola which focuses on the unity of the two families (Dlamini and Whelpton 2013:180). Culturally, as one of the ancestors or 'living dead', Sobhuza's spirit was believed to be present at the time (*umtsimba*); *thirdly* legitimacy occurs on the acceptance of the father of the child as his own (Dlamini and Whelpton 2013:176–177; 240–244).

[19] In his paper, Pejstrup acknowledges that his views have been coloured by his engagement with labour activists. Yet, his conclusion is that His Majesty's legitimacy is valid in the three different manners: 'a rational one that is strong due to the King's supremacy; a traditional form that is strong in this case due to conservatism and nationalism; and a charismatic form that reflects the superhuman icon the King has become' (2011:17).

authority rests, while His Majesty fills the role of a ceremonial head – effectively taking away the power of the councils.

3.1.4. The spiritual pitfalls of hierarchy

Having dealt with the issue of legitimacy, we turn to the overall position of hierarchical leadership of any description.

Theologically, God, through Samuel, warned Israel against ever wanting a king to rule over them. (1 Sam 8:10–18) Ignoring the warning from Samuel, the people got the king they wanted, anmely, Saul. As Samuel had prophesied, he and the kings that followed him took their wealth and made it their own. They led the people into war and forsook the ways of God.

In the modern world, 'kings' are not necessarily royalty. Self-proclaimed rulers and other autocrats, surrounded by their oligarchic councils, drain their economies for their own benefit. Unfortunately, this is not only true of politics, but this author's opinion is that it occurs throughout the commercial world and within the Church.

What does the New Testament say to leaders, the rich and the famous? Jesus said quite a bit. 'Whoever wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of all (Mark 9:35b); But many who are first will be last, and those who are last will be first (Mark 10:31); You know that those who are regarded the rulers of the gentiles lord it over their people, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:42–45); 'Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for

the Father is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world' (1 John 2:15–16). Perhaps his most telling parable is that of the rich man and Lazarus (Matt 19:24). Elsewhere, he compared a camel going through the eye of a needle to the ability of a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). Yet, the case for the rich man is not hopeless. Jesus, knowing there will always be rich, admonishes them in Luke 16:9 to 'use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings'. In a similar vein, Jesus told the rich young ruler, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven' (Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22).

3.1.5. Authority is delegated

Besides wealth, class brings with it the function of authority. Jesus understood authority better than anyone. He had abandoned his eternal equality with the Father. Therefore, he understood that the source of his authority was the Father; 'the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does' (John 5:19–20). With these words, Jesus set the standard for all questions on authority and submission. Jesus knew that 'All authority in heaven and on earth' (Matt 28:18) would be given to him. This would ultimately result in his submission to human authority in the form of the Roman soldiers (John 18:11–12) the Sanhedrin (John 18:13–26), the Roman Governor (John 18:27–19:16), and Herod—the puppet king (Luke 23:7–10) as he carried out the will of the Father.

With regard to submission to governmental authority, Paul states, 'Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that

exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves' (Rom 13:1–7). These words are self-explanatory. From the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18 and those of Paul, we understand that all authority, of whatever description, is delegated. Those in authority are cautioned that they are God's servants. As such, God can withdraw their delegated authority at any time and bring hardship to those who abuse that office. Instead, Paul calls on those in authority to empower those under them.

3.1.6. Empowerment, as opposed to dictatorship

Not only are we instructed to obey governmental authority but the instruction extends to marriage and the workplace.[20] The overriding commandment, whether one is in or under authority, is fundamental to a Christian understanding of authority. This researcher accepts the following interpretation of Ephesians 5:18–21 where the words in italics (participles) below are directly dependent on the verb 'be filled' (Curle 2012:204–205):

Be filled with the Spirit,

- *speaking* to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. [19]
- *singing* and *making* music from your heart to the Lord.
- *giving* thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [20]
- *submitting* to one another out of reverence for Christ. [21]

[20] Writing to the Colossians, Paul instructed those under authority to 'obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord' (3:22).

While understanding the Aristotelian House Code (Osiek and Balch 1997:119), Paul chooses a different road when confronted with a master/slave situation amongst the brethren, one of empowerment. This is practically displayed in his letter to Philemon, where he appeals to his 'dear friend and fellow worker' (Philemon 1:1) to release Onesimus as a 'runaway slave' (Callahan 1997:38; Hooker 2003:1447), and welcome him as a 'brother in the Lord' (Philemon 1:16). Nowhere do we find the 'top-down' authority that would have been warranted by someone who owed Paul his 'very self' (Philemon 1:19). Instead we find Paul asking his friend (Philemon 1:14; 1:19) to empower Onesimus, in the only way that would be meaningful to his humanity—his release as a slave, even offering to settle any debt that Philemon believed that he might be owed (Phil 1:18). Paul asks Philemon to do this of his own free will, even though he 'could be bold and order' it (Phil 1:18).

If one views authority as the 'ability to empower', the question that confronts the various levels of authority is: 'How best can I empower the person under me?' In Ephesians 4:12–16, Paul explains that the role of church leaders is to 'equip the saints'. This is a sound business and human principle. But empowerment does not necessarily refer only to the so-called 'equipping of the saints'. Too often, leaders stand in the path of those underneath them fearing for their own position. In doing so, they stifle their subordinates and become a cork blocking the progress of the institution. If people are equipped, they need to express their new status in a real way–not to stagnate.

To those who must submit, Paul also gave sage wisdom:

(1) 'Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but as slaves of

Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free (Eph 6:5)'.

(2) 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (Eph 5:22–23)'.

(3) 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (Eph 6:1)'.

3.1.7. A practical illustration of submitting in the 'now' while living in the 'not yet'

Paul's statement on the equality of all mankind (Gal 3:26–29) would have been outlandish (and is still so) in a patriarchalistic world. However, in Ephesians 5:21—6:9, we see the fruit of Paul's 'now' but 'not yet' eschatology. In his 2012 thesis, Curle used the following illustration of Paul's belief. 'Paul's eschatology has set up a spiritual "mezzanine floor"[21] where believers experience the "already" while awaiting the "not yet" on the "upper floor". On this "mezzanine floor" Christians live in relationship with each other and the Holy Spirit above

[21] 'Mezzanine: an intermediate storey that projects in the form of a balcony; a low-ceilinged storey between two main stories of a building' (Merriam Webster Dictionary 2011).

the patriarchalism of the "now" on the "ground floor"' (Curle 2012:166).

The mezzanine image of the 'already-not yet' helps the reader gain a better understanding of Paul and Peter's eschatology. From the mezzanine floor one can interact with those on the ground floor as well as those on the upper floor. Spiritually, one can interact with those in the world - the 'now' (ground floor), as well being in relationship with God in the 'not yet' (first floor).

This image helps us understand relationships between believers outside of cultural realities. It is within this 'mezzanine' relationship that Ephesians 5 and 6 makes sense.

3.2. Gender

Anthropologist Steven Goldberg notes that male dominance is, and has always been, extant across the entire globe: 'There is not, nor has there ever been, any society that even remotely failed to associate authority and leadership in suprafamilial areas with the male. There are no borderline cases' (1993:15).

Here too, Swaziland followed the historical paradigm set out in 2.1 above,[22] although with the implementation of the Swaziland 2005

[22] A wife's legal status was similar to that of a child (Numbers 30:16); a father could sell his daughter as a servant (Exod 21:7; De Vaux 1961:27); the rape of a virgin was not considered an offence punishable by death. Only on discovery, would the man be required to marry the girl and pay her father fifty shekels (Deut 22:28–29; De Vaux 1961:26). (The purpose of the punishment was not the revenge of the rape, but to recompense the loss that the father had experienced as he would not be able to extract a bride-price for the girl.) Suspected adultery by a woman was subjected to a holy curse to establish whether she was guilty of unfaithfulness. There was no corresponding treatment for suspected unfaithfulness by men (Num 5:11–31).

Constitution, women achieved *de jure*[23] (¶20), if not *de facto*, equality. This legal position is at odds with Swazi law and custom, as women fall first under the guardianship of their fathers (Dlamini and Whelpton 2013:177) and, once married, their husbands (p. 166).

Curle found that in hierarchical positioning(*sigaba*)-based cultures, women are subjugated to the status of a second-class citizen and marital power is exclusively in the hands of the man (Curle 2012:217). In this culture, influence is coercive—whether physically, financially or emotionally. Conversely 'in the (Western) postmodern world, marital power revolves around the concept of personal power. Each spouse maximises personal resources in order to gain influence in marriage' (Balswick 2006:64). However, as Gilder and Goldberg note: 'males occupy the overwhelming numbers of hierarchical positions' (Gilder 1993:64) and 'There is not an iota of evidence that any change in social, economic, or technological factors significantly reduces the percentages of males in hierarchies. The post-modern society is virtually as patriarchal as the most primitive' (Goldberg1993:128) The result of this generally is that in *lizinga* (acquired socio-economic positioning)-based societies, as much as women try to compete with their spouses for the maximisation of personal resources, they will always come second.

Also noted was that the position of extreme hierarchicalists (whether through patriarchal ranking (*sigaba*) or personal achievement (*lizinga*) is scripturally groundless: firstly, by a proper reading of Genesis 1:26–3:23; secondly, because of the counter-cultural approach of Jesus; and

[23] Clause 20 (2) of the Swaziland 2005 Constitution states that 'For the avoidance of any doubt, a person shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion or social or economic standing, political opinion, age or disability'.

thirdly, because of Paul's belief that 'there is neither … male nor female' (Gal 3:28).

3.3. Race

The Bible does not indicate that race was specifically a major issue[24] during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry apart from the tensions between the Jews and the Samaritans. Samaritans are mentioned three times in the New Testament (1) the 'Samaritan Leper' – one of ten lepers that Jesus healed, but who was the only one to return and offer thanks (Luke 17:11–19); (2) the 'Woman at the Well' where Jesus went beyond acceptable protocol to speak to a single woman and a Samaritan (John 4:1–42) and (3) the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:25–37). The story of the Good Samaritan is too well-known to delve into its depths. What is important is to apply the truths of 'who is my neighbour?' to the facts of modern-day Swaziland.

If Jesus were to have set his parable in Swaziland, it is likely that the journey would have been from Mbabane to Maputo. The cast could have consisted of the victim, a white pastor, a Zionist bishop[25] and a Shangaan. In the telling of the story, the pastor and the bishop would have passed by on the other side while the Shangaan cared for the victim. Jesus demonstrated that it was the person who was hated the most who brought the most compassion to the situation and acted as a neighbour. One should remember that the context of this parable was one of law, where the legal scholar posed to Jesus the question 'who is

[24] The reality of other ethnic groups lay mainly in their class position of being a slave.

[25] Readers should be aware that the choices of a white pastor and a Zionist bishop are used for effect—not from any personal bias. At issue is the need to remain as close to the original story as possible.

my neighbour?' flowing out of God's commandment to 'love one's neighbour as one's self.

With the interpretation that Jesus gave, neighbours contextually would include everyone from Princes of the Realm, ordinary citizens, to Shangaans and others at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder.

4. A Critical Review of the Church's Position on the Patriarchalistic Culture in the Kingdom of Swaziland

Because the extreme form of patriarchalism (which incorporates the veneration of ancestors) is so deeply ingrained in the life and worldview of the Swazi - it will not easily be deculturalized.

4.1. Class

As the Church looks to the future, it must face the reality of the role that the ancestors and earthly leadership play in the life of the Swazi. Sihlongonyane argues:

> By simply controlling what the Swazi nation believes, what they can do or not do according to the dominating culture of the ruling elite, the chance for its independent existence is destroyed. In this way, the nation is controlled through socialisation of what they learn and believe in within the 'national family hierarchy.' In Swaziland, the 'family' became a psychological haven that weakens the determination of people to stand and fight oppression. This, to a large extent has made "activists in the country today to face the difficult task of convincing the public that resistance to an undemocratic government is not a betrayal of cultural identity" (Salmond 1997:7) (Sihlongonyane 2003:172).

In addition, there is the continued threat of the disenfranchisement of land, where the elite can remove the right to use Swazi Nation Land, without recompense from any individual.

It should be noted that this author does not believe that regime change, as a limited number of people are pushing for, will bring about a change in the status quo. All it will do is to replace one oligarchy with another. The political leadership of Zimbabwe (and recently South Africa) bears ample support for this position.

For its part, the current regime needs to be aware of the fact that:

> God established government to be His hands and feet to do the good for the people that He intends for them and that He would do for them if He had physical hands and feet, which, of course, He does not. Government officials are charged by God with operating by proxy on His behalf. God defined the quality of life He intends for every individual as "a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:1–2). God defines government officials as "servants of God (Romans 13:4,6) - a servanthood that has nothing to do with what they individually may think of God. He mentions Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and Cyrus, King of Persia, by name as "My servant" (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6) and "My shepherd" Isaiah 44:28–45:6 before either one of them acknowledged God's existence or mastery over their lives. (Allen 2010:163)

What should the position of the Church be? Since the Church is the Body of Christ, it is prudent to view the issues through his eyes. At the onset of his ministry here on Earth, Jesus spelled out his mission in Luke 4:18.

Since his resurrection, it has fallen on the Church to fulfil that charge. There are Christians who argue that preaching the Gospel only pertains

to the spiritual side of humanity. This view, held by many, negates the social gospel, is damned by Christ's own position in Matthew 25:31–40 and the social gospel that is spread throughout the book of Luke. Bell (2011:41) argues that one of Luke's main themes that Jesus spreads is:

> a social revolution, in which the previous systems and hierarchies of clean and unclean, sinner and saved, and up and down don't mean what they used to. God is doing a new work through Jesus, calling all people to human solidarity. Everybody is a brother, a sister. Equals, children of the God who shows no favouritism. To reject this new social order was to reject Jesus.

For the poor woman in Matsapha (1.2.3), forced to sell her body for a loaf of bread, the words of Luke 4:18 take on a meaning far removed from any super-spiritual focus:

To proclaim:	
Good news to the poor;	*A better salary than she currently earns*
Freedom for the prisoners	*The ability to live in a two bedroomed flat – one for herself and one for her children*
To set the oppressed free.	*Not being forced to work under sweatshop conditions*

To that poor lady, the Gospel of Jesus Christ means being able to earn sufficient wages at her place of work, so as to live without playing HIV/AIDS Russian Roulette in order to provide a meal for herself and her family. For the young man growing up in that environment, being delivered is far more than just a spiritual act – it's being given an opportunity to experience life to its fullness backed by a decent

education and sufficient food to grow up into a world filled with opportunities. To the young girl, seeking the cooling taste of a simple ice-cream, life should not be about selling her body in the restroom of a fast-food restaurant (Moahloli 2008).

What options are then open to the Church?

4.1.1. Servant leadership

Christianity is a radical belief system. Its author, to whom all authority in Heaven and Earth was given (Matt 28:18; John 17:2), washed his disciples' feet. After washing their feet, Jesus commanded his disciples (and through them every believer) to 'wash one another's feet (John 13:13–14)'.

Thus, within the Christian faith, there is no place for *sigaba* (hierarchical positioning), religious domination, or *lizinga* (acquired socio-economic positioning). There is no place for classism, sexism or racism. When the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim 6:15) commands that we love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34), there is no place for positional 'power plays'. All that is of consequence is the Kingdom of God and its proclamation.

4.1.2. Prophetic role of the church

As the Church, we need to prophetically proclaim a Gospel that preaches *de facto* equality of all people. A gospel that (while acknowledging different functional positions) does not permit anyone to belittle, abuse or otherwise look down on others.

Samuel called David 'a man after (God's) own heart' (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). Even though David was a patriarchalistic King with the

power of life and death over any of his subjects, he chose to listen to the prophets of his time—even when those prophets brought words that spoke of God's displeasure against him personally (2 Sam 12:7–15). David, knowing he was a ruler under caution (Curle 2012:242) repented and was forgiven – notwithstanding the consequences. Swaziland has a similar culture to that of the time of King David. When rulers, such as His Majesty Mswati III have total authority, it is vital that the prophetic voice of the Church is vibrant and not silenced. This silence may come through closeness—where Church and State are undivided. (Mzizi considered His Majesty's close proximity to the two branches of the Zionist Church problematical (1994:65)). While it is important for the King (and the elite) to have a personal priest such as David's Ira (2 Sam 20:26), it is equally important that they have a Nathan (as opposed to a soothsayer) who can fearlessly speak truth about issues in their lives (2 Sam 12:1–14).

4.1.3. The ancestral cultural understanding that the elite will head up the afterlife

When one considers what Jesus had to say regarding the position of leaders, the rich and the famous (2.1.6), it behoves each constituent denomination within the wider church to address its position on the beliefs of the ancestral cult.

4.2. Gender

Approximately seventy per cent of the adults in the Church (the women) are seen as 'second-class citizens' by the other thirty per cent (the men) (Curle 2012:239–242). This presents the Church in Swaziland

with a significant challenge where the culture subjugates all women to that of childbearer.[26]

When a large percentage of women acknowledge that their husbands have the right to beat them (Curle 2012:240), what hope is there of impacting Swaziland with a victorious Christian worldview where 'there is neither (white) nor (black), neither (Shangaan) nor (Dlamini Nkosi), nor is there male and female, for … all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28)?

Unfortunately, the Church is faced by the reality that 'people are first Swazis and secondly Christians'. (Mabuza 2016) Thus their belief is not only coloured by their culture, it is actually determined by it.

This author sees the need for radical change within, not only the Church, but also, the entire Kingdom. He further believes that change will not come without a royal standard bearer. Unless one of the senior Princes[27] has the courage to stand up on behalf of Swazi women and say that enough is enough, there is little hope that they will ever be treated with dignity and respect as equals.

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[26] The payment of *emalobolo* is said to signify *kutsenga sisu* (literally—the purchase of the uterus) (Women and Law 1998:175–176).

[27] The argument is well taken that it is unlikely that a senior Prince would ever adopt this position. However, this author aligns the plight of poor women in Swaziland to that experienced by the slaves in the 19th century. It was only the influence of political champions like William Wilberforce and President Lincoln that brought about meaningful change. When one is voiceless, one needs a champion with influence to contend one's cause.

4.3. Race

With the rising level of poverty and a growing lack of employment amongst the youth, discontent will also rise. Caught up in the middle of it will be the Church and its attitude towards the poor. Theologically, the Church is required to adopt a position that supports more equality for the 'have nots'. The aspects of race conflict listed in 1.3 above require two things: (1) economic upliftment as opposed to exploitation (2) forgiveness of past atrocities as opposed to festering bitterness.

The problem that this author notes is that there are a growing number of church leaders who are adopting a 'prosperity cult' viewpoint.[28]

While the cult is undergirded by the truth of sowing and reaping,[29] the verse in question is written within the context of judgement and forgiveness—not self-entitlement and enrichment. These are heart issues that are more important within the Kingdom than personal gain. Regrettably, this prefacing does not accompany most Churches' emphasis on tithing.

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[28] This consumer culture is based on people growing up determining who they are by what they can consume. The Christian gospel is quite the opposite—one's value, whether we are rich or otherwise, is found only in Christ. People are not aware of this and pastors don't know that when they start out. Effectively the western culture, which Swazis are buying into, is designed to programme people into buying things that they do not need through telling them what they want. (This aspect of Western culture is too involved to detail within the focus of this critique and will be dealt with a further article).

[29] The principle of sowing and reaping is spelt out in Luke 6:37–38. However, it should be noted that the subject of giving is prefaced by thoughts on judging and forgiving. Only after dealing with questions related to the hardness of the heart, does Jesus turn to the heart attitude of one's generosity of spirit (as is borne out in the witness of the widow who gave an immense sum compared to her means (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4).

Sadly, not many Church leaders are even aware of the social aspects of the Gospels. As is the case with women, it will require the standard-bearing of a senior member of the Royal Family to practically lead the way.

5. Summary

At the heart of every ism, be it classism, sexism or racism, is an underlying standpoint that "I am better than you, and therefore I will treat you accordingly." In this article, Swaziland was chosen as a case study, not because other countries are so blessed that they are not controlled by isms, but because the isms in Swaziland are so clear cut.

Not only is the Kingdom of Swaziland clearly a Patriarchal society, but other Southern African countries are experiencing similar issues as they bow to their oligarchical super-lords. The impact of the suffering caused by this over-lordship is beginning to be felt as unbridled youths rise up without any understanding of their own culture, their own real value, and the value of women.

Clearly this is contrary to the biblical position espoused by Christ Jesus and amplified by the Apostles in their epistles.

Biblically, relationships need to be determined by their ontologically equality, as demonstrated in this author's understanding of living on a mezzanine floor where Christians are "in this world but not of it" (John 17:14-16). Within this context, Christians are called to meet the needs of their neighbours. From this standpoint, we can extract the following Biblical truths:

a. The definition of neighbour within a Christian context encompasses everyone—regardless of class, gender or race (2.3).
b. Ephesians 5:21–6:9 teaches us that:
   i. Persons in positions of headship should lay down their 'now' positions of patriarchalistic advantage through sacrificial 'servant leadership'.
   ii. Persons subject to those in leadership should lay down their 'not yet' positions of equality as they submit to those over them whereby the functionally superiors experience honour (2.1.7).
c. Headship should not be interpreted as the ability to command, but the ability to empower (2.1.7).
d. Therefore, those in leadership through function (kings, princes, chiefs, indvunas, husbands, pastors, elders and employers) should actively empower those under them. As Christians actively empower others, the needs, not only of them and their families, but also those of the Kingdom (both Christ's and Swaziland's) will be met.
e. Within this understanding of functionality, it is possible for two persons to functionally have headship over the other while also being in submission. An example of this could be and elder submitting to an employer in the marketplace while having authority over the employer in the church. The situation is similar in that of a Chief and his Pastor.
f. If headship is interpreted as the ability to empower, it follows that on occasion, the leader will either need to step up, so that the equipped person can fulfil his purpose, or step aside and find what new purpose, God is calling that leader to.

As the Church, we need to acknowledge that cultural practices that espouse abusive domination do not comply with a biblical

understanding of authority as set out in the New Testament. Unfortunately, the wider Church (which includes the Zionist Congregations) has taken the less confrontational path by adopting the world's view of male, class, and race, superiority.

It is this author's opinion that: (1) when the predatory elite take advantage of the illiterate poor in rising to power; seek personal gain at the expense of the already impoverished (2) where women continue to find themselves at the bottom of the economic rung necessitating that they sell the only commodity they have—their bodies; Then the Church is called to prophetically speak up like Mother Teresa or be found wanting in terms of Christ's standard set out in Matthew 25:31-40.

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‘What is this Evil Thing … Profaning the Sabbath?’ A New-Historicist Look at the Sabbath Restrictions in Nehemiah 13:15–22

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Abstract

As one of the three ‘reforms’ that Nehemiah undertakes, Nehemiah 13:15–22 narrates his Sabbath ‘reforms’. In this action-filled self-portrait, Nehemiah paints himself as the safeguarder of the sanctity of the Sabbath (cf. v.22). A New Historical scrutiny of the portrait, however, reveals a twin *excess* therein: (i) in Nehemiah’s power; (ii) in his novel interpretation of the ‘book of Moses’ (cf. 13:1). Whereas the former provides a reading strategy (interpretive significance), the latter bears witness to the adaptability and survival of texts—both biblical and ours (pastoral significance).

[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

Knowledge and meaning are agglutinative (Sherwood 2000:5)

As meaning-making beings, we humans approach, apprehend, appropriate what we newly encounter in terms of what we already know. The object of such encounters can be a person or a thing. Among the latter, texts constitute a subcategory. Of these, texts that are deemed sacred and normative, such as the biblical texts, elicit an urgent need for appropriating their meaning(s). Biblical interpretation has been engaged in such meaning-making process. In fact, biblical interpretation is as old as the Bible itself, as the abounding instances of inner-biblical interpretation attest.[2]

Even a cursory glance at the history of biblical interpretation would reveal that its task has been anything but uniform, both in terms of methodology and perspective. For instance, during the heydays of modernism, when reason was reified by the onrush of Enlightenment air, biblical interpretation predominantly tended towards Historical Critical Method (HCM). HCM operated under a number of presuppositions: it (i) paid particular attention to the aspect of 'history' (so, *historical*),[3] (ii) claimed for itself a dispassionate disposition (hence, *critical*), and (iii) laid out a systematic set of steps to be followed (therefore, *method*). Later, as the confident claims of modernism began to wane, it ushered

[2] Inner-biblical interpretations appear in varying lengths. For example, among the large ones, the books of Chronicles retell, rather re-interpret, the books of Genesis through 2 Kings. Among the less lengthy ones, Jer 26:12 quotes and interprets Mic 3:12; Neh 13:1–2 repeats almost verbatim Deut 23:3–4.

[3] However, 'history' was understood differently by various HCM practitioners. For some, it meant the 'history' of Israel that was presumed to lie 'behind' the text. But for most others, it meant the 'history' of the text, namely, how the text grew into its final form.

in an awareness that the aspect of 'history' is often on a slippery slope. In response, Literary Critical Methods (LCM) chose to prioritise the aesthetic dimension of texts (as opposed to 'history'). Despite their diverse foci, HCM and LCM operated under a common assumption: if an exegete meticulously follows the rigorous details of a chosen method and remains neutral, the exegete is guaranteed to arrive at *the* meaning of the text. Such a methodological confidence contributed to the blossoming of exegetical literature. But, as history would have it, even this confidence received a deep dent when postmodern thought began to appear on the interpretive horizon.

Postmodern perspective, in Leotardian phrase, is an 'incredulity towards metanarrative' (Lyotard 1984:xxiv). As such, it casts its sceptical gaze upon (i) any system that promises to explain everything, (ii) any claim to neutrality, and (iii) any idea or institution which projects itself as foundational.[4] Extending its critical awareness to the interpretation of texts, postmodern perspective averred that no reading can be neutral, nor any interpretation disinterested. On the contrary, every reading is a re-reading, an add up, or an agglutination. In every act of reading, the interpreter brings to the process as much, if not more, of his background and assumptions as the author(s) who composed the text do(es). Its implications are enormous. If every reading is but an 'add up', then any claim to be arriving at *the* meaning is an impossibility, if not a total fantasy. Then, one might quiz, have we arrived at the crossroads of interpretive impasse? On the contrary!

Inasmuch as a text is credited to the creativity of its author(s), so are to be construed its readers in their acts of reading and meaning-making. The awareness that authors and interpreters bring their 'baggage' to the

[4] Following the work of Cornel West, Adam aptly summarises the postmodern gaze as: 'antifoundational, antitotalizing, and demystifying', cf. Adam (1995:5).

text and its interpretation has relevant ramifications—including, interpretive and pastoral. New Historicism, an offshoot of postmodern perspective, offers the promise of harnessing these ramifications. The present paper, therefore, begins with (i) an overview of New Historicism (NH) and (ii) re-reads Nehemiah 13:15–22 in the light of NH sensibilities in order to (iii) delineate some interpretive and pastoral significances. Before the discussion turns to NH proper, an overview of the chosen text is in order.

2. Nehemiah, the Governor: A Portrait

2.1. Historical prelude

The Babylonian onslaught on Judah in 587/586 BCE and the subsequent exile of the upper echelons of the Judean populace left the city of Jerusalem in ruins and 'desolate' (cf. Lam 1:1, 13).[5] The impact of this traumatizing event is strongly etched in the painful memories of Israel (cf. Ps 137). About 70 years later, a sign of respite and relief appeared when the Persian king Cyrus the Great declared that the exiles could go back to their land (cf. Ezra 1:1–4; see also 2 Chr 36:22–23).[6] In response, some of the Judean exiles began to return from Babylon from around 539 BCE. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah purport to narrate the events associated with the returns and the rebuilding of the community.[7] Within this context, the book of Nehemiah traces his two

[5] All biblical quotes are from NRSV, unless otherwise stated.

[6] Archaeologically, the Cyrus Cylinder attests to the Persian king's policy of letting the people to go back to their homelands, cf. Rogers (1990:190–191).

[7] On Ezra-Nehemiah, cf. Kalimi (2012). In early Jewish traditions, Ezra-Nehemiah formed a single book, until Origen separated them into two books in the 3rd century CE, cf. Glatt-Gilad (2011:265).

tenures (Pfeiffer 1973:485) as the 'governor in the land of Judah'.[8] While the first lasted for 12 years (cf. Neh 5:14), the length of the second is not specified. The Sabbath 'reforms', spelt out in Nehemiah 13:15–22, take place during his second tenure (cf. Neh 13:6).

2.2. Literary genre and setting

Within the Old Testament, Ezra-Nehemiah are noted for their unique literary genre. Both contain lengthy memoirs. Nehemiah 1:1–7:73a and chapters 11–13 constitute the Nehemiah Memoir (NM). Narrated in the first person, NM is a 'forceful account of Nehemiah's career from his own point of view' (Collins 2004:437). Chapter 13, as a part of NM, narrates his three 'reforms': (i) cleansing the Temple of foreign elements (vv. 4–14); (2) Sabbath restrictions (vv. 15–22); (iii) condemnation of mixed marriages (vv. 23–31).

2.3. The Sabbath 'reform' proper

On a Sabbath day, Nehemiah observes people at various works (treading, carrying, bringing, and so on). So, he warns them from selling food. Even foreigners (Tyrians) bring fish and merchandise and are selling them. Nehemiah then remonstrates with the nobles of Judah. He asserts that it was because of their ancestors' profaning of the Sabbath that God brought disaster upon the city. Nehemiah then commands the gates of the city to be shut, and sets his servants on guard. However, some merchants spend the night in front of the city wall. So, he warns them that he would lay hands on them, should they do it again. From then on, they do not come back. Finally, Nehemiah commands the Levites to purify themselves and guard the gates. Then, a short prayer by the governor concludes the entire Sabbath episode.

[8] Judah (*Yehud*) was then part of a Persian province, cf. Berquist (2007).

2.4. Literary structure

Nehemiah 13:15–22 constitute a well-defined literary unit as (i) the pericope begins with an explicit temporal marker (‘In those days …’ v. 15); (ii) closes with a prayer (‘remember me’ v. 22); and (iii) the theme ‘Sabbath’ (*šabbāṯ*) dominates the entire passage.[9] Based on the content, the text divides into three subunits:

i) Nehemiah’s dealings with diverse people (vv. 15–18)

a) Warning the merchandise carriers (v. 1)
b) Tyrians selling fish and other merchandise (v. 16)
c) Remonstration with the nobles (vv. 17–18)

ii) Nehemiah’s many measures (vv. 19–22a)

a) Command to shut the gates and setting his servants (v.19)
b) Warning the sellers who wait outside the city (vv. 20–21)
c) Command to the Levites to purify themselves and guard the city (v. 22a)

iii) Concluding entreaty to God: ‘remember me’ (*zokrâhlî*[10] v. 22b)

A number of verbs within this short pericope present Nehemiah in the thick of action: he warns (v. 15), remonstrates (v. 17), commands, gives orders, and sets servants (cf. v.19), warns again (v.21), and commands again (v. 22). Such an action-filled portrayal reiterates that Nehemiah would go to any length to ‘keep the Sabbath day holy’. For some

[9] ‘Sabbath’ occurs in every verse except v. 20. Out of the 13 occurrences of ‘Sabbath’ in the book of Nehemiah, ten instances are found here.

[10] On ‘remember me’ motif, cf. Wijk-Bos (1998:98).

scholars, this Nehemian passion appears appropriate because 'Sabbath was and continues to be immensely important in Jewish religious practice' (Stuhlmueller and Bergant 1996:851). And it became all the more important after the loss of two centralizing and identity-affirming institutions: the monarchy and the Temple. The action-filled involvement of Nehemiah thus presents him as 'the safeguarder of the sanctity of the Sabbath'.

Despite Nehemiah's self-portrait (cf. NM) of passionate involvement, it is odd that none of the other characters speak. But their actions do! Should they be given voice and heard in tandem with the persuading voice of the governor, they craft a story that is different from the dominant storyline. New Historicism offers the tools to tune our ears to these interacting voices. An overview of NH will help pave the way for appropriating its tools.

3. New Historicism (NH): An Overview

Stephen Greenblatt is credited with having coined the term: 'New Historicism'.[11] It is 'new' because, unlike HCM, NH is not interested in the 'history' *per se*—be it the 'history' as portrayed in the text or the 'history' of the text. All the same, NH is still 'historical' in asserting that 'words can be understood only against the background of their own times' (Barton 2013:121) because texts 'are caught up in the *social processes* and *contexts* out of which they emerge'.[12] As a result, NH does not expend its energy in searching for nonbiased data in the texts,

[11] Cf. Thomas (1989:182). For an introduction to New Historicism, cf. Hens-Piazza (2002). On NH's assumptions, strategies, and techniques, cf. Erisman (2014). And for a case study, cf. Sherwood (1997).

[12] cf. Hens-Piazza (2002:6; emphasis added).

which are nonexistent, but pays particular attention to the purpose or the 'interest' that a text is produced to serve (Carvalho 2006:197).

'Past' as a continued construction: Due to the 'interested' nature of texts, the 'past' as portrayed in them can hardly be read as neutral data. Similarly, reading the texts is also motivated by 'interests'. NH therefore asserts that, despite a text's claim to 'pastness,' the years of reading and rereading, interpreting and reinterpreting, and appropriating and opposing come to form an entire world of the text, a world which no reader can ignore (Hens-Piazza 2002:67). As a result, the 'past' in the text can hardly be treated as fixed. If so, as noted earlier, 'history' comes to stand on a slippery slope. In short, if 'old historicisms seem to divide history into periods … New Historicism pluralizes history'.[13]

So, Multiplicity of Voices: Within texts, pluralized 'history' and slippery 'past' show forth in the presence of multiple and divergent voices. To state this differently, every piece of literature has an agenda which its author would pursue to assert overtly or covertly. Even while doing so, the author leaves behind other minor voices—voices that oppose and critique the dominant one. As a result, 'mainstream ideologies are formed by dominant and emergent forces, but mixing with, and possibly subverting them, are residual elements' (Sherwood 1997:368). These residual elements appear on 'the margins of dominant hegemonic discourse'.[14] Due to such coalescence of various voices, textual characters turn out to be complex. If earlier methods granted standalone existence to textual characters, NH lays them bare 'as decentred, fashioned, compromised in a complex of relation to social forces' (Sherwood 1997:368–69).

[13] Sherwood here draws from the idea of F. Lentricchia. For details, cf. Sherwood (1997:368).

[14] For an illustrative case from the Talmud, cf. Hens-Piazza (2002:57–60).

With characters being complex and compromised, the notion of power can hardly be tied to a single character. New Historicism, therefore, trains its eyes to observe how power is dispersed within a text. Power, in this sense, does not flow as in a 'linear structure, with influence flowing in one direction, but as an intricate web or network or cycle of exchange … All power relations [therefore] are complex and are reciprocal' (Sherwood 1997:370–71).

Adaptability and Survival of Text: The complex and reciprocal power relation, in turn, informs the way texts themselves assume their authority. 'Texts do not "reflect" worlds in simple mimetic relationships, but rather their power is derived from their intimate connections to social structures and their capacity to transform and embody social anxiety and desire' (Sherwood 1997:372–73). Successful replication of any text requires that it is at once faithfully copied and also exhibits 'an extraordinary capacity to produce variations when variation is required'.[15] The Bible presents an excellent illustration. It has remained a successful replicator of itself because, quite often, 'the Bible is employed to address concerns, desires, and anxieties of various societies and time periods. At the same time … the Bible "negotiates its position in society by internalizing and transforming anxieties, and giving back to society an idealized picture of itself."'[16]

NH Reading Strategy: Guided by the awareness of the multiplicity of voices, the notion of dispersed power, and adaptability and survival of the text, NH invites its adherents to look at any text—biblical ones including—as 'ideologically plotted, crafted, and designed, and how the

[15] Based on the insights of Hugh Pyper, Sherwood makes this observation, cf. Sherwood (2000:197); Pyper (1998:70–90).

[16] For example, various commentaries on the book of Jonah show how they are informed by the social situations of the commentators, cf. Hens-Piazza (2002:66).

"confidently plotted storyline" inevitably represents a "sentimentality, an excess, an exaggeration."' [17] To unearth the *excess*, a 'New Historicist hunts for the marginal, the curious and bizarre' (Sherwood 1997:367). So, NH reading strategy involves:

1. Reading the text

Paying attention to the text and the plotted storyline therein.

2. Re-reading the text for any 'excess'

Hearing the dominant voice for any *excess* or *exaggeration.*

3. Hearing other 'voices'

'Voices' that have been hitherto unheard or treated as unimportant.

4. Perceiving the Power Dispersion

Listening to the dominant voice's claim to power *vis-à-vis* other subverting 'voices'.

5. Interpretive and Pastoral Significances

On how we read texts and how texts, in turn, adapt and survive.

Earlier, subsection 2 dwelt on the historical and literary details of the chosen text in order to listen to the plotted storyline (cf. step 1). The present subsection has outlined the NH reading strategy and thus sets the stage for step 2: re-reading the text for any *excess*.

[17] Even while quoting this idea of Hoffman, Sherwood is quick to acknowledge that not all biblical texts fall into this naïve outline. cf. Sherwood (1997:374); Hoffman (1998).

4. New Historical (Re)-Reading of Nehemian Sabbath 'Reforms'

4.1. The excess

On observing various activities on a Sabbath day, Nehemiah declares that profanation of the Sabbath is an 'evil thing' and it was the reason for God to bring 'disaster' (v. 17). Any further violation, Nehemiah continues, would bring 'more wrath on Israel' (v. 18). On close scrutiny, this Nehemian reasoning raises a number of questions: do the activities that Nehemiah observes violate Sabbath stipulations? Is profanation of the Sabbath the cause of disaster on the city? Do Sabbath violations bring God's wrath at all?

Violated Sabbath? Nehemiah 13:1 situates Nehemiah's three 'reforms'—Sabbath including—in the context of what was 'read from the book of Moses'. Then, Nehemiah 13:1b–3 repeats, almost verbatim, Deuteronomy 23:3–4. Thus, the Torah, or more specifically the book of Deuteronomy, is portrayed as the foundation for the 'reforms'. Given these details, it pays to compare the Nehemian restrictions with the Sabbath stipulations in Deuteronomy, or more broadly, the Torah.

Elusiveness characterizes Sabbath-related information in the Torah![18] Although work (*m^{e}lā'kâ*) is forbidden (Exod 20, 31, and elsewhere), there is hardly any further elaboration on it. The only explicitly prohibited act is the lighting of fire (Exod 35:3).[19] Further, although

[18] Elusiveness characterises both the origin and the fixity of the Sabbath, cf. Blenkinsopp (1988:360); Stuhlmueller and Bergant (1996:851); Kaiser (1991:76); Sarna (1970:19); Pfeiffer (1973:168).

[19] Exod 16 however extends it to both the gathering of wood and the preparation of food, cf. Kramer (2012:204).

'the command to keep seventh day of the week holy is found in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–4; Deut 5:6–18), Sabbath breaking is not usually one of the sins preached against by the prophets or condemned in the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua to 2 Kings)' (Grabbe 2003:325). Against this background, Nehemian remonstration with the nobles that their Sabbath negligence amounts to an 'evil' thing (*rā'āh* v. 17) and the cause for God's wrath is in *excess* of what is given in the Torah.

In addition, the activities that Nehemiah observes are not the ones prohibited in the Torah. He sees selling and so, by implication, buying. However, 'none of the Mosaic Sabbath laws prohibit the right to make purchase on the Sabbath day'.[20] In fact, the Sabbath is an ideal day for market activities. If so, Nehemiah's warning against selling (vv. 1, 21) would amount to 'the abolition of the Sabbath market' (Blenkinsopp 1988:360), which is in *excess* of what the Torah stipulated.

Other than selling, verse 15 describes a series of agricultural activities: wine pressing, loading of grains, wine, grapes, and figs. Wine pressing is a time-critical job. Any delay in the process can adversely affect the quality and the quantity of the outcome (wine). Similarly, harvesting, packing, and selling of delicate fruits such as grapes are time-sensitive. But the governor's command to shut the gates 'when it began to be dark' would have meant a shutdown from Friday sundown to Sunday sunrise: approximately 36 hours! Can these peasants afford to wait until the Sabbath is over to resume the wine pressing or handling the delicate fruits? If this itself is an *excess*, then prohibiting the sale of food for the same duration is an equally—if not more—*exaggerated* restriction.

[20] Exod 20:8–11; 23:12; 31:13–17; 34:21; 35:2–3; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:12; cf Exod 16:22–30; Num 15:32–35, cf. LeFebvre (2006:117).

The Sabbath observance, which began as a welfare measure (rest and relief for people, animals, slaves, and resident aliens, cf. Exod 23:12), thus turns into an act of unprecedented control over even the basic commodities such as food and agricultural produce. Interestingly, this control mechanism is projected to be in conformity with 'the words of Moses'. The observation of Andrew Steinmann aptly underscores the Nehemian *excess* here: 'when making his reforms in Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah does not make explicit appeal to Israel's most important written text, the Torah. While his memoir may allude to Pentateuchal legislation, he accomplishes his reforms mainly on the basis of his personal authority' (Steinmann 2013). Even this, his personal authority, bears perceptible traces of *excess*.

4.2. Power dispersion and other 'voices'

During his first tenure, the task of Nehemiah was to mend the 'broken walls' (Neh 2:11–16). But 'a broken community' becomes his challenge during his second tenure. Perhaps exasperated, he responds through a series of emotional outbursts:

> When Nehemiah discovers what has gone on behind his back, he has a temper tantrum… Each time Nehemiah finds a flaw in the conduct of the people he becomes involved physically or threatens to do so. He 'throws' the furniture of Tobias out of the temple room [cf. 13:8], threatens to 'lay hands' on the merchants outside the city gates [cf. v.21], and on the third occasion he does lay hands on the perpetrators of the offense [cf. v.25] (Wijk-Bos 1998:95–97).

Such a passionate involvement may bespeak the governor's unrestrained authority over all kinds of people. Other voices, however, narrate a different story. These 'voices' belong to those at the winepress, the Levites, Tyrians selling fish, other sellers, the buyers, those who

carry burdens, the nobles, and his servants. True, none of them respond in words. But their (re)actions interrupt and even subvert the dominant voice of Nehemiah in a number of ways:

a) Nehemiah reprimands the nobles by appealing to a theological motivation: God's wrath (cf. v. 17). But the nobles respond neither in words nor in deeds.
b) Nehemiah gets the gates shut for the entire duration of—and also after—the Sabbath; places his own servants to prevent any burden being brought in (cf. v. 19), which indicates that his command to shut the gates has hardly served the purpose.
c) Some merchants, as though defying Nehemiah's warning, continue to come and spend the night near the gate (cf. v. 20).
d) Nehemiah warns them that he would lay his hands if they come again. Only then do they stop coming (cf. v. 21).
e) Despite the observation that the merchants have stopped coming, Nehemiah appoints the Levites to guard the gates (cf. v. 22). And, whatever happened to his servants is left only to the imagination of the reader.

Though all the 'voices' deserve a full treatment, given the limited scope of this paper, the discussion here focuses on three 'voices', those of the nobles, the people, and the foreigners.

The Nobles: On observing various activities, Nehemiah initially warns the sellers (vv. 15–16). Apparently, his warnings are not taken seriously. So, he 'remonstrates' (literally, *rîb* or court case) with the nobles (Fensham 1982:264). Nehemiah even charges them that *they* are doing the profanation of the Sabbath. The nobles neither carry corn nor sell fish. How can the governor be justified in his scathing accusation of the

nobles?[21] Scathing though it is, the response from the nobles was merely *silence*.

Such a silence is all the more telling, when it is situated within the larger context of the book of Nehemiah. The book recounts various interactions between Nehemiah and the nobles (*hôrim*).[22] In almost all of these occasions, the nobles are presented as silent spectators. Chapter 5, for example, narrates how Nehemiah brought charges against them because of their economic dealings, which resulted in the oppression and therefore the outcry of the people. Even as Nehemiah charges, the nobles remain 'silent' (5:8). Only with further admonition and by his appeal to the 'fear of God', do the nobles respond: 'We will restore … we will do as you say' (v. 12). But Nehemiah is hardly satisfied. He calls the priests and makes the nobles take an oath. And in a dramatic gesture, he shakes off the fold of his garments in order to hurl yet another warning. Despite his arresting actions, no further response comes forth from the nobles. Only the people respond, 'Amen'. The episode then ends on a telling note: 'And the people did as they had promised' (v. 13). On the part of the nobles, however, no response gets reported!

As noted, the nobles are mere recipients of Nehemiah's warnings on most occasions. However, one episode narrates their active role. It occurs in the context of rebuilding the walls (cf. chapter 6). Having

[21] Some scholars opine that the nobles 'connived at those that did [the profanation], and did not use their power to restrain them, and so made themselves guilty', cf. Henry et al. (1985:854). Others go further and state that the nobles benefitted from the Sabbath trading, cf. Grabbe (1998:169). But the text itself does not explicitly state such reasons.

[22] The words 'noble' and 'nobles' (*hôr* or *hôrim*) occur seven times (2:16; 4:14; 4:19; 5:7; 6:17; 7:5; 13:17), not counting the word *addîr* (3:5; 10:29) which is also translated as 'nobles' in NRSV.

completed the walls, Nehemiah makes a passing remark: 'in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them' (cf. 6:17). As regards the content, Nehemiah narrates, the nobles 'reported my words to him [Tobiah]. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me' (6:19). These correspondences indicate that the relation between the nobles and Nehemiah was anything but cordial. Against this backdrop, the Nehemian 'remonstration' serves a purpose that seems to go beyond his passion for the Sabbath observance. On this, Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley's observation is spot on: Nehemiah was 'sent to limit the power of elites in the region of Jerusalem who appear to have been under the patronage of Sanballat of Samaria' (Fitzpatrick-McKinley 2015:252). In short, his religious passion notwithstanding, Nehemian confrontation with the nobles bears witness to a power struggle. In such a charged context, the silence from the nobles undermines the governor's claim to his arbitrating prerogative. Thus, silent subversion typifies the nobles. But they are not alone in this.

The People: Like the nobles, 'the people' occur frequently in the book and almost always as mute recipients of Nehemian admonition. Yet, there is one notable exception that deserves attention. Verse 15 narrates that Nehemiah sees 'the people' in activities. The identity of 'the people', however, is not specified. Since the Sabbath stipulations are binding only on the people who entered into the covenant (cf. 10:28ff), it can be assumed that Nehemiah is dealing with the covenanted people.[23] Granting this scenario, it is worth comparing these two chapters (10, 13)—the only two places where 'Sabbath' is treated in the book.

[23] This view can further be substantiated by the next verse. Tyrians, the foreigners, bring fish and other merchandise to the market and sell them. However, Nehemiah takes no issue with them.

In Nehemiah 10, the people enter voluntarily into 'an oath to walk in God's law' (v. 29). Elaborating on their oath, the people promise, 'If the peoples of the land bring in *merchandise* or any *grain* on the *Sabbath* … we will not buy' (v.31; emphasis added). The repeated occurrence of 'we' in this episode reiterates that the initiative and execution of the Sabbath obligations comes from the people; not from any leader's power (Wijk-Bos 1998:86). But, Nehemiah 13 narrates an unambiguous contrast: the 'heaps of *grain*' are brought into the city (cf. v. 15); Tyrians bring *merchandise* and sell on a *Sabbath* day (v. 16). In short, if Nehemiah 10 outlines the obligations covenanted by the people, Nehemiah 13 describes those obligations neglected by them. On both occasions, the power to choose is in the hands of the people. And v.20 accentuates this observation. Even when the gates are shut, the sellers spend the night outside Jerusalem. Their willingness to spend the night (cf. v. 20) signfies their hope to sell wares at the first possible opportunity. If the people had insisted on observing their oath, the sellers' waiting would have been hopeless. However, their repeated wait (until threatened with physical chastisement) indicates the possibility that there would be some ready buyers. Thus, the voluntary oath of the people on the one hand and the blatant disregard of the same by them on the other hand make a further dent in the *Yehud* governor's self-claimed power to oversee the Sabbath observance.

The Foreigners: The third group that sheds light on the negotiated power of Nehemiah is the Tyrians. Reading v.15 and v.16 in parallel presents a perceptible contrast. Both the verses begin with what Nehemiah observes: things being brought into the city for sale. However, the comparison stops there. Whereas verse 15b specifies how the governor deals with the sellers (by warning them), no comparable action is found in verse 16: 'Foreigners are not rebuked or addressed by

Nehemiah' (Pakkala 2004:217). Nehemiah rather turns his attention to the nobles.

Since the observance of Sabbath is mandated for the Israelites, it might be argued that the foreigners (Tyrians) are not under the purview of Sabbath restrictions. However, there is one detail that does not quite square well with this. Nehemiah's passionate actions in verses 15, 21 indicate that he is going after the sellers (rather than the buyers), perhaps to curb the issue (selling) at its root. If so, the Tyrians' presence deals a double blow to his efforts. One, Nehemiah sees them selling but he does deal with them. Two, they are living *within* the city. Thus, all his other actions (shutting the gates, guarding them, and threatening the merchants outside the wall) would amount to nothing if Tyrians are left to stay within the city. Thus, the presence of and the uninterrupted selling by the Tyrians make further inroads into the power that Nehemiah claims for himself.

Another event, narrated just prior to the Sabbath episode, argues further for the diminished power of Nehemiah vis-à-vis various foreigners. Nehemiah 13:4–14 narrates that the priest Eliashib granted accommodation to Tobiah, an Ammonite, in a large room, which served as the storage space for the Temple provisions and offerings! Because such a foreign presence is in direct violation of Deuteronomical stipulation (cf. Deut 23:3), Nehemiah becomes 'angry' and throws 'all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room' (v. 8). In all likelihood, that emotional display could not have taken place in the presence of the priest and/or Tobiah as no direct confrontation gets reported. Despite the authorisation from the king of Persia, Nehemiah's anger could only be directed at the mute furniture that gets thrown out. Thus, the Tyrian and the Tobiah episodes together point to the

diminished power that the governor seems to have wielded, as his own memoir attests.

The discussion thus far has endeavoured to listen to the power dispersion within the text: the power that is claimed and yet contested, negotiated, and even subverted. These contesting 'voices,' in effect, considerably downsize the text's dominant voice that depicts Nehemiah as 'the safeguarder of the sanctity of the Sabbath'. A New Historical sensitivity thus helps to re-appropriate the dominant storyline of the text together with the 'interest' that the text is created to serve. There is a further value in reading NM through NH lens. That value lies in Nehemian novelty in re-appropriating an earlier text in response to the existing situation which, in turn, bears witness to the adaptability and survival of texts.

4.3. Adaptability of texts

Earlier in the discussion, the Nehemian interpretation of Deuteronomical Sabbath stipulations was shown as an *excess* or *exaggeration*. But, Nehemiah is not alone in fashioning such interpretive innovations. As Henry et al (1985:854) observe, Jeremiah has stated that bearing burdens and bringing them by the gates of Jerusalem are in violation of Sabbath stipulations (Jer 17:21). Jeremiah even expands his explanation by linking the 'nation's fidelity to Sabbath observance (Jer 17:19–27)' (Stuhlmueller and Bergant 1996:853). Thus, the prophet connects the disaster that befell Israel with the failure in Sabbath observance. Michael Fishbane traces how Jeremiah achieved such an interpretive innovation: (1) the prophet placed his 'expansion on the Sabbath law on the lips of the Lord: "thus says the Yahweh" (17:21); and (2) he claimed that this new provision was *actually part of* the Sinai declaration "commanded [to] your forefathers" (17:22–23)'. Fishbane comments:

> In sum, such a revelation … which presumptively cites regulations hitherto unrecorded as known and ancient is most remarkable… Indeed, inner-biblical legal exegesis contains many other instances whereby the old revelation is misrepresented to one degree or another; but there is none like Jer. 17:21–2 where exegetical innovations are so brazenly represented as a citation of the old revelation by YHWH himself.[24]

So, already in Jeremiah, a 'new legislation is being passed off as though it were old'.[25] And Nehemiah's Sabbath restrictions appear to follow suit. How ought we to respond when we encounter such interpretive novelties? Should they be deplored as instances of inexactitude? It depends on how we view texts. If texts are perceived as 'locked up' finished product, which we take out once in a while, have a look, and lock it back, then the Jeremian and Nehemian novelties *are* instances of inexactitude! But as the Bible itself witnesses, reading a text is tantamount to an encounter which takes place in a real-life context. During these encounters, texts are brought to bear on the contemporary context of its reader and vice versa. To this end, Jeremiah's novelty presents an apt illustration; so is the Nehemian one. In fact, for the later Jewish traditions, Nehemian novelty was 'precedent-setting, for the translation of the prohibition of "doing business" or "treading" into a prohibition of carrying in and out is supported by all later elaborations of Sabbath practice in different Jewish communities' (Kramer 2012:205). Novelties such as these underscore the adaptability of texts in response to their encounter with their readers and the latter's situations. By their adaptability, the texts continue to survive in diverse hues, one such 'hue,' which this author encountered, presents a real-life case of pastoral challenge as well as significance.

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[24] Fishbane (1985:134); LeFebvre (2006:118).

[25] For relevant resources, cf. LeFebvre (2006:119).

5. Pastoral Case and Significance

Pratyusha[26] was a student of a Masters in Computer Applications (MCA) program. Hailing from a Christian family, she was ever eager to give witness to her Christian identity. During cultural events, study group discussion, class debate, co-curricular activities, and much more vividly during monthly ecumenical prayer services, her Christian identity could hardly be missed. On the other hand, her brilliant academic acumen catapulted her to be the top of her class. This dual prominence—religious and academic—made her the obvious candidate for the *Best Student* award. Thus, Pratyusha was on a dream-run; or, at least she was until an incident that ensued.

It happened during the days that led up to the semester-end practical exams. Due to the unavailability of examiners during the working days, the college administration chose to schedule an exam on a Sunday. Things appeared to be sailing smoothly until Pratyusha's unwillingness to attend the exam was brought to their notice. Even when her academic mentor tried to advise, Pratyusha remained determined in her stance. Her reason was: 'It is the Lord's Day and I will not engage in any academic activity, including exams'.

Two religious priests, who were part of the administration, tried on their part to talk her into attending the exam. The harder they tried to convince her, the firmer she seemed to become in her decision. Even the practical consequences—such as losing her grade, having to repeat the exam with her junior batch, and the eventual impact it would have on her campus placement—did not make her reconsider her decision. The exam did take place on a Sunday and Pratyusha stayed with her decision.

[26] The actual name is changed to protect the privacy of the person.

The incident baffled both the administration and her student companions, who wondered if she had made a disproportionate decision under the guise of her religious commitment. How come a graduate student of Computer Science—where it is often perceived as fashionable to debunk traditions—could give an interpretation of the Lord's Day that sounded quite restrictive even to religious members of the institution? Perhaps NH sensibility, which sheds light on the adaptability of texts may provide a key to deciphering her troubling decision. Growing up in a denominational Christian setup, Pratyusha appropriated an interpretation of the Lord's Day for herself. The same interpretation then became so powerful that it began to wield its grip upon her, so that she was not even willing to dialogue with her interpretation and much less with her subsequent decision!

6. Concluding Comment

Having listed the features of NH, this paper re-read the Nehemian Sabbath restrictions for the twin *excesses* therein. By means of NH strategy, the self-portrayed authority (power *excess*) was shown as contested, compromised, and subverted. The interpretive *excess*, on the other hand, revealed the adaptability and survival of texts. Adaptabilities such as these occur not only in ancient times and in textual witnesses (cf. Nehemiah and Jeremiah) but also in our reading and interpretive contexts, as the case of Pratyusha demonstrates.

Finally, it was reasonably less problematic for me to present the insights of New Historicism, apply it to the passage in question, and then look at the real-life case to understand it from the New Historical angle. But then, where do *I* stand in doing all this? Can my reading be outside the purview of New Historicism? In critiquing Nehemiah's attempt at Sabbath restoration and Pratyusha's 'disproportionate' sacrifice, how

far am I informed by my cultural context? I was born and grew up in a Christian community where the fixity and practice of the Lord's Day was not a burning issue. And it had to do with the practical needs of the place. Our village was one of the many mission stations of a parish that had but two priests ministering. Hence, Sunday liturgy had to be anticipated to Saturday on a few occasions. Also, as part of a teacher's family, for whom the weekend often consisted of only Sundays, the Lord's Day was reserved for completing the household chores that got accumulated through the weekdays. As New Historicists aver, might this socio-religious context of mine make the Nehemian 'reform' as restrictive and the decision of Pratyusha as 'disproportionate'?

After all,
Everyone starts from somewhere; everyone has "an axe to grind.'"
But, how meaningful would our readings be,
when we are New Historically aware of our 'axes'!

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One Saviour and Two Responses: A Comparison and Analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10

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Abstract

This journal article undertakes a comparison and analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10. One reason for doing so is the paucity of scholarship exploring the interrelationship between these two texts. A second motivation is that both passages showcase two contrasting responses to the Saviour, one characterized by unbelief and the other by belief. A third incentive for this endeavour is that the importance of believing in the Saviour receives elucidation. As this essay demonstrates, each narrative advances a key theme of the third Synoptic Gospel, namely, that Jesus, the divine-human Son, came to earth to unshackle those enslaved to sin and restore them in their relationship with God.

1. Introduction

The Gospel of Luke provides readers with a detailed account of Jesus' works, teachings, and life. Like the other three canonical Gospel writers,

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

Luke paid close attention to historical facts. For instance, the Evangelist recorded the names of several Roman officials in power at the time of Jesus' birth; yet, in contrast to contemporary writing conventions, the author was not obsessed with furnishing precise details or maintaining a slavish chronological order. Indeed, numerous events placed in this Gospel are not arranged to match the exact sequence in which they occurred.

Furthermore, rather than Luke being exhaustive in his treatment of his subject, he only included information that he deemed essential for understanding the way of salvation. The author's interest was to demonstrate the historical veracity and worldwide significance of the soteriological events he narrated. This included depicting Jesus not only as the Jewish Messiah, but also as the Saviour of all the earth's inhabitants. Fittingly, the Evangelist portrays Jesus as the Redeemer who sought to find and deliver people who were 'lost' (19:10).

It would be incorrect to surmise that the Gospel of Luke is merely a compilation of irreconcilable fragments; instead, it is better to regard the third Synoptic Gospel as an integrated narrative written by a well-informed person. In contrast to the other three gospels, which were presumably penned by Jewish believers, a Gentile Christian possibly wrote the Gospel of Luke. An alternative, lesser-held option is that Luke was a Hellenized Jew. If Luke was a Gentile, his own ethnic roots and his Gentile audience may explain why his gospel has a universal perspective.

Antioch of Syria might have been Luke's place of birth. Greek names with contractions ending in 'as' (such as Luke's original Greek name, Loukas) were common among slaves. Greek and Roman masters often educated their slaves to become physicians and later freed them to practise medicine. One corresponding postulate is that Luke could have

been an emancipated bondservant whose former master trained to be a healer of the body. There is further speculation that Luke was born into the household of Theophilus, a government official who sponsored Luke's research and writing of the third Synoptic Gospel.

In keeping with the preceding suppositions, the central theme of the third Synoptic Gospel is that God offers salvation to all people when they trust in the Messiah. Additionally, the Father's saving acts in human history come to fulfilment through the advent of his Son. Time and again, Luke emphasised that deliverance from sin was not the sole possession of one ethnic group; rather, it was open to people of all races and human conditions. The message of Luke's Gospel is that the redemption Jesus provided was broad enough to include everyone who came to him in repentance and faith. Even though the physician-evangelist presented Jesus as the Saviour of all humanity, readers discover that only a minority of individuals believe in him.

Clarifying with respect to the above are the descriptive analyses of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10 in sections 2.0 and 3.0, respectively. Each of these texts represents what O'Toole (1991:108) labels as a 'quest story'. The prototypical narrative involves an individual who 'approaches Jesus' in search of 'something very important'. On the one hand, both passages draw attention to an inquisitor or seeker; on the other hand, they highlight two divergent reactions to Jesus. One response is characterised by unbelief and disappointment, while the other entails faith in Jesus that leads to salvation.

An examination of the academic literature dealing with the Gospel of Luke indicates there are mainly incidental, disconnected observations comparing the rich young ruler with the chief tax collector. Six exceptions are Carroll (2012:373), France (2013:298–9), Green (1997:666–7), Hamm (1988:436), O'Hanlon (1981:9), and O'Toole

(1992:1033), who each devote about a paragraph to state some parallels between these two individuals. Three additional exceptions are Garland (2011:744), Galloway (2011:51–52), and Tannehill (1986:123–4), who each offer two paragraphs to contrast the attitudes and responses of each person. These concessions notwithstanding, there remains a paucity of scholarship exploring in a focused, sustained manner the interrelationship between the two passages under consideration.

As the following sections demonstrate, there is value in examining the preceding, potentially relevant lacuna. The endeavour includes the discourse in section 4, in which an extended comparison and analysis of the two principal texts is undertaken. This is followed by section 5, in which the key findings of the study are conveyed. With the preceding in mind, the major claim is that Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10 showcase two different responses to the Saviour, one characterized by unbelief and the other by belief. Each narrative, in turn, moves forward a key theme of the third Synoptic Gospel, namely, that Jesus, the divine-human Son, came to earth to unshackle those enslaved to sin and restore them in their relationship with God. The irony is that the powerbrokers of society, as represented by the rich young ruler, spurn the Messiah and his gracious offer of salvation. Oppositely, the dregs of society, as represented by the prominent tax collector, Zacchaeus, trust in Jesus for eternal life and become heirs of the divine kingdom.

2. A Descriptive Analysis of Luke 18:18–30

The episode involving the rich young ruler is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. Accordingly, pertinent information from Matthew 19:16–30 and Mark 10:17–31 is correlated with Luke 18:18–30 to inform the descriptive analysis that follows. Jesus' encounter with the wealthy official took place in Perea in the winter of AD 30. This

location notwithstanding, Jesus was heading with unshakable resolve to Jerusalem. As the Saviour did so, someone came running up to him and knelt before him as an act of reverence. When the details of the various Gospel accounts are considered, it is ascertained that the enquirer was not only rich, but also a leader and young. Hendriksen (1973:723) surmises the official was likely less than 40 years old.

When the aristocrat's meticulous record of law-keeping is taken into consideration, the various accounts leave the impression that he enjoyed a sterling reputation. The descriptions found in the Synoptic Gospels could have fitted one of the local Jewish council or court representtatives. They acted under the authority of the Roman government and exercised judicial as well as administrative responsibilities. Accordingly, the enquirer may have been a synagogue official, a Pharisee, or a pious civic leader. If these suppositions are accurate, it is reasonable to deduce that the enquirer had garnered numerous accolades.

Despite the above flourishes, the young man lacked assurance of 'eternal life' (Luke 18:18), a concept well established within Second Temple Judaism. In John 17:3, Jesus defined eternal life as enjoying a personal relationship with the Father based on knowing him as the one true God. Furthermore, it is only possible to genuinely know the Father through faith in the Son, whom the Father had sent to reveal himself. In short, eternal life is a growing relationship with the triune God that begins, not just when the believer dies, but at conversion.

Perhaps based on rumours about Jesus the patrician had heard, he sought out the itinerant preacher from Nazareth for a definitive answer to the aspirant's urgent query. Evidently, the young man expected to be given a meritworthy task he could accomplish to win favour with God. Based on this observation, it is evident the ruler thought in terms of earning salvation through the scrupulous observance of edicts. Likewise,

the aristocrat seemed unaware of the truth that eternal life could only be received as the Father's gift from the Son. Newman and Stine (1988) paraphrase the official's question as, 'what must I do to make myself good enough?' He had been raised to heed the Mosaic Law, but he still felt unfulfilled. Put another way, there was a gaping spiritual void within him.

The official's enquiry reflected current Jewish thinking concerning the way to gain acceptance with God. For instance, in Jesus' night-time 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 Law. With profound insight, Jesus told the Pharisee and respected member of the Sanhedrin that, 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 (because 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. Like a helpless, vulnerable child, even such an accomplished individual as the rich young ruler needed to be spiritually reborn. Moreover, God's power alone, not human effort, could transform the official's sinful heart (as well as that of all people). Ultimately, the kingdom of God could be received only by those with childlike faith. Edwards (2002:312) elucidates that just as children are dependent on their parents, so believers are dependent on their heavenly Father for eternal life.

In the young man's initial greeting, he complimented Jesus for being a 'good teacher' (Luke 18:18). The Greek adjective translated 'good'

denotes what is upright or honourable. In this context, the noun rendered ‘teacher’ refers to distinguished rabbis who instructed others in truths about God, his commandments, and his expectations for humankind. To point the aristocrat’s thinking in the proper direction, Jesus asked why the wealthy ruler considered Jesus to be impeccable within his essential nature. The Saviour also declared that no person was intrinsically good. Indeed, since only God was infinitely holy, he alone could be called ‘good’ as well as determine who and what was ‘good’.

Marshall (1978:684) interjects that Jesus, in his response, sought to eliminate ‘any cheapening of the idea of goodness’. Accordingly, Jesus’ point was that true virtue was not found in sinful people or the deeds they performed; rather, there was only one source of supreme goodness, namely, God. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that Jesus was denying his own deity and ethical flawlessness. Behind his statement was the awareness of his unity with the Father and the Spirit. Also, Jesus wanted the young man to seriously consider the implications of calling the Saviour ‘good’ (v. 19) before frivolously using the term. The prudence of Jesus’ approach is brought out in verse 23, which reveals that ultimately the aristocrat made a conscious decision not to follow Jesus.

The Messiah next said that if the aspiring leader truly prized the life God gave, he should obey the ‘commandments’ (v. 20). The latter renders a Greek noun that refers to the precepts, injunctions, and edicts of God, particularly those recorded in the Pentateuch. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude from Jesus’ statement that he thought heeding the Mosaic Law could earn eternal life; rather, Jesus’ strategy was to help his enquirer recognize his inability to obtain God’s favour through good works. Jesus could have done the ruler’s thinking for him

by telling him that salvation could never be merited by what one does; instead, Jesus worked with the aristocrat on his current level of understanding and led him to confront the truth on his own terms and in his own way.

According to Matthew 19:18, the official asked which decrees he should keep. Jesus' reply in Luke 18:20 focused on a subset of the Ten Commandments that primarily concerned one's relationship with other people. The Messiah cited prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, perjury, defrauding (which is akin to coveting), and dishonouring parents. Matthew 19:19 adds Jesus' emphasis on the importance of people loving others as much as themselves.

A comparison of the three Synoptic Gospels indicates some variation in the form and order of the edicts Jesus cited, which Hendriksen (1973:725) considers to be 'minor' in 'character'. Lenski (1946:915) infers from his examination of the relevant intertextual data that the Saviour was not constrained to adhere to the exact wording of the Decalogue. Garland (2011:731) takes the analysis further when he points out that Jesus' interlocutor arrived with a 'selfish question about his own future security'; and in response, the Messiah shifted the young man's 'attention to others, which requires selflessness'. Bock (1996:1479) surmises that the way in which a person 'treats others' points to 'acts of faithfulness' that are both 'concrete' and measurable.

The pious aristocrat, perhaps like his scrupulous peers, genuinely thought he had wholeheartedly observed since his childhood all the commandments Jesus mentioned (Luke 18:21). Most likely, this points back to the enquirer's bar mitzvah at the age of 13 when all Jewish males assumed personal responsibility for heeding the Mosaic Law. Evidently, the aspiring leader thought Jesus needed to give him a longer list, so that he could set about observing these directives, too. Clearly,

the official had not yet grasped the fact that keeping the law could never save anyone. It could only disclose a person's sin and the need for a Saviour. Also, for the ruler, obedience to the law was a matter of external compliance. He did not realise that inner conformity was also imperative, and that it was impossible for people to fully achieve this by themselves.

According to Mark 10:21, Jesus looked at the aristocrat intently and felt empathy for him. The Greek verb rendered 'loved' denotes the unselfish, unconditional compassion of the Messiah. It seeks to reach out to others in need, even when the object seems unworthy of being loved. The editorial note in the second Synoptic Gospel shows how Jesus' love for all people was individualized in this situation. Out of compassion, the Saviour told the young man something he did not want to hear, namely, to sell all he owned—which included his land, houses, and livestock—and give the proceeds to the destitute (Luke 18:22). Jesus assured the official he would have riches in 'heaven'. By doing this, he would demonstrate that earthly wealth no longer prevented him from exclusively following the Redeemer.

The Greek verb rendered 'lack' (v. 22) pointed to an area of the enquirer's spiritual life that remained deficient. Jesus drew attention to this when, according to Matthew 19:21, he addressed the aspiring leader's desire to be 'perfect'. The latter renders an adjective that also can be translated 'mature' or 'full grown'. In this context, it refers to the complete absence of deficiency in any area of one's spiritual life. As it turns out, this was not the case with the rich young ruler, for he was unduly attached to his material belongings, a shortcoming against which the Hebrew sacred writings warned.

In Jesus' day, his Jewish peers felt that a person's lot in life was a measure of God's approval. If people were wealthy, it allegedly was a

sign that God was on their side. In contrast, if people lived in poverty, it reputedly meant that they had sinned and were suffering God's judgment. Jews living in that era also measured people by their role in society. Those most respected were the religious leaders, such as the Pharisees and priests, along with the ruling classes. Affluent laypersons and the working middle class were also respected, but they were lower in the social order and tended to look up to the Pharisees and other religious leaders. As France (2002:399) observes, the Saviour's remarks were not just an 'expression' of his 'attitude toward wealth', but also 'part of a broader critique of conventional human values'.

Luke 18:23 indicates that Jesus had touched the enquirer's heart, and he was devastated. The official felt extremely 'sad', in which the underlying Greek adjective points to the presence of grief, distress, or anguish. Mark 10:22 uses the idiomatic expression rendered '[his] face fell'. This translates a verb that metaphorically can refer to the sky being covered with dark clouds. In the case of the aristocrat, he became gloomy and went away dejected, for he did not want to part with his substantial temporal possessions to receive the treasures of heaven. Jesus never specifically stated the one item or attribute the young man lacked. Nonetheless, as soon as Jesus instructed the ruler to sell whatever he owned, the one shortcoming took control of his heart and dictated his response. He chose his belongings over everlasting life.

Jesus' directive to sell everything pointed to the commandments in the Decalogue that he did not mention, namely, those requiring that God be first. From this, as Talbert (2002:202) concludes, the official was an 'idolater' in which material 'wealth' was the false deity he venerated. It is worth stressing that Jesus' directive for the aristocrat to sell his possessions was not a command that God dictated to everyone. That said, believers should be willing to relinquish whatever distracts them

from wholeheartedly following Jesus. Ultimately, giving to the poor does not save anyone; however, with respect to the ruler, his riches were a barrier between himself and God.

As the official began to leave, Jesus shifted his attention to his disciples. Compared to Matthew and Luke, Mark's Gospel provides more details about the emotional aspects of the exchange that unfolded between the Saviour and his followers. To begin, as he looked at them, he noted that it was difficult for the wealthy to 'enter' (Mark 10:23) the divine 'kingdom' and for that reason submit to God's rule. This statement astounded and possibly alarmed the Twelve (v. 24). Their response, though, did not stop Jesus from reiterating his declaration. Next, Jesus clarified that it was 'easier' (Luke 18:25) for a 'camel' to pass through a sewing needle's 'eye' than for those who amassed lots of possessions to gain entrance into heaven.

In the first century AD, the hole in a needle was possibly the smallest opening imaginable for Palestine's residents. Also, camels were regarded as the largest and most common domesticated beasts of burden. According to an old tradition, Jesus' word picture referred to a low gate in the wall of Jerusalem. This gate, which was for those who arrived after the main gates had been shut for the night, was called 'the eye of the needle'. People could get through easily, but camels could crawl through only with great difficulty—on their knees—and only if their cargo was unloaded.

According to this line of reasoning, Jesus' point was that the wealthy could enter the kingdom only if they got down on their knees (in other words, humbled themselves) and unloaded their possessions. While in some ways the preceding tradition may seem attractive, no reliable evidence exists that there ever was a gate called the 'eye of the needle'. It seems more consistent, then, with Jesus' style of teaching and his use

of humour and exaggeration to conclude that he meant a literal camel and needle. In brief, he was talking about an impossibility, not a difficulty. The corollary is that only God could save a human being.

Luke 18:26 does not record the emotions Jesus' disciples felt at this moment. Matthew 19:25 states that the Saviour's remark caused the Twelve to be 'greatly astonished'; in comparison, Mark 10:26 reports they were 'even more amazed'. Two different Greek adverbs are used in each passage, though they utilize the same verb. Also, while the adverbs concern the same sort of emotional response, the term used in Mark 10:26 points to an intensification of the disciples' initial reaction recorded in verse 24. To be explicit, in the wake of their surprise and shock they nearly lost their mental composure.

The dismay of the Twelve indicates they accepted the common thinking of their peers regarding the presence of wealth as an ironclad affirmation of God's special favour. Jesus, of course, rejected this mistaken notion. His followers were so stunned that they wondered how anyone could be 'saved' (Luke 18:26). This renders a Greek verb, which in this context, refers to deliverance from the penalties of divine judgment. Evidently, the Twelve agreed with the religious leaders, who taught that those who had many material possessions were most favoured by God. If, therefore, the rich could not enter heaven, how could the poor ever hope to do so?

Next, Jesus gave the answer that his provocative statement had anticipated. Entering heaven was 'impossible' (v. 27) for people to merit, but all things were 'possible' for God to do in his grace. Put another way, while no one (not even the wealthy) could earn eternal life through the scrupulous observance of the Mosaic Law, the Father gave salvation freely to those who believed in the Son. Admittedly, while human sinfulness made it impossible for fallen people to become

regenerate on their own, the rich had temptations to sin unique to them; yet, even then God could achieve the impossible, namely, change any human heart.

It seems the Twelve operated on the basis of payment and reward. Peter, at least, reflected this debit-and-credit mindset when he reminded the Saviour (perhaps with an attitude of smugness) that the entire group had abandoned everything to become his disciples (Luke 18:28). Evidently, Peter and the rest of the eleven thought they deserved more recognition than others for the sacrifices they had made to accompany Jesus. Marshall (1978:688) articulates the 'unspoken thought' with the question, 'What shall we get in return for our self-sacrifice?' In this exchange, the Messiah decided not to challenge how genuinely unselfish the Twelve had been up to this point; instead, Jesus affirmed their commitment, though it was imperfect.

'Truly' (v. 29) renders the Greek emphatic particle amēn, which is Hebrew in origin and points to the dependability and certitude of a statement. In this case, the Father would not overlook any sacrifice his spiritual children made for the sake of his Son. A comparison of the three Synoptic Gospels provides a fuller understanding of what Jesus promised. In Matthew 19:28, he directed the attention of his disciples to the messianic age, when the entire creation would be renewed. At that time, Jesus would reign from his 'glorious throne'. Moreover, the Twelve would be seated on their respective 'thrones' and be given authority to make judicial decisions concerning Israel's 'twelve tribes'. One option is to take Jesus' statement literally; a second possibility is that he was speaking figuratively.

Mark 10:29–30 records Jesus' acknowledgement that his disciples had given up all sorts of financial claims and inheritance rights in connection with their families and ancestral estates. They did so on

account of the Son and his plan of redemption, which involved both the ‘gospel’ (Mark 10:29) and the ‘kingdom of God’ (Luke 18:29). Nolland (1993a:891) opines that from an eternal perspective, the priorities of the Creator ‘transcend even the most sacred and binding of human loyalties’.

The Saviour reassured his followers that in the ‘present age’ (v. 30), he would shower them with innumerable spiritual blessings. Their generous reward also included becoming part of the worldwide body of Christ, along with its numerous members and the possibility of being maltreated for one’s faith. Though believers may suffer for their devotion to the Messiah, they were assured that the divine kingdom belonged to them. Furthermore, at the consummation of history, they would become heirs of ‘eternal life’. The implication is that the gospel, eternal life, the kingdom of God, and salvation were all linked to faith in the Messiah and demonstrated by an unmitigated resolve to be his disciple.

3. A Descriptive Analysis of Luke 19:1–10

As noted in the previous section, Jesus spent the months before his crucifixion in Perea. Except for his return to restore Lazarus to life, Jesus remained out of the Jerusalem area during this time until his triumphal entry. In this regard, Luke 18:31–34 provides a useful literary and theological context to the Saviour’s encounter with Zacchaeus and the emphasis in 19:10 on Jesus’ redemptive mission to ‘seek and save’ those who were spiritually ‘lost’. As Jesus and his disciples travelled toward Jerusalem, he stopped to warn them about what would happen to him in the city. An examination of the third Synoptic Gospel indicates this was one of several warnings Jesus gave his disciples regarding his upcoming death.

Readers can only imagine the solemnity of the moment as Jesus gathered the Twelve around him (18:31). Next, Jesus detailed the harsh treatment that awaited him, such as mocking, insults, and flogging (v. 32). In some instances, the scourge used for the mocking was enough to cause death. Jesus did not specifically mention the cruel and horrible crucifixion, but he did imply it by describing all the events that typically led up to it. For the first time, Jesus also identified his executioners as Gentiles and foretold his resurrection on the third day. In making these declarations, Jesus sought to prepare his followers for the worst, assure them that all the upcoming events followed the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, and affirm to them that he would triumph over the grave (v. 33).

It is not difficult to picture the growing sense of alarm welling up in Jesus' disciples. They heard his words, but they failed to comprehend their meaning until after the incidents had occurred (v. 34). The Twelve could not imagine such horrible events happening to Jesus, particularly how, as Bock (1996:1499) indicates, Jesus' 'death could fit into the divine plan'. Perhaps they thought this was another of Jesus' paradoxical sayings, which they would later figure out; or perhaps Luke indicated that the meaning of Jesus' words was concealed from his followers in the same way that his identity was veiled from the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Furthermore, it is difficult to know exactly how the Twelve perceived Jesus as the Messiah and how that impacted their grasp of unfolding events. Acts 1:6 indicates Jesus' followers were caught up in the popular idea that the Messiah would throw off pagan rule and establish a Jewish kingdom. Consequently, the notion of a suffering Redeemer was foreign to the disciples, as it was to many of their Jewish peers in that day. They revelled in the prophecies from the Psalms, Daniel, and

elsewhere that foretold a conquering Messiah-Monarch; yet, they overlooked those oracles—especially from Isaiah—that also spoke about the Redeemer as a Suffering Servant.

For the preceding reasons, when Jesus spoke about his crucifixion, the Twelve could not comprehend such a concept and perhaps instead looked for some hidden meaning in Jesus' words. It was not until after his crucifixion and resurrection were complete that the disciples looked back and fully realized that Jesus had foretold everything that would happen. Paradoxically, the chief priests and Pharisees recognised Jesus' claim that he would rise again and requested that a guard be posted at his tomb; but the events took his followers by surprise.

The three Synoptic Gospels recount an episode in which Jesus, while on the outskirts of Jericho, encountered two blind beggars, one of whom Mark 10:46 identifies as 'Bartimaeus'. Evidently, as Calvin (2009:367–8) suggests, Bartimaeus was the more vocal of the two in pleading with Jesus to restore their sight. Some in the throng of pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to observe the Passover festival attempted to silence the beggars' pleas for 'mercy' (Luke 10:38). Jesus, however, stopped and directed that the pair be brought to him. Then, Jesus, in response to their entreaty, placed his hands on their eyes and enabled them to instantly receive their sight. Mark 10:52 indicates that the bold request put forward by Bartimaeus was prompted by his belief that Jesus could restore his sight. The Messiah not only affirmed this truth, but also declared that spiritual wellness had come to Bartimaeus (along with the other unnamed beggar).

Luke 19:1 notes that once Jesus entered Jericho, he intended to progressively make his way through the town. As clarified by Strauss (2002:462), there were 'two Jerichos' in the first century AD One was the 'uninhabited city' showcased in the Hebrew sacred writings, while

the second was the a ‘new city’ built by Herod the Great and situated approximately a ‘mile to the south’. One possibility (albeit disputed) is that in the episode under consideration, the Messiah and his followers were making their way from the ‘old Jericho’ to the ‘new Jericho’.

Jericho is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world and the first population centre the Israelites conquered under Joshua’s command. It is in a wide plain of the lower Jordan river valley at the foot of the ascent of the Judean mountains. Jericho is about eight miles northwest of the spot where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea and about five miles west of the Jordan. The combination of rich soil, water from seasonal rains, and constant sunshine made Jericho an attractive place for settlement.

After Jesus entered Jericho, he met a rich and influential tax collector named Zacchaeus (v. 2). Even though his name literally meant ‘pure’ or ‘innocent’, most likely he acquired his wealth over the years through fraudulent means. In Jesus’ day, publicans were agents or contract workers who collected tariffs and tolls in designated areas. Tax collectors were usually Romans; yet, as in the case of Zacchaeus, some of them were Jewish. Because of the opportunity to become wealthy, tax collectors paid the Romans for the opportunity to collect tariffs and tolls.

Under the Roman system, all males over the age of 14 and all females over 12 were subject to a poll tax. There was also a land tax, as well as several indirect taxes on imports and exports, and even taxes on common items such as salt. Farmers who tried to move their goods outside of their own territory were hit with road tolls that ate up most of their profits. Many transported goods, including slaves, were also subject to taxation. To make a profit, publicans would charge several times more than what the Roman government required. The desire for

personal gain would invariably lead to the inflation of what was charged. Each person involved in the collection process would pocket some of the excess money being amassed.

The Jews held their fellow citizens who were tax collectors in disdain because they served as agents of the despised Roman government. Also, everyone could see how the publicans became rich at the expense of their own people. Furthermore, Jewish tax collectors were considered ceremonially impure, since they had frequent contact with Gentiles. Because Jericho was on a major trade route and a centre for commerce, there were plenty of opportunities for a leading publican such as Zacchaeus to become rich. He probably employed and supervised local Jews to do the actual task of gouging others. These individuals would know the ways the local people tried to avoid taxation. For these reasons, it is likely Zacchaeus was despised by the Jewish residents in Jericho.

Perhaps on the day Jesus arrived, Zacchaeus was walking along the main thoroughfare or heading toward his customs station when he heard the commotion of the crowd. It remains unclear, though, why Zacchaeus was so eager to catch a glimpse of Jesus (Luke 19:3). Despite the tax collector's repeated efforts, his short stature prevented him from looking over the heads of the entourage following the Saviour. Also, it is likely that no one would enable such a reviled publican to move to the front to obtain a better view. So, Zacchaeus decided to scale a 'sycamore-fig tree' (v. 4) growing beside the road. Since these trees had wide, low-hanging branches attached to shorter, wider trunks, they were relatively easy to climb.

Most likely, Zacchaeus intended to remain undetected in the tree. After all, a person with his considerable wealth and influence typically tried to avoid the embarrassment of being found in a such a conspicuous spot;

nonetheless, his encounter with the Saviour that day would prove to be a life-changing experience for Zacchaeus. Imagine the astonishment the publican must have felt when Jesus passed by, saw the tax collector, and deliberately made eye contact with him. With Zacchaeus being up above eye level in the tree, few within the throng would have bothered to notice him; but Jesus, through supernatural insight, already knew about Zacchaeus and summoned him.

Perhaps the tax collector's heart started to race when Jesus called Zacchaeus by name and told him not to waste any time descending from the branch where he sat (v. 5). Jesus literally said it was 'necessary' for him, as part of his God-given redemptive mission, to lodge that night in the home of Zacchaeus. Jesus' words implied that his acceptance and forgiveness of Zacchaeus was unconditional. The request must have come as a surprise to a person accustomed to the scorn of his fellow Jews. Likely, the crowds were just as stunned when they heard that a popular and highly regarded Jewish rabbi wanted to socialise with someone whom the locals considered to be a swindler and turncoat.

Most likely, Jesus wanted others to know that all people—even a loathed tax gatherer such as Zacchaeus—needed to hear the good news about the kingdom. After all, as stated in section 1.0, Jesus came to earth to redeem people like the publican. France (2013:298) explains that 'for Jesus, the work of salvation took precedence over social protocol'. Such observations notwithstanding, it remains unclear why Zacchaeus was thrilled to accept Jesus' request (v. 6). Despite the official's possible embarrassment, he quickly climbed down the tree and received Jesus as a guest in the publican's home. This episode is a wonderful illustration of what it means for the lost to open their hearts in repentance and faith to the Saviour.

Unlike the exuberance Zacchaeus felt, many in the crowd were displeased with Jesus' choice of whom to honour with his fellowship. In turn, the throng displayed their annoyance by grumbling among themselves (v. 7). At first, it may have been just a few irritated bystanders; but then, a chorus of discontent quickly emerged. The consensus was that Zacchaeus had violated the Mosaic Law and so was unworthy to be in Jesus' esteemed presence. The throng, however, failed to realise that Jesus came to earth to redeem sinners. Certainly Zacchaeus—along with everyone else in the crowd—fitted that description.

Judging from the intensity of the reaction of the bystanders to Jesus' decision, Zacchaeus must have been an extraordinarily dishonest tax collector. Though he was regarded a notorious transgressor of the Mosaic Law and worthy of condemnation, the official seemed increasingly eager to meet Jesus. Otherwise, why would such a wealthy, influential man as Zacchaeus risk the undignified action of climbing up a tree? Those blinded by pride could not see how God had prepared the heart of the publican to meet the perfect, sinless Messiah. So, even though the throngs were correct about Zacchaeus' reprehensible past, they failed to appreciate the grace-oriented nature of Jesus' salvific mission.

Zacchaeus had wronged many people, and the Mosaic Law required full restitution plus an additional one-fifth in circumstances in which money was acquired by fraud. Zacchaeus, however, went far beyond what the legal code mandated. Presumably, later that day, during a meal hosted by Zacchaeus at his domicile in honour of Jesus, the tax gatherer stood up in front of his guests and said that he would give half his wealth to the destitute. Additionally, if the publican had overcharged people on their taxes, he would give them back four times as much (v. 8). The law

required a fourfold restitution only when an animal was stolen and killed. If the animal was found alive, only twofold restitution was required.

A point of dispute centres around the best way to understand the assertions Zacchaeus made about himself in verse 8. Nolland (1993b:906) clarifies that this reading of the text 'involves taking the present tense verbs as iterative, rather than as futuristic'. One proponent is Fitzmyer (1985:1221), who thinks the tax collector was defending his status as a righteous person by calling attention to his established practice of treating others in an equitable and unselfish manner. According to this view, Zacchaeus sought to 'vindicate' himself in response to the overly biased accusations made by the 'grumbling crowd' (v. 7). In contrast, this essay sides with the interpretation, as summarized by Bovon (2013:598–9), that the publican made an 'ethical decision' to 'act charitably' toward, rather than defraud, others. This commitment was 'motivated and transformed' by his 'encounter with Jesus'. Indeed, the emphasis in the narrative is on someone who was 'lost' (v. 10) receiving by faith the 'salvation' (v. 9) the Redeemer freely offered.

The better interpretive option, then, is to understand Zacchaeus candidly evaluating the crimes he committed and acknowledging that he was as guilty as the lowest common robber. So, in contrast to the religious elite, Zacchaeus truly repented of his sins. Jesus took note of the decision Zacchaeus made. The Saviour declared that this penitent tax collector had shown by his pledge to be generous and make restitution to the poor that he was genuinely saved. He was a true reborn descendant of Abraham and child of the covenant promise (v. 9). Scripture reveals that Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of all who trusted in the Lord for redemption. Jesus earlier declared that it was

difficult for those awash in riches to be redeemed; yet, the transformation in the attitude, priorities, and behaviour of Zacchaeus shows that it is not impossible. Ironically, the tax collector stood in sharp contrast to the rich young ruler.

The residents of Jericho had criticized Jesus for associating with Zacchaeus, whom they also slandered and rejected. In verse 10, however, the Saviour declared that he had come to earth to 'seek' (like a shepherd) and 'save' (or rescue) those who were 'lost'. In referring to himself as the 'Son of Man,' Jesus drew attention to his unique, authoritative status as the suffering Servant and Messiah. This verse is a fitting summary concerning why Jesus left the glories of heaven. In brief, his mission was not to please himself; instead, his objective was to redeem sinners from divine judgment.

4. A Comparison and Analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10

Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10 spotlight Jesus' encounter with two wealthy, prominent individuals. Fitzmyer (1985:1222) considers Zacchaeus to be a 'foil' to the rich young ruler. In keeping with the observations put forward by various scholars, it is worthwhile to note that the latter person was an unnamed, respected leader and Torah-observant member of his ethnic Jewish community. The other individual was also someone of influence named Zacchaeus; however, his fellow Jews disdained him for allegedly violating the edicts in the Mosaic Law involving ceremonial purity. Even more objectionable was his perceived collaboration with the hated Roman overlords. While the Synoptic Gospels do not disclose the origin of the rich young ruler's wealth, it is likely that the publican amassed his fortune by repeatedly gouging his Jewish peers living in Jericho and its environs.

Both aspirants were aware of their deep spiritual need. For the anonymous individual showcased in 18:18–30, the realization gradually emerged over a period of time. Admittedly, he did everything he could to heed the Decalogue, along with all the other commandments in the Pentateuch; yet, despite his sustained, compulsive efforts, he sensed that something was lacking in his quest to secure God's favour. This awareness prompted the official to ask what task he had overlooked to obtain everlasting life. For the person in the limelight in 19:1–10, the recognition of his spiritual need seems to have arisen suddenly. The narrative leaves the impression that when Zacchaeus learned about Jesus' arrival, it immediately triggered something within the tax collector. This impelled him to go out of his way—even to the point of risking embarrassment—to catch an exclusive glimpse of the Saviour.

On one level, Jesus engaged both wealthy individuals in a civil and candid manner. On another level, the Saviour tailored his interaction to reflect the specific needs of each person. With respect to the rich young ruler, Jesus challenged the nature of the aristocrat's lead-in question, took his assertion of Torah observance at face value, and pinpointed the foremost area he still needed to address. The result of the exchange is that despite the official's claim of devotion to God, he refused to abandon his substantial financial holdings to benefit the impoverished. He demonstrated by his response that he was an idolater, in which he sacrificed everything—including his relationship with the Creator—on the altar of hoarding material wealth.

Concerning the detested publican, he made no pretence about the ethical nature of his personal and professional existence. Neither did he let his riches or his notoriety prevent him from stealing a quick look at Jesus. For his part, the Saviour intentionally reached out to Zacchaeus in an unconditional, welcoming manner. In turn, the tax collector

enthusiastically received Jesus into the publican's home as his guest. Neither he nor the Saviour were deterred by the grumbling that ensued among the onlookers over the fact that Jesus chose to befriend a loathed malefactor. Indeed, Zacchaeus was so transformed by Jesus' redemptive presence that the tax collector exceeded what was required in the Mosaic Law to make restitution to those whom he had defrauded over the years. He demonstrated by his actions that he was willing to sacrifice his material wealth on the altar of becoming a genuine follower of Jesus.

Within the context of the first century AD, peers of the rich young ruler would have regarded him as being a leading member of society with an impeccable reputation. In contrast, the affluent publican would be seen as a swindler who had long ago lost his moral compass. Similarly, bystanders—including Jesus' disciples—viewed the Torah-observant aristocrat as enjoying God's favour; oppositely, spectators uniformly concluded that the publican was a transgressor who deserved God's wrath. The two narratives, though, portray radically different outcomes. On the one hand, it was the despised tax collector who experienced the Father's offer of salvation through his Son; on the other hand, it was the wealthy nobleman who failed to achieve his goal of inheriting eternal life. Whereas he fell short in his attempt to enter God's kingdom, divine grace enabled Zacchaeus to became a reborn child of Abraham.

According to Matthew 19:30 and Mark 10:31, Jesus declared that in the end times, the status and prestige savoured by the elite would be upended. The profound irony is that many who were now regarded as being the greatest would one day be viewed as the least important. Oppositely, those who appeared to be the least important now would one day be the greatest. The inference is that that the rich, far from being shining examples of piety, were often the worst of sinners. In

contrast, many of the poor and despised were in fact the most faithful servants of God. When the Lord established full and final justice at the terminus of the age, realities, not appearances, would form the basis of his judgment.

5. Conclusion

This journal article undertakes a comparison and analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10. There are at least three reasons for doing so: (1) a paucity of scholarship exists exploring in depth the interrelationship between these two texts; (2) both passages showcase two contrasting responses to the Saviour, one characterized by unbelief and the other by belief; and, (3) the importance of believing in the Saviour receives elucidation. The major claim is that a consideration of each narrative advances a key theme of the third Synoptic Gospel, namely, that Jesus, the divine-human Son, came to earth to unshackle those enslaved to sin and restore them in their relationship with God.

The first section broaches the need for the study undertaken in the essay, including the overview reiterated in the preceding paragraph. General background information is provided concerning the Gospel of Luke. One supposition advanced is the possibility that the author was a freed physician-slave (whether Gentile or Jew) whom a government official named Theophilus sponsored to research and write the third Synoptic Gospel. In keeping with this premise, the author's own experiences of existing on the margins of society could explain the universal perspective found throughout his treatise.

That inclusive mindset can be seen in the central theme of Luke's Gospel, which is that the Father offers salvation to the lost, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, when they trust in

the Son. The preceding truth notwithstanding, only a minority of individuals come to the Saviour in repentance and faith. Also, it is not necessarily those with prominence and power in society who turn to the Messiah for redemption. The latter observation is brought into sharp relief in the descriptive analyses appearing in sections 2 and 3, respectively. The former deals with Luke 18:18–30, while the latter concerns 19:1–10.

When these two texts are compared and analysed, it is discovered that a nameless, rich, young ruler expressed a keen desire to do anything necessary to gain possession of 'eternal life' (18:18); yet, paradoxically, he refused to abandon his vast material wealth as a prelude to obtaining his desire (v. 23). In contrast, a despised, high-ranking publican identified as Zacchaeus willingly relinquished his money to follow Jesus (19:8). Surprisingly, the person who enjoyed the respect and admiration of his peers scorned the most precious gift in the entire cosmos—an intimate relationship with the Creator. Just as shocking is the fact that someone whom others in society loathed became a beloved child in God's spiritual family.

For ministers of the gospel, the significance of the insights arising from the preceding comparison and analysis cannot be overstated. To take this assessment further, the tax collector evidently realized that there was nothing he could do on his own to merit eternal life. The encounter Zacchaeus had with Jesus resulted in the publican abandoning his erstwhile fraudulent ways (which points to repentance) and receiving the 'salvation' (v. 10) Jesus freely offered (indicating the presence of regenerative faith). Oppositely, the Torah-observant aristocrat, regardless of how hard he tried, fell short in his efforts to gain entrance to God's kingdom. Tragically, the young man's idolatrous lust for

material wealth sabotaged him from seeing his deepest spiritual need satisfied.

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Review of Mann, Atonement for a Sinless Society (2nd ed.)

Robert D. Falconer[1]

Mann A 2015. *Atonement for a Sinless Society* (2nd ed.). Eugene: Cascade Books.

1. Introduction to the Author

Alan Mann works in education, supporting children with complex special educational needs. He is a graduate of The London School of Theology (LST) where he studied for a Bachelor of Theology and a postgraduate course in Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation. Mann has worked for a number of UK-based Christian leaders and organisations, and has contributed to numerous books, magazines and online publications. For several years he served as an Open Learning Tutor for LST, specialising in Christianity in Contemporary Culture and Theology of the Poor. He lives in the UK with his family. In addition to *Atonement for a Sinless Society,* Mann has authored the following books: *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2004, co-authored with Steve Chalke), *A Permanent Becoming: A Contemporary Look at the Fruit of*

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

the Spirit (2008), and *Different Eyes: The Art of Living Beautifully* (2010, co-authored with Steve Chalke)[2].

2. The Purpose of the Book

In very simple terms, Mann's book, *Atonement for a Sinless Society*, offers to do just that, to show how the atoning work of Christ might be applied to such a society that does not acknowledge sin. That is, how is the atonement relevant for a society where the concept of sin is irrelevant, at least in traditional Christian terms?

Mann likens it to speaking a foreign language. When the story of the Cross of Christ is told, often it is told in a 'foreign cultural language' that is difficult for others to understand and accept, not because the cross of Christ is irrelevant, but because language itself is irrelevant. The book encourages us not to persist in thinking of the atonement in narrow terms by presenting its significance in out-dated expressions.

It is not that the language we used to speak of the atonement was unfruitful or incomprehensible, but rather that society has changed in such a way that if we continue to use the same language, for the majority of people the atonement will be confusing, unpalatable and loathsome. Therefore, we should not be overconfident that we have pinned down the meaning of the atonement and how we ought to express it.

Mann uses the example of Pentecost to illustrate the purpose of his book. People were surprised by the message of Jesus being preached by the disciples in their own language at Pentecost. Jesus' disciples had a captive audience to proclaim the gospel to, because their audiences

[2] Author profile provided by Alan Mann.

were able to understand the message. Similarly, Christians today need to surprise the people of this age by telling them the story of the atonement in their own language. In so doing we are able to capture the attention of the people of our day, communicating the atonement account with deep meaning and significance that is relevant for their own postmodern lives.

It is our responsibility to read the atonement in light of the context in which we find ourselves, in order that we may communicate the gospel of Christ effectively and profoundly. In order to do this, we need to recognise the concerns of our time, as well as the prevailing philosophical and the cultural contexts in order that we may engage our society, a society that for the most part considers itself as 'sinless'. As Christians we are called to discover new expressions of our faith, and while this may be risky, it is one that is creative and exciting. Mann encourages his readers to speak meaningfully of the atonement so that it may be heard and understood by such a 'sinless society', and while it is in the end God who reconciles us to himself, we have an important part to play in communicating the gospel story successfully to our contemporaries.

3. Evaluation

I read the first edition of *Atonement for a 'sinless' society: engaging with an emerging culture* (1st ed.; 2005) 7 years ago and used it as a foundation for my doctoral dissertation (Mann makes mention of my work, along with others, on the first page of his second edition). I remember being more impacted by the first edition than I was by the second. With that said, I still find much value in many of the insights and social commentary presented in this book. Some of these insights are new and fresh. Without a doubt the book is worth a read. It demands

serious consideration and by nature calls for engagement. The arguments in the book are to be taken seriously, especially in terms of how the material might be applied effectively as we proclaim the atoning work of Christ and his kingdom. The book is no doubt challenging. Notwithstanding, if I am to be entirely honest, I find that there is enough material in the book to make a conservative evangelical like myself feel somewhat uneasy. Whether this is a good thing, I am unsure. It does, however, help to put this into perspective by considering its strengths and weaknesses.

3.1. Strengths

Perhaps the greatest strength in the book is the desire by the author to communicate the atonement in such terms that 'surprise' people from a 'sinless society' in a language that they understand and that makes sense to them. My own research has sought to do something somewhat similar, communicating the atonement in the context of African metaphysics, in an effort to show how the atonement may be meaningful to African people.

One might imagine that the reader, if he is not careful, too quickly concludes that the author himself wishes to disregard the notion of sin. Yet, it needs to be clear that the question Mann is asking is, 'what does a 'sinless society' substitute for sin and how does the atonement address those concerns?' Mann argues that, 'shame is a very real narrative, that is often self-generating, and self-originating, rather than a product of institutionally-driven perceptions'. We all know how the atoning work of Christ addresses the traditional issue of sin, but how does it address the question of shame, especially for a culture that does not acknowledge personal sin? Mann believes that sin has been reduced solely to wrongful actions and that this is unhelpful, when in fact sin may have far greater meaning for our time if it is described as 'an

absence of mutual, intimate, unpolluted relating that ultimately leads human beings into a lack of self-coherence'. My understanding is that Mann is not disregarding the traditional Christian concept of sin, but that there is more to consider. The book continues in significant detail and discourse on this line of thought. And while I *do* consider this a strength, it's obviously not immune to criticism. Mann's thoughts are not as clear-cut or as black and white as we might like them to be, and this is what makes the book interesting and thought-provoking.

While much of the book is inward looking, I appreciated the way in which Mann sought to demonstrate how, through the atoning work of Christ, we are no longer the victims who have a need to be empowered by shame, because our identity is not found in our own narrative, but in the narrative of our Creator (and may I add, our Saviour). In our Creator's narration, we are freed 'from the shame that has haunted us, free from the fear of failing our ideal-self'. This concept was extended into his use of Jesus' own narrative, namely his Passion, where he highlights some of Jesus' own struggles, as well as other gospel narratives to develop his argument. His analysis of Judas' narrative of shame and Peter's narrative of shame and denial in contrast to Jesus' narrative is really quite striking. This, Mann does rather powerfully and convincingly.

Apparently, in today's 'sinless society' it is the sinners who are the victims. But Mann shows us the power of this 'victimisation' in the New Testament narrative, whereby Jesus experiences severe and genuine victimisation and becomes the ultimate victim, suffering innocently at the hands of the powerful religious and political structures. As postmodern readers, those who see themselves as victims, read the Passion narrative, they are 'dumbfounded—not by God's holiness, but

by his status as the ultimate victim. And so all the other victims wait to be judged by God for, as everyone knows, the ultimate victim wins'.

Consequently, having read quite an exhaustive amount of material on the atonement, I still find Mann's *Atonement in a Sinless Society* an informative read for our postmodern society, as well as for other societies that substitute sin for shame. But I would supplement his book with Martin Luther's theology on the Atonement[3], Scot McKnight's, *A Community Called Atonement,* Hans Boersma's, *Violence, hospitality and the cross: reappropriating the atonement tradition,* and most recently, Fleming Rutledge's book, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ.* Altogether I think these would make a holistic balanced approach for presenting the atonement in a 'sinless' and postmodern society.

3.2. Weaknesses

Despite the strengths of this book, there are weaknesses, but many of these weaknesses, I acknowledge, may well come from my own conservative Evangelical background, and so they may not necessarily be as objective as I might like.

To begin with, Mann's use of *at-one-ment* is clichéd. Not only is it overused in 'pop theology', the atonement is ironically much more than *at-one-ment* and all that that envisions. But with that said, I do appreciate the theme of reconciliation in Mann's work.

I also disliked Mann's use of 'the Other', finding it vague and unnecessary, when God, or Jesus might have been used. To give him

[3] cf. Luther's Commentary on Galatians, and his Large Catechism and Small Catechism.

credit, while 'the Other' is used throughout the book, God and Jesus are used in the book appropriately, but somewhat sparingly. I never quite understood the need to employ the expression 'the Other' in the context of Mann's book.

Mann's effort to understand and engage with a 'sinless society' and to offer a theology of atonement is indeed honourable, but I wonder how one might creatively introduce sin in relationship to the Christian God *in* a 'sinless society'. Furthermore, while much of what is written in the book can be observed in our society, whether it be in the books we read, television, media or social media, one wonders how many people from the so called 'sinless society' relate to how their internal lives are portrayed in this book. Would they describe themselves similarly? I am unsure, but it is a nagging question.

Stories and individual narratives are emphasised in the book. Mann suggests that expressions of stories and narrative might act as one kind of repentance. While the idea is of course fascinating and perhaps even helpful to some extent, it seems to have three problems: (1) Repentance is more than telling one's own story, though that is a start; it is also about a change of behaviour. (2) People do not seem to engage with stories as much as they once did (asides from film, sitcoms and the odd novel they might read), and (3) people are generally not interested in each other's stories, especially if they are unfortunate. Everyone simply gets on with their own story.

On the one hand Mann appears to call our attention to shame as the substitute to sin in a 'sinless society', which may well be true, but then he *also* highlights shame in the narrative of scripture. I wonder whether humanity from the very start has suffered from a shame-filled conscience (Adam and Eve) *along* with their awareness of sin against an Almighty God. Perhaps the difference is that the traditional

awareness of sin is absent from today's modern society, as Mann points out. But I don't think a shame-based society is particularly modern, as Mann seems to suggest. The difference, I think, is that the traditional 'sin' aspect is missing. Mann observes,

> The sinless self is *sinned against*, not the sinner. They are the helpless victims of social structures, institutions, and corporate bodies. It is with these perpetrators that responsibility lies, not with the "innocent victims" of their distorted practices. Obligations, and responsibilities lie fairly, and squarely with institutions in the story the sinless self tells. Therefore, there are no duties they have failed to fulfill, no forbidden acts about which they should feel guilty, no 'sins' that need confessing.

In light of this, Mann argues that it is of the utmost importance for Christian communities to rethink their liturgical practices that are more meaningful and relevant for such a 'sinless society'. He feels that 'it must be a liturgy that is recognizable to the self as one that carries something of their own story—or, at the very least, it must leave space so that their story can be told'. No doubt such a liturgy may be done well, but I fear it could too easily fall into therapeutic type liturgies, or the shallow liturgies of postmodern seeker-sensitive churches which already exist. Perhaps there is room for further reflection and experimentation for such liturgical practices.

Nevertheless, after reading the book, I am left wondering, surely whether we live in a 'sinless society' or not, all of us know the difference between right and wrong, and thus we are all aware of our own wrong doing, whether we are willing to call it out for what it is, is another matter.

4. Application

Despite the above weaknesses, *Atonement in a Sinless Society* certainly has much to offer in terms of Christian narrative and practice, by way of exciting and meaningful applications.

While I do not wish to diminish the substitutionary aspect of the atonement, and all its other important motifs, Mann's work might well prove to be a helpful guide for evangelism and mission in societies where sin is understood very differently from its traditional Christian counterpart. And while I am rather hesitant that preachers should omit the concept of a traditional understanding of sin, I do believe that issues of shame and how the atonement deals with this effectively could and should be included in preaching and Bible interpretation. Mann has already done some of the interpretation work for us. The same could be said for biblical counselling. I think there is much value in using some of Mann's ideas of shame, identity and personhood, especially in light of how these relate to the atoning work of Christ. As Christian parents, I believe it is important that our children are taught the traditional concept of sin (at least from a certain age), even *in* a 'sinless society', but with that said, I also believe that there is more than enough room to demonstrate how Jesus and his atoning death deals with our shame, making us whole persons reconciled to God (or the 'Other', as Mann puts it). I found Mann's theology very helpful here.

Perhaps I am most interested to see how Mann's theology and concepts might be adopted and interwoven into the arts, especially in creative writing, poetry, novels and the visual arts. I think of how N.D. Wilson's most recent film, *The River Thief* (2015) might have adopted some of these themes provocatively and wonderfully. As powerful and relevant I think penal substitution is, perhaps *Atonement in a Sinless Society*,

offers us new, fresh perspectives in which to think, and write meaningful narrative, and produce compelling cinemagraphy for our time.

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Editorial Policy

Positioning Statement

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.

Purpose

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 that are as clear and accessible as possible for the benefit of both specialist and non-specialist readers.

Standard

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.

Kinds of Articles

Conspectus publishes three kinds of theological research:

- *Scholarly essays* of 3000–10000 words on biblical, theological, or ministerial topics, which should demonstrate mastery of the current scholarship on the topic.
- *Book reviews* of 1000–5000 words reviewing publications in fields of interest to *Conspectus*. We favour detailed reviews that can offer students and pastors insight into the content, strengths, and limitations of the book.
- *Project reports* of 1000–4000 words reflecting the findings of theological research projects, including theses and dissertations.

Doctrinal Basis

In doctrine, the South African Theological Seminary is broadly evangelical. We believe in the inspiration of Scripture, the doctrine of

the Trinity, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the sinfulness of man, the need for salvation through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through believers, and the centrality of the local church to the mission of God. SATS stands on the triune doctrinal foundation—Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-led. *Conspectus* reinforces these three core theological tenets by means of scholarly research that deliberates their meaning and application for the modern church.

Submitting an Article

The author of an article that is submitted for review is required to submit the names and contact details of three potential referees. The entire review process is completely anonymous from the perspective of both the reviewers and authors.

The Review Process

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.

The senior editor advances the submission to two referees with appropriate expertise on the particular topic. The editor removes the name of the author from the submission. The potential reviewer receives an electronic copy of the submission, together with a Conspectus Review Form, which contains three sections: (a) the review

criteria, (b) the recommendation, (c) developmental feedback (i.e. comments).

Each reviewer is required to make a recommendation, which must be one of the following four options: (a) publish without changes, (b) publish with minor changes, (c) publish with major changes, and (d) do not publish. The reviewer is also expected to provide qualitative comment on aspects of the article that he/she believes could be improved.

The review process is developmental in nature; reviewers provide in-depth assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of the article. If they recommend 'publish with minor changes' or 'publish with major changes', they are expected to explain the perceived deficiencies and offer possible remedies.

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.

Before publication, the author receives a proof copy of the article in PDF format for final inspection and approval.

Closing dates for submissions:

- 28/29th of February for the March issue
- 31st of August for the September issue