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SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

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Editorial

It is with great pride and joy that the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) presents you with our very first publication of the SATS PhD Compendium (volume 1, 2020). The Compendium is a collection of doctoral thesis summary articles written by all our English and French PhD Alumni.

This truly is a celebration of all those who completed their PhD in 2019 and 2020, but it is also a wonderful milestone for SATS on our 25th anniversary. And so, we celebrate our journey from humble beginnings to today where we can publish 22 doctoral summaries. We are immensely grateful for God's guiding hand in SATS's doctoral program.

I would like to personally thank all those who contributed to the publication, namely, Dr Cornelia van Deventer, who got the project started, Lindsey Moyo, who did the proofreading of the manuscript—along with others who proofread some of the articles in the earlier stages of the project—and Marno Kirstein, who did a superb job in typesetting the document. I also thank all our doctoral alumni of 2019 and 2020 who submitted their articles; together they have produced a magnificent publication. Lastly, I wish to thank Jesus for his faithfulness towards SATS and towards every student who has completed their PhD. Jesus, we are mindful that you never wrote a document for publication, or pursued a formal education, and yet

you taught us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:25b; ESV). Help all of us to live that out in earnest in all we say and do.

Dr Robert Falconer

SATS Coordinator of MTh & PhD Programs

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The Influence of Akan Traditional Religious Conceptions on the Reception of Hamartiology of First John by a Selection of Charismatic Preachers of Ghana

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Abstract

The general Christian tradition in Ghana has historically attracted local and cultural views to itself that have enriched its universal nature and strengthened it to address different doctrines in different cultural and religious contexts. This has, however, led to misconceptions in the interpretation of some Christian doctrines, such as the doctrine of sin described in 1 John. This study employs a tailored method for reception analysis of 1 John's hamartiology by a selection of Ghanaian charismatic preachers. It discovers that, both for better and for worse, Akan traditional religious concepts of sin influence the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by charismatic preachers in Ghana. This finding is in itself not surprising. However, the precise manner and extent to which the influences flow have immense implications for the communication of

the gospel in Ghana. The reception-analytical method developed from the philosophical framework of reception theory enables the study to establish that Akan traditional religious concepts create a horizon of expectations for Akan charismatic preachers in Ghana that influence their reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. From the comparison between the doctrine of sin in 1 John and the horizon of expectations of charismatic preachers in Ghana, it is apparent that, to a large extent, they have succeeded in contextualizing the Christian message. In the process, however, traditional Akan cosmology, both for better and for worse, influences their reception of the doctrine of sin seen in 1 John.

Keywords

Reception, Akan traditional religion, horizon of expectations, uses and gratification, charismatic hamartiology, 1 John

1. Introduction

Christian tradition in Ghana has attracted local and cultural views that have enriched its universal nature and strengthened it to address different doctrines of the Bible. This enrichment serves as the undercurrent for the stream of newer Pentecostal independent or charismatic churches. These churches possess intrinsic characteristics that are the product of cultural influences. This has sometimes led to a failure to adequately analyze, understand, and express some Christian doctrines, such as the doctrine of sin.

Charismatic churches in Ghana may be classified as part of the neo-Pentecostal movement or the ‘third wave’ of the Pentecostal Christian tradition. The ‘first wave’ being Pentecostalism, and the ‘second wave’ the evangelical charismatic movement. A distinctive feature of charismatic

churches in Ghana is that they keenly appropriate electronic media in order to be accessible (Meyer 2004, 466). Live church services are streamed nationally and across the world through radio, television, and online platforms. For example, during the 'Greater Works Conference' of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) in 2018, the five-day conference was streamed on Facebook Live and on MyJoyOnline platforms. Daily devotional messages are also posted on WhatsApp platforms. Accordingly, charismatic churches are extremely influential in the national consciousness. Music is often given a prominent role in their liturgy. Hackett (1998, 263) puts forth that music is one of the most important means by which charismatic churches in Ghana have constructed their identity. Many commercial gospel music performers are deeply rooted in charismatic churches and their music ministries have become part of the charismatic church 'brand' (Carl 2015, 48). For example, gospel-music singer Gifty Osei was married to Prophet Prince Elisha Osei, a charismatic preacher and the head pastor of Blessed Generation Chapel International in Tema. Prophet Elisha Osei embodies the gifts of healing, teaching, and deliverance. The music videos of Florence Obinim, wife of Bishop Daniel Obinim of God's Way International Ministries occupy much of the airtime on the church's television channel, OB TV (Carl 2015, 48).

Charismatic churches in Ghana have thus become very influential. They own universities and pre-tertiary schools. ICGC owns Central University, a prominent private tertiary institution in Ghana with a student population of over six thousand. The General Overseer of ICGC, Dr Mensah Otabil, is the chancellor of Central University. Another prominent charismatic church in Ghana is the Christian Action Faith Church (CAFC). The church owns Dominion University College and the leader of CAFC, Archbishop Duncan-Williams, is the chancellor. Charismatic churches in

Ghana attract many people from all walks of life to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many prominent politicians in Ghana fellowship in these churches. For example, former Ghanaian president, John Mahama, who served from 2012 to 2017, is a member of an Assemblies of God church. Thus, any phenomenon influencing for their hermeneutics has wide-ranging implications for the gospel, the direction of the church, and, inevitably, world Christianity.

There are reasons to believe that charismatic churches in Ghana are influenced by traditional concepts. Akrong (2011, 32) points out how their soteriological assumptions and social context underpin their hermeneutical appropriations of Christian doctrines. Traditional notions are prominent and important in social identity in Ghana. This, however, creates the potential for syncretistic influences. For example, as in traditional religion, charismatic Christians tend to acknowledge that beliefs and practices inform every facet of human life. The prominent role that the concept of “the good life” plays as part of its soteriology is critical in this assessment (Quayesi-Amakye 2017, 112). In many of these churches, just as it is in Akan traditional religion (ATR), the realization of “the good life” features strongly as the goal of salvation (Quayesi-Amakye 2017, 116). Adherents, therefore, deploy the spiritual resources of Christianity to overcome the problems impeding their realization of “the good life.” In the process of these interactions, it appears that some charismatic preachers have become susceptible to influences from ATR. In another example, just as in traditional religion, many charismatic preachers and their followers perceive that setbacks are caused by evil spirits (Akrong 2011, 31). In broad terms, this study aims to establish the precise way such parallels influence the reception of particular biblical doctrines. Specifically, the investigation restricts itself to the hamartiology of I John, given the richness

and comprehensive nature of the doctrine in this letter. Thus, the question posed is: To what degree, for better or for worse, do ATR concepts of sin influence the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by charismatic preachers of Ghana? The hypothesis of the study is that the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by Ghanaian charismatic preachers has been adversely affected by beliefs and practices of Akan traditional, religious, and cultural concepts. This is argued using reception analysis. The choice of reception theory for this study is based on the presupposition that it enables the analysis of the link between the original hearers and future readers of 1 John. Despite its rich content on sin, there are no published studies in relation to the reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John by Ghanaian charismatic preachers. This makes this study important not just for shedding light on the hermeneutical processes of influential preachers of contemporary Christianity, but also for establishing the exact contours of the biblical doctrine itself. The study combines insights from hermeneutics, biblical theology, reception analysis, and contemporary Christian praxes. In some respects, this study takes up the challenge by Bediako to African scholars that they should seek to contextualize Christian theology in their current settings.

In the remaining sections of this article, we summarize the key features of the methodology employed, set out the exegesis on the doctrine of sin in 1 John, summarize the findings of the empirical investigation, and provide some reflections on their implications.

2. Summary of Reception Theory

Reception theory as a literary method describes how the reader creates meaning (Klint 2000, 88). Reception refers to the response a text provokes from the reader at different periods and places (Jauss 1982, 27). It considers

the effect of the reader's tradition and prejudices on the interpretation process. Different readers may understand a text differently (Lv and Ning 2013, 114). Jauss and Iser were the leading proponents of reception theory, and developed it in two different directions. Critics who employ reception theory in biblical studies draw heavily on Iser's text-centered method that gives much attention to the dialogue between the implied reader and the text. Jauss's focus, on the other hand, is on the varying historical reception of literary works (Klint 2000, 89). Iser puts forward the view that meaning is developed in the process of reading. He points out that meaning is not the outcome of a single aspect of text or reader (Lv and Ning 2013). It is through his/her proactive investigation in the reception process that meaning emerges (Lv and Ning 2013, 114–115). The point of convergence of the views of Iser and Jauss was their agreement that the reader's role was more important than the relation between author and text in the process of literary activity (Lv and Ning 2013, 115). Two reception-analytical methods employed in this study are the horizon of expectations and uses and gratifications.

2.1 Horizon of expectations

“Horizon of expectations” is the fulcrum of Jauss's interpretative theory. Gadamer (2004) affirms this concept by arguing that every experience has its own horizon of expectations. Experience is obtained from “anticipation or preconception to fulfilment or disappointment of anticipation” (Jauss 2005, 203–204; Parris 2009, 149). Knowledge within the horizon of disappointed expectations constitutes some things that can be experienced and open a new horizon. Jauss saw the theory of horizon of expectations as a hermeneutical foundation, and therefore developed a hermeneutical process for analyzing a text that had three stages: understanding,

interpretation, and application (Srouji-Shrajrawi 2013, 6). This process is useful for revealing the role played by the reader's prejudices and previous knowledge of the subject matter of a text. Experience and expectation constitute an important conceptual pair such that "no expectation exists without experience and no experience exists without expectation" (Parris 2009, 150). The fusion of the horizons may, however, give the erroneous impression that the reader is a passive participant. Jauss, therefore, used the term "mediation of horizons."

2.2 Uses and gratifications

"Uses and gratifications" is employed in communications theory to study the specific needs that attract and hold an audience to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs (Ruggiero 2000, 3). It is a "need seeking" theory of communications that points to the media's most important role as fulfilling the needs and motivations of the audience (Mehrad and Tajer 2016, 2). In textual analysis, uses and gratifications take the interpreter's motivations for reading a text as its vantage point for understanding the exposure and impact of the text (Ballard 2011). It is an important concept that this study integrates under reception theory. Certain individual needs do interact with personal values and the cultural environment to produce perceived problems and perceived solutions that constitute different motives for gratification behavior in the use of texts. The gratifications sought by the reader and preacher form the central concept in the theory and place the focus on the interpreter instead of the message, by asking, "What do people do with the text?" rather than "What do texts do to people?"

Two major pitfalls of reception theory as a literary study method should be noted at this juncture. The first hinges on readers' inability to

agree on a single, non-contradictory interpretation of a text and indicate that the meaning of a text is significantly affected by several factors at the point at which it is read. The second is that the reception of texts without the original cultural context can be “hair-raisingly ahistorical” (Eagleton 2003, 77). There is a degree of truth in the claim that texts have no fixed meanings, especially as different interpreters may arrive at different understandings. Yet, the claim cannot be that when the writer wrote the text, they did not have a meaning in mind. They did, because otherwise writing would be a meaningless activity. The reader must, therefore, be conscious of the degree of the influence of their own biases and traditions as they read the text and must take the author’s context into consideration in the interpretation.

2.3 Method of reception analysis

The following procedure for reception analysis was followed in this study. Interview questions were grouped under various themes and their rationale explained. The themes are: the influence of the cultural background of charismatic preachers on their understanding of the doctrine of sin in 1 John; the perceived meaning of the epistle’s concept of God as light and sin as darkness; how ATR conceptions and vocabularies of sin influence charismatic preachers’ understanding of the intersections of hamartiology of 1 John with the imagery of Christians as God’s family; remedies for sin; sin as lawlessness and the role of the devil; and the central message and gratifications of sin. We also analyzed sermons and books of these preachers. The various responses were analyzed and compared with an exegetical analysis of the doctrine sin in 1 John. In the process, differences and reasons for such differences were teased out. The differences include highlights of how Akan conceptions were reflected in the answers. A general summary of the findings and reflections on their implications was then set out.

In applying the reception analysis for this study, we explored the question: Why do charismatic preachers read texts on the doctrine of sin in 1 John, and what do they use them for? The idea behind this approach is that the preaching needs of charismatic preachers influence which texts they select to preach on the doctrine of sin, how they use these texts, and what gratifications these texts give them. ATR conceptions interact with the personal values of charismatic preachers to produce perceived needs. These perceived needs constitute their motive for gratification in interpreting and preaching on the text. The gratifications may be derived from many antecedent variables such as text structure, social circumstances, psychological needs, values, and traditional conceptual beliefs that relate to the gratification pattern. We sought to identify some of these variables and the way and extent to which they shape the interpretation and application of a text. Data for analysis was obtained from interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions.

Thirty charismatic preachers were selected for this study. They were given a list of possible uses and gratifications and asked whether these constituted the motives behind their reading of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. They were asked which book of the Bible they preferred for studying the doctrine of sin; whether sinful behaviors attract their attention; how often they observe sinful behaviors; why they observe these sinful behaviors; how important these observations are to them and for their sermons; how often do they preach on sin; and what impact they make by preaching on sin. This study also examines the motives for reading or avoiding the doctrine of sin in 1 John as well as the gratifications rebuked or enhanced by this reading.

3. Summary of Exegetical Analysis of Hamartiology of 1 John

In addition to examining the key hamartiological terms, important passages such as 1:5–2:2, 11, 12, 29; 4:10, 20; 5:16–18 were examined in their putative socio-historical, cultural, and religious contexts. John wrote the epistle to correct the doctrine of the false teachers. Some were influenced by proto-Gnosticism and others by Docetism, which seemed to focus on ethics. These teachers held erroneous views about Christ. They regarded themselves as being superior and without sin. They also claimed better and greater knowledge of God, yet did not know him or keep his commands. The secessionists argued that they were sinless and did not need purification from sin. They claimed continuous fellowship with God while they lived in the darkness of sin (1:8, 10). To this assertion, John responded, ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν (we have come to know him, if we keep his commands, 2:3). These false teachers claimed fellowship with God and that they walked in the light. They denied the influence of sin in their lives yet lived in a manner that was in sharp contrast to these claims. John refuted the Docetists's denial of Jesus's humanity with texts such as 2:1. He emphasizes that Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν (Jesus Christ), παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα (we have as an advocate with the Father), and δίκαιον (the righteous[one]). This is the same Christ who has saving power and dwelt in the flesh. John refers to Jesus thus: αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν (he is the atoning sacrifice for sins, 2:2). He rejects the claims of those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh affirming that πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν (every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 4:2).

John used the diatribe and third-class conditional sentence ἐὰν εἴπωμεν (if we say) to express what we consider a disagreement with assertions of the false teachers (1:8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9). For instance, the heretics

were influenced by Greek philosophy from Plato to believe that fellowship is based on knowledge. John responded to this in 1:6, Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν (If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth; NIV). The false doctrine of antinomianism was that a Christian can live as he/she pleases, for his/her relationship to God does not depend on the law. John exposes this false view, asserting that walking in the darkness of sin is a hindrance to fellowship with God. Further, if a person rejects the deity of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace, he/she is not saved and walks in darkness. John points out that ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτί, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων (if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, 1:7). First John 1:6 underlines the depraved quality of antinomian Gnostic doctrine, whereas 1:7 reflects John's apostolic teaching. He contrasts the implications of adhering to Gnostic doctrine with the implications of conforming to the teaching of Christ Jesus. In 1:6, "walking in darkness" is by implication not experiencing fellowship with God, not living in his presence, or not living according to his standard of holiness.

The condition for walking in God's light and fellowship is not the condition of sinless perfection. It is fellowship with God attained because of the atonement (ἰλασμός) for sins (2:2). The individual has a personal responsibility to confess his/her sins and be cleansed so as not to hinder his/her fellowship with God and with other believers. The attainment of righteousness in Gnostic doctrine was the reason for John's thoughts and writings to his "little children." He denounced the falsehood of the Gnostics by putting forward that acting outside God's commands is lawlessness. He points out: Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία (Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness, 3:4). He thus affirmed that Gnostics were sinners.

The inference from the foregoing point is that texts on hamartiology were a response to the socio-religious doctrine of proto-Gnosticism infiltrating the Johannine community. Whereas there may have been other issues plaguing the fellowship, this was probably one of the largest sources of doctrinal disputation at the time John wrote his epistle. Antinomian Gnostics maintained that Christians were free by grace from the moral law. This was based on their concept of the soul and body being morally independent of each other; that is, the sinful gratifications of the body had no bearing on the spirit. John applies the concept of light and darkness to explain moral issues. The antithesis of light and darkness was key in Gnostic doctrine. The remedy for sin according to I John is that the Christian must confess their sin to be forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness. To confess is “to say the same thing” as God (Glasscock 2009, 220). Put together, it is clear that the hamartiology of I John was a response to the situation in which socio-cultural circumstances were resulting in adaptations of Christian doctrine by elements of the community of the time. This provides a foundation for testing how it is received in a roughly similar context in which ATR conceptions vie to influence the hamartiology of charismatic preachers.

4. Summary of Findings of Empirical Study

4.1 Akan cosmological influences on charismatic preachers’ reception of hamartiology of I John

We discovered that the concept of sin espoused by some charismatic preachers betrays their horizon of *bònè* (sin) in Akan conceptions. The claim that sinful spirits can be cast out of a person as an evil spirit is an Akan conception that has become ingrained in the horizon of expectations

of the preachers. This concept is, however, absent from 1 John. The concept of sin in 1 John is that sin is a human failure and not ascribed to external spirits. The life of charismatic Christians proceeds in the form of salvation from sin, and spiritual enemies such as the devil, evil spirits, and witchcraft. These spiritual enemies constitute entities that deprive people of their well-being. We must point out, however, that charismatics preachers' view of sin from demonic powers and the devil may also come from other biblical texts. For example, Zechariah 3:1–7 describes a vision in which an angel shows Zechariah a scene of Joshua the high priest dressed in filthy rags, representing the sins of Judah. He was before God, and Satan was standing as the prosecutor. God rebuked Satan and ordered that Joshua be given clean clothes, which represent God's forgiveness of Judah's sins. For charismatic Christians, salvation from sin becomes a stepping stone to being empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome these spiritual enemies. The reality is that no one—children or adults—can claim a past sinless condition.

This study also found that the charismatic preachers primarily speak of salvation in terms of the forgiveness of sin, atonement, and reconciliation with God, yet in praxis, salvation permeates their material horizons. Their gratifications include financial breakthroughs, marriages, resolution of marriage problems, childbearing, jobs, sobriety, housing needs, and relief from bad dreams. The concern for human welfare forms the axiological basis of their use of the hamartiology of 1 John and takes its strong and unreflective desire from Akan traditional conceptions. As with Akan tradition, charismatic preachers believe in the doctrine of universal causality. They explain human moral actions with causal references to supernatural beings such as evil spirits. This aligns with the Akan belief that misfortunes and tragedies are caused by evil spirits. This idea is antithetical

to the concepts in 1 John where ἁμαρτίας (sin), ἀδικίας (unrighteousness) and ἄνομία (guilt, lawlessness) depict the failures of a human person and cannot be attributed to external spirits, nor are they spirits in themselves. However, it must be admitted that the devil plays a role in the sinful acts a person commits (1 John 3:8–10). The Akan is thus predisposed to better understand the assertion that “Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil” (3:8). It also makes him/her prone to exaggerate the understanding of the doctrine of sin in 1 John.

4.2 Notions of sin among the charismatic preachers

The Akan concept of *bòné* (sin) also regards sins as only an action; and a child who has not been observed engaging in any sinful act has not sinned. The implication of this perspective from charismatic preachers asserts that a Christian possesses sinless perfection until evil spirits cause him/her to sin. This reception is inappropriate in light of the hamartiology of 1 John. This concept signifies a fundamental change in meaning from that of 1 John. It shows unmistakably that the preoccupation of charismatic preachers’ moral thought is their gratification for material possessions.

The metaphorical statement that “God is light” is a penetrating description of God’s nature. It portrays God’s righteous functions and includes his holiness and his intellectual and moral enlightenment. God’s nature as light illuminates and purifies those who come to him just as physical light reveals and purifies. Charismatic preachers describe darkness not as the absence of holiness and righteous functions, but rather as the presence of witchcraft and evil spirits that influence an individual to commit sin, resulting in misfortunes and serial sinful misbehaviors that require intense prayer to avert. This is similar to Akan thought of *mmusuyi* (deliverance from evil) in that they both use darkness in a negative sense.

Also, in the reception of sin by the charismatic preachers, sin is conceived as darkness that affects various areas of the sinner's life. This interpretation has connotations of Akan thought. Darkness in Akan tradition denotes evil motives, clandestine activities, and secrets that people refuse to disclose.

The study also found that the charismatic preachers' understanding of sin as lawlessness interfaces with Akan conceptions of sin. They describe sin as *mmrato* (law-breaking) that attracts God's punishment. This is similar to the manner in which individuals in Akan traditional settings are punished for disobeying regulations. The preachers claim that God punishes those who disobey his word. This concept is understood because in Akan tradition acts must be for the well-being of the community and must be sanctioned by spiritual agents. Infractions are regarded as *mmrato* (law-breaking). The response that sin must be punished is reassuring. However, the severity of punishment causes fear and anxiety, as in Akan traditional communities.

4.3 The charismatic preachers' reception of remedies for sin in 1 John

The primary objective of the remedy for sin in 1 John is different from Akan conceptions. In 1 John forgiveness and cleansing from sin benefits the Christian in a manner that improves his/her fellowship with God the Father and fellow Christians. The blood of Jesus cleanses all kinds of sin (1:7). Cleansing in this context is not just a one-time act for salvation but involves continuous cleansing throughout the Christian journey for continuous fellowship with God. This is unlike Akan conceptions, whose remedy for sin is to restore spiritual relationship with God and, ultimately, for material benefits and physical well-being. While the means of remedy for the doctrine of sin in 1 John is the blood of Jesus that cleanses past and continual sins, the remedy for sin in Akan thought includes the blood of an

animal. There was no evidence to show that any charismatic preacher had assimilated this ATR thought into their teaching. Their emphasis on the power in the blood of Jesus was quite pronounced and indeed aligns with I John.

4.4 Gratifications and the reception of the doctrine of sin in I John

One of the key attractions of Akan cosmological influences in the theology of the charismatic preachers is its underlying link between human well-being and sin. The pervasiveness of references to evil spirits in the charismatic preachers' account of hamartiology is more closely aligned to their thoughts regarding Akan cosmology. This may result in an exaggerated emphasis on spirits in their theology. These gratifications are derived from antecedent variables such as social Akan circumstances, psychological needs, values, and traditional conceptual beliefs that relate to the gratification pattern used by these preachers.

5. Reflections and Implications of the Findings

This study set out to investigate to what degree, for better or for worse, ATR conceptions of sin influence the reception of the hamartiology of I John by a sub-section of charismatic preachers in Ghana. It discovered that the perception of the doctrine of sin in I John by the charismatic preachers is influenced by their soteriological goals, which are the realization of salvation as well as healing, prosperity, and success. These soteriological goals are influenced by Akan traditional conceptions of salvation from sin and spiritual enemies such as the devil, evil spirits, and witchcraft. The following are some reflections of charismatic preachers' reception of the doctrine of sin in I John and the subsequent implications:

- In the attempt by charismatic preachers to interpret the doctrine of sin in 1 John they are unwitting captives of the notion of *bòné* (sin) in Akan conceptions. We discovered that it is difficult for them to arrive at the horizon of the hamartiology of 1 John by disregarding Akan conceptions. Akan concept of *bòné* (sin), *akyiwáde* (taboo), and *mmusuo* (evil) moved with them as they continue to live. They claim sinful spirits influence individuals to commit acts of sin and can be cast out of a person. The implication is that the charismatic preachers tend to dismiss the inner character flaws of human nature that include pride, hatred, and dishonesty (cf. 1 John 2:16; John 8:44).
- The charismatic preachers regard sin as being caused by witchcraft and demons with the intended goal of denying them benefits such as good health, good marriages, profitable jobs, successful businesses, and prosperity. This interpretation has positive and negative elements. The devil and his demons are described by John as the source of sinful behavior (3:8). This cosmological emphasis raises awareness of the role demonic forces and evil spirits play in sin. This interpretation, however, results in some not taking responsibility for their sinful, fleshly gratifications. When they get themselves involved in sexual scandals, for instance, they describe the ladies involved as witches sent from the devil to tempt them to fall into sin. The devil, however, is not the only source of sinful behavior seen the First Epistle of John. While he is the originator of sin, he is not the immediate cause. Sin has selfish manifestations such as self-will, self-centeredness, and self-assertion. The world is also a source of sin. Thus, there is a need for balance in how the

charismatic preachers appropriate the cosmological speculations of ATR in their reception of biblical hamartiology.

- The shared mental framework within which charismatic preachers in Akan culture interpret the epistle's doctrine of sin includes their knowledge of Akan expectations of some sins as forbidden because their resultant effects include curses. Also, these sins are to be exorcised through deliverance. This portrays the Akan concept of *akyiwáde* (taboos) and *mmusuo* (evil) which are regarded as abominations. This is a wrongful interpretation and antithetical to the doctrine of sin in 1 John. ἁμαρτίας (sin), ἀδικίας (unrighteousness), and ἄνομία (guilt, lawlessness) depict human failures other than evil spirits.
- The concept of spiritual direction has become ingrained in the conceptual framework of charismatic preachers. They give spiritual directions for their congregants to overcome enemies. While the idea of counselling is perhaps universal, the particular practices of the selected charismatic preachers exhibit elements of the influence of the Akan traditional religious practice of *sumsum akwankyere* (spiritual direction or divination). It includes the diagnosis of hidden problems, predictions of future events, and prescription of solutions. This is comparable to traditional religious practices in Akan, where fetish priests offer solutions to problems in the form of directions from the spirit world for the protection and prosperity of clients. Often, a motivation behind the adoption of this practice is the gratification of material welfare and good health.

- As noted earlier, in the reception of sin by the charismatic preachers, sin is perceived as darkness that affects various areas of the sinner's life. This undergirds a tendency to believe in the influence of the evil eye and the fear that sharing good plans could lead to their supernatural abortion. The charismatic preachers thus tend to encourage their congregants to keep personal plans secret, since agents of the devil could abort them. While this might feed a tendency towards mistrust and fuel paranoia, it also catalyzes constant prayer life.

6. Conclusion

The charismatic preachers studied have, to a large extent, succeeded in contextualizing the Christian message, resulting in the rapid growth of their churches. In the process, however, traditional conceptions such as Akan cosmology have, for better and for worse, influenced their reception and the presentation of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. We have demonstrated how the cultural and traditional contextual situation of Akan charismatic preachers in Ghana influences their reception of a text. This means that the horizon of expectations of charismatic preachers of the doctrine of sin in 1 John will differ from other preachers with different expectations. Differences in interpretations can be minimized if the charismatic preacher becomes conscious of the danger of syncretism and confers with original manuscripts or avails himself/herself of sound theological education, especially in hermeneutics, to help reduce these dangers.

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Oral Bible Storytelling as a Missional Instrument in Discipling Men in Kejom, North West Cameroon

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Abstract

This article investigates why family heads, the *fòyn*, and members of the *kwifòyn* and other priestly societies in Kejom, in the North West Region of Cameroon, are absent from churches. The introduction describes how church leaders have reached out and ministered to these men. The next sections describe the role and function of the *fòyn*, family heads, and the *kwifòyn* and other priestly societies. Based on a comparison of the biblical and African traditional religious view of God and the spirit world, and of the functions of priests and sacrifices in both views, possible points of contact are established which could be used to minister to these men and help them become committed believers in Christ. The last section describes the role of oral Bible storying, as well as other aspects which need attention, in helping someone from an African Traditional Religion background to

become a mature believer. It also describes the actual implementation of an oral Bible storying approach in Kejom.

Keywords

Kejom, Keku, Ketingu, *fòyn*, *kwifòyn*, *əfən*, family heads, point of contact, oral Bible storying

1. Introduction

The research described in this article was carried out in the Kejom community which is located in the North West region of Cameroon. It consists of two villages (Keku and Ketingu) with a population of approximately 40,000.

The need for this research became apparent while visiting churches in Kejom. In all the churches there was an overwhelming majority of women and children; the number of men in attendance in the most extreme case was just one, and in other churches there were just a few. Research revealed that the reason for their absence is their involvement in rituals inspired by African Traditional Religion (ATR). Most of the churches condemn the ATR practices; as a result most men do not attend church.

The purpose of this research was to establish which approaches the churches have used to minister to men and how men have responded. Based on the biblical view of God and the spirit world and the biblical role of priests and sacrifices, I investigated points of contact between the ATR worldview and the biblical worldview.

Finally, I proposed the use of oral Bible storying as an approach to help church leaders to minister more effectively and in a culturally relevant way to men with traditional priestly functions. The implementation of an

actual pilot project using this approach in some quarters of the community is described.

I used the Exploratory, Descriptive, Normative and Action (EDNA) model for this research (Woodbridge 2013, 89), as it falls within the field of practical theology.

During the exploratory phase I investigated what has led to the problem of low church attendance levels amongst men. Although some of the churches in Kejom have been present in the community for over a hundred years, not many men have become believers. This article describes how church leaders of three denominations—the Cameroon Baptist Convention, the Full Gospel church (a Pentecostal denomination), and the Presbyterian church—have tried to reach these men. It also describes events in the history of these three churches that might have contributed to the present situation.

During the descriptive phase I gathered information on what is currently happening. It outlines the ATR worldview, particularly the related authority structure, and the rituals and sacrifices offered to the ancestors of the *fòyn* (paramount chief), ancestors of families, and the gods of the land.

The normative phase describes what I believe could be done to reach out and minister more effectively to men involved in traditional priestly roles. Based on the biblical view of the spirit world and on the OT role of priests and sacrifices, it describes which ATR beliefs could be used as points of contact to help ATR adherents become Christian believers.

The fourth phase includes both research and action. It identifies and describes an approach which might be effective in reaching out to these men. This approach has several aspects: the need for a worldview change, oral Bible storytelling, discipleship, and special attention on the integration of men into the church if they decide to become committed believers. The aspect of oral Bible storying was implemented in some instances in Kejom.

2. Ministry to Men Involved in ATR Rituals

2.1 Strategies used to reach out to men

Field research determined the strategies used by pastors of three denominations to minister to men. This information was obtained from questionnaires given to all seventeen pastors of the three denominations in the region. The result of the questionnaire showed that these churches are largely made up of women and children, with women comprising 77 percent of the adult membership. To reach out to men, pastors have mostly used crusades as well as personal invitations to men to attend special church events and regular men's meetings. In some cases, pastors would take part in community activities, such as quarter meetings, and community development meetings, to foster relationships with men in the community.

If a man who received an invitation did attend an event, it would usually be just a one-time attendance, largely because of the church's rejection of ATR rituals. Some pastors indicated they would visit that individual to encourage and pray with him. As a result, some men have become believers, although no specific number was given.

Church leaders offer some teaching concerning involvement in ATR rituals; however, most of the teaching focuses on condemning this involvement without giving clear biblical backing for their teaching. Men from an ATR background perceive this as negative, and as a result usually do not come to church on a regular basis. They are not willing to meet the churches' requirements or to stop their involvement in traditional societies, and some are afraid of the consequences if they give up taking part in ATR rituals. If an individual did show interest, most pastors indicated they would continue to visit him and show friendship. If such an individual came to church regularly, pastors would observe him for some time before giving him a leadership role that corresponded with his gifts.

2.2 Factors that have contributed to or hindered growth

An overview of the history of the spread of Christianity in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon, and in the Kejom area in particular, gives some insight into the factors that contributed to, or hindered, church growth. This information was gathered through literary research and some interviews with older people in the community.

During colonization, the Germans started large plantations in the South West region where many men from the North West were working. The first converts to Christianity from the North West were people who lived in the coastal area of Cameroon; many had worked on the plantations and had attended Christian services during their stay in the camps there (Kimbi 2014, 186). Some of these converts started the Baptist churches in Ketingu and Keku. Later, the Baptist church set up clinics in Ketingu and schools were established in both villages. The Presbyterian church also established a school in Keku.

Mfonyam (2011, 95) describes how the early missionaries of the Presbyterian church denigrated the traditions of the people in the region. In recent years, the church leaders of this denomination have had a more tolerant approach. The Baptist church was initially more tolerant towards ATR rituals, but has begun speaking out against them. The Full Gospel church has always encouraged its members to completely separate themselves from ATR practices.

Most Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Kejom have a men's group; some of these groups struggle with poor attendance. The Full Gospel church does not have a men's ministry in Kejom.

In summary, the various factors that have contributed to church growth are:

- The Baptist and Presbyterian churches began using education and health care as a means to reach people with the gospel.
- Men from the North West who were converted during their stay in the South West started Christian communities when they returned.

The most pronounced obstacles to growth have been:

- The confrontational way the churches have condemned participation in traditional rituals.
- Confusion caused by the different responses of the denominations to participation in ATR rituals.
- A lack of focus on ministering to men.

3. The ATR Worldview of the Kejom People

3.1 The ATR worldview and the authority structure

During the descriptive phase I gathered information on what is currently happening. It describes the ATR worldview and the authority structure that is closely connected with ATR beliefs. This information was gathered partly through literary research and partly through semi-structured interviews carried out by contacts in the community.

The Kejom ATR worldview includes the belief in the Supreme Being (*Nyìngòṅ*), the gods (*və nyìngòṅ*), the ancestors (*ti 'vəvəti '*), and witchcraft. *Nyìngòṅ* is the creator, but is unavailable to men. *Nyìngòṅ* has great powers and is respected by the Kejom people. However, they believe that he can only intervene through the ancestors and the gods. The *və nyìngòṅ* are especially called on at the beginning of the year. Once a year the *vəpfən* priests (belonging to the *əfen* society) go to all the entrances of their village to perform rituals to the gods. The *və nyìngòṅ* operate more on the level of

the whole village, while the ancestors watch over their particular families. People fear the ancestors more than the *və nyiŋgòŋ*.

The authority structure of Kejom society is tied in with the worldview of the Kejom people. The *fòyn* (paramount chief) is both the physical and spiritual head of the whole fòyndon and is responsible for its well-being. The ritual installation of a new *fòyn* is believed to transform him into a sacred being whose personal 'immortality' is asserted through the 'fact' that he is believed to never eat, be ill, or die (Kaberry 1962, 286). The *fòyn* is believed to receive magical power and wisdom from the royal ancestors and his people (Knöpfli 1998, 52).

The *kwi'fòyn* is the most powerful secret society in Kejom, watching over the *fòyn*, advising him and protecting him. It is also a regulatory society, judging cases of witchcraft, as well as other matters. It is the guardian of the Kejom traditions. Although the *fòyn* is considered by his subjects as their spiritual head, in reality the *kwi'fòyn* society is the spiritual head of the village. It has the overall authority over priestly societies. When church leaders condemn ATR practices, or when Christians violate them because of their beliefs, the *kwi'fòyn* can impose sanctions which range from restitution to banning a person from public activities for a time, or even excommunicating a person from the village. Every year the *kwi'fòyn* decides whether or not the annual dance will be held. The annual dance (preceded by the renewal of covenants with the gods) is the most important ritual in Kejom.

At the base of the authority structure is the family head. His overall role is to stand in the gap when there are problems in the family. He is in charge of ceremonies in the family and keeps the family united. Those who are members of the authority structure are respected and have prestige. A man who is not involved in any way and is not a member of a secret society lacks that prestige.

3.2 *The functions of priests and sacrifices.*

Priests in Kejom are intermediaries between man and *Nyìngòh*, the *və nyìngòh*, and the *ti'vəvəti'*; they are in charge of various rituals and ceremonies. The rituals are carried out by the *fòyn*, the *kwi'fòyn*, the *əfən*, and some other priestly societies or family heads. Several of these rituals are performed at specific times, such as the renewal of covenants at the entrances to the village (with the primary aim of protection and in preparation for the annual dance) and during planting season (Maynard 2004, 66). Others are carried out when there is a specific need.

The *kwi'fòyn*, the *əfən*, and the *fòyn* are responsible for the well-being of the whole *fòyndom*. The *fòyn* performs rituals connected to the gods and his ancestors.

Family heads in their priestly role perform various sacrifices and rituals to ensure the well-being of their families. The most important role a family head fulfills is keeping the family united. The most important rituals he performs take place after a funeral and during a death celebration to send the deceased off to the land of the dead (Diduk 2001, 32–33); a death celebration takes place some time after a funeral.

4. Points of Contact Between the Biblical and Kejom Worldview

4.1 *Point of contact: The biblical view of God and the spirit world*

Certain aspects within the Kejom belief system may be able to function as entry points to present the gospel. Tiénou (1980, §A.1) emphasizes that when Christianity is presented to adherents of ATR, an approach which builds from the known to the unknown is needed. Van Sanders (2004, 1–2, 15) states that it is important to determine if there is any continuity between the gospel and the existing belief system. He calls it point of contact:

“Point of contact theory rests upon a certain degree of continuity between Christianity and the belief systems of non-Christian individuals.” (Van Sanders 2004:15).

The Kejom belief system was examined to establish possible points of contact to present the gospel. The first aspect that needs to be noted is what knowledge of himself God has placed in the Kejom people. All people have a general revelation of God which consists of information or knowledge about God’s character and existence (Rom 1:19-20) (Van Sanders 2004, 10).

The Kejom believe that *Nyingòn* created the world. However, the view of God as the creator is incomplete when people believe that God is not involved in their lives, as is the case in Kejom. The biblical view of God insists that he is alive, still creates, provides for our needs, and is our heavenly Father (Tippett 1987, 81). ATR adherents in Kejom need to know that God cannot be manipulated by ritual or sacrifice; he is not unpredictable like ATR deities or the ancestors. He is a faithful God: impartial, just, loving, holy, righteous, kind, gracious, and merciful. God is also a jealous God, desiring his people’s welfare and therefore not tolerating that they be led into falsehood or submission to other deities. He is the focus of adoration and praise (Steyne 1990, 175–178).

Michael (2013, 83, 85) adds that the teaching of God’s omnipresence should encourage the understanding of God’s presence to bless, comfort, and protect his people in every situation they are passing through and wherever they are. God, in his omniscience, knows and understands everything. These are important attributes for former adherents of ATR to embrace, since they may be tempted in times of trouble to go back to the ancestors or gods.

Tiénou (1980, §C.III.i) states that the concept of God’s holiness is foreign to adherents of ATR. He is not seen as personally righteous and

holy as the Scripture reveals him, or as the God who judges every man by his (God's) standard of righteousness. Michael (2013, 168–171) explains that in ATR there are no stories about the fall. There is no “theological bridge” to connect the story of the fall and salvation in Judeo-Christian faith with salvation in ATR where sin is considered an act against the community and not necessarily against God (Tiénoú 1980, §5.G.VII.i). The NT presents a holistic understanding of salvation. It focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ as the center of salvation (Acts 4:12) (Michael 2013, 171). People need to be taught that God rewards good and punishes evil. He is prepared to protect those who acknowledge his lordship and trust in him. He is able to deliver them from evildoers, including the spiritual forces that attack them. This he will do through Jesus Christ (Tiénoú 1980, §5.G.VII.i).

4.2 Point of contact: The beliefs concerning the spirit world

Historically, many missionaries and church leaders have not taken the worldview and religion of Africans seriously out of fear that doing so might weaken the gospel message. However, this approach weakened the impact of Christianity on the African (Van der Walt 1994, 16). A Baptist pastor in Kejom stated that this is still true for some of the Baptist churches. The pastors of these churches call the beliefs concerning the spirit world superstitions. However, adherents of ATR in Kejom say, “There is a spirit world out there.”

The consciousness of the spirit world in Kejom, where ancestral spirits and divinities are believed to mediate between Nyingòṅ and man, can serve as a basis for understanding the biblical view of the spirit world.

The biblical view is that God created a spiritual world. He created angels, some of whom fell when they were led in rebellion against God by Satan (Gehman 2005, 38, 43). Angels and other spiritual beings work

ultimately under God's divine control in spite of the opposition of some of them to God's plan (Michael 2013, 95).

Although the functions of angels are far more extensive than those of the intermediaries in ATR, the main point of contact is that angels are involved in people's lives, as the ATR intermediaries are also believed to be. Michael (2013, 93, 43) points out that the majority of Africans who are familiar with the biblical view of the spirit world see similarities between it and the ATR view. In the ATR view, ancestral spirits and divinities mediate between God and man. The revelation of the biblical God is clouded by the belief in the presence of these divinities and intermediaries.

The point of contact between biblical demons and ATR evil spirits is that both are believed to oppose human beings, although in the biblical view demons also oppose God. It is important for a new believer to realize that Christ is Lord over all of them.

Tiénou (1980, §F.V.iii) emphasizes that the spirits are real, but Christ is Lord over all of them. In Christ, the righteous do not need to fear the spirits. Christ, who is in those who believe in him, "is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4 NIV). Jesus Christ came to set people free from bondage to these spirits. The protection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit sets Christian believers free from spirit powers.

4.3 Point of contact: Sacrifices, and the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ

The sacrifices which are carried out in Kejom can be an important point of contact. The men who perform sacrifices and offerings need to understand that these sacrifices are not necessary since the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ made all other sacrifices obsolete.

Michael (2013, 168) states that ATR focuses on salvation, as almost all traditional practices, sacrifices, and other religious experiences stem from the desire for some form of salvation or deliverance from the problems of life. In ATR, the anger of gods is handled by offering sacrifices to appease them. In Christianity, the cross of Christ is the means of taking away the anger of God against sinful humanity (Turaki 2008, 32).

In comparing Christ's sacrifice with sacrifices in ATR, the sacrifice of Jesus has benefits which no other sacrifice offers. The blood Christ shed established a new covenant through which we receive forgiveness of sins, are cleansed of all impurity, are set apart for God, and are assured of a permanent future. Christ's blood, which symbolizes his death, ratified this covenant. As the only mediator of the new covenant, Christ intercedes for us to God and represents God to us (Pali 2014, 156, 161).

4.4 Point of contact: Priesthood

Some of the priestly functions in ATR in Kejom can be carried over to a biblical worldview. However, biblical priesthood is not only for men, but for every believer. The overarching function of the Kejom priests is to watch over the welfare of the village and the family to protect them from evil and to preserve unity. Men with ATR priestly functions who become Christian believers could continue this watchcare through the priestly functions of prayer and intercession for their community and the world around them.

The biblical priesthood differs in the sense that it is no longer a special priesthood which mediates between individuals and God; rather, each believer has direct access to God himself. Unlike the priesthood in Kejom where only the *əfan*, the *kwi'fòyn*, and the family head have special access to the gods and the ancestors, every single Christian can now "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb 4:16) (Grudem 1988, 101).

For the Christian, “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices” (Rom 12:1) is true worship. The sacrifice of oneself does fit the context of the Kejom priests. One of the functions of the members of the *kwi’fòyn* is to protect the community. As a believer in Christ, protecting the community and family and working for their good requires self-denial and self-sacrifice.

The family head is a peacemaker. This is also one of the roles of the *kwi’fòyn*, which maintains order and guards peace in the village. Any Kejom man who becomes a follower of Christ should be encouraged to continue to fulfil the task of a peacemaker (Rom 12:14). As a believer, he must be committed to pursuing peace and reconciling broken relationships. A Christian should also pursue peace as a witness to the world around them. It would be beneficial for churches to emphasize the importance of this priesthood in order to help men understand that their role as priests continues when they become followers of Christ.

5. Towards an Approach of Ministry to Men

5.1 A worldview change is needed

When someone becomes a committed believer, a worldview change is needed. Our worldview monitors how we respond to changes in the culture. As people are introduced to new ideas, behavior, and products, their fundamental assumptions may be challenged, causing tension in their understanding of reality. After evaluating new ideas, they may change or drop some of their assumptions. Those ideas that fit their culture are accepted, and those that do not are rejected. It is during this process that a worldview change takes place (Hiebert 2002, 15).

The points of contact between ATR and the biblical view of God can play an important role in moving towards a worldview change.

Conversion to Christ must take place at three levels: (1) behavior, (2) rituals, and (3) beliefs and worldview. A change in behavior must include a change in a person's fundamental allegiance so that Christ becomes the Lord of everything in their life.

In Kejom, rituals take place at various times of the year and at moments when a crisis has happened. Since rituals play a central role in creating and renewing religious beliefs, church leaders should be aware of the need for people to express their faith in new living ritual forms (Hiebert 2002, 10–11).

5.2 The need for an oral approach

Although the Kejom community received the NT in the Kejom language in April of 2018, few people know how to read and write in their mother tongue. Some of the pastors whose churches I visited mentioned that up to 70 percent of their members are illiterate (Babila-Boer 2013, 76). Others are literate in English and/or Kejom, but still prefer oral ways of communication.

Church leaders in Kejom have attempted various approaches to reach the men in the community, most of which have not been very successful. It seems a different approach might be needed.

According to Casey (2000, 13), 90 percent of Christian workers worldwide use literary methods, although two-thirds of the world's population are oral learners (Chiang et al. 2005, 3). In the second half of the twentieth century, missionaries started changing their methodologies (Lovejoy 2000, 4). Biblical storytelling emerged as a different methodology where illiteracy was no longer a barrier to spreading the gospel in oral cultures. This proved to be a more effective way to present the gospel message to oral communities (Greer 2011, 38–39).

A contextualized way of reaching men with a priestly function could be through an oral approach using oral Bible storying (OBS). Since Kejom is still chiefly an oral society with a high illiteracy rate, OBS could be helpful in reaching men and others. Many in Kejom still consider storytelling a valuable practice in spite of the fact that storytelling is gradually dying out because of busyness and the use of other oral means of communication (phones, radio and television). Church leaders in other communities have used OBS successfully. Since I was involved with OBS at CABTAL, it seemed worthwhile to try this approach to reach Kejom men (while not excluding other people in the society).

OBS can take place anywhere and at any time. People are visited in their own environment instead of having to go elsewhere. The storytellers can meet people in their homes, in meeting places where people gather, or at any convenient place. People normally will not quickly refuse someone who sits down with them to tell a story.

Effective ministries in oral communities should be sensitive to worldview, use points of contact, and confront barriers to the gospel message. The points of contact that have been established can serve as a basis for the selection of stories.

5.3 Effective discipleship

As already mentioned, the believer's worldview needs to be transformed in the process of spiritual growth. Mbiti (1990, 3) says that it is costly for an African to accept a new religion. Religion is part of their whole system of being. Christianity needs to occupy the whole person, in the same way that ATR does, otherwise many converts will go back to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and definitely when there is a crisis. It is therefore crucial to provide effective discipleship.

Many working with oral communities claim that the best way to disciple oral learners is through oral storytelling. New believers need to grow in understanding about which changes need to be made concerning their involvement in traditional practices. Their primary faith commitment to gods, spirits, and ancestors must be replaced. Church leaders should help believers evaluate the ATR rituals and decide which elements should be replaced or rejected and which ones could be kept (Tippett 1987, 201).

Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno (1999, 21–29) describe several steps of an approach which could be used in evaluating a ritual through a process of critical contextualization. Church leaders could help new believers do the following:

- Gather information concerning a particular belief/practice.
- Test the truth of the belief/practice with the truth of Scripture.
- Evaluate the belief/practice in light of biblical understanding, decide whether a change is needed, and determine the probable consequences of such a change.
- Apply the gospel to their lives.

5.4 Integration of new believers

When a man decides to follow Christ, leaving behind his ATR priestly roles and membership in certain societies, his status in the community changes. Michael (2013, 115, 119, 122) explains that in African society “personhood is a state attained by fulfilling certain community expectations.... It is based on certain personal achievements that are accorded social or community importance.” A subhuman status is ascribed to the uninitiated of a particular cult. In the Kejom society, men who are not involved in any society are often mocked.

The leaders in Kejom society are respected, and the church needs to take this into account. Otherwise these men will find themselves in a void. The effect of cultural voids might be reduced when the churches pay greater attention to the cultural institution people reject when they accept Christianity. The churches need to ask what functions these new believers fulfilled in the society they were part of and what kind of Christian substitutes could replace them (Tippett 1987, 201).

For many men in Kejom, the church is considered a place for women and children. Church leaders need to give attention to how to integrate men who are leadership figures in their extended families and in the community. It will be difficult for them to step into structures where women and children make up three-quarters of the membership and where they themselves have no leadership role and have much to learn.

The men's groups which meet in most churches could play a key role in this process. They could integrate and disciple new believers for some time before integrating them into the church. By new believers starting out in the men's group, other men can help them grow to a certain maturity. Then, when they decide to integrate in the church, it is a conscious, considered decision. The church leaders also need to build biblical leadership skills in these men so that they can be used in the church context, even if means starting with some minor roles.

6. Oral Bible Storying in Kejom

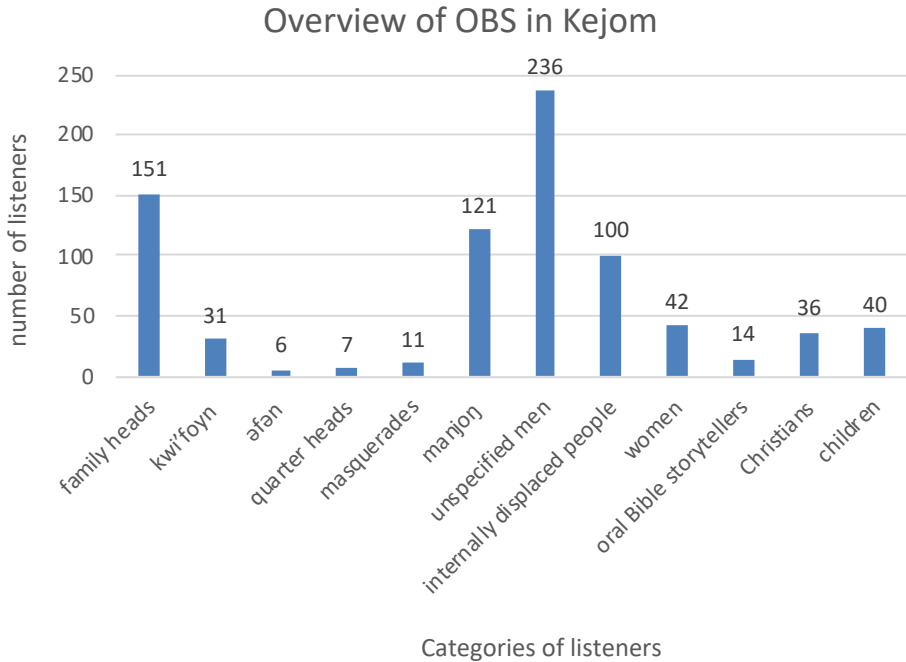
6.1 Implementation of oral Bible storytelling

Implementation of an OBS approach took place in the two Kejom villages. Two Kejom speakers, one from each village, were involved in crafting twenty-three stories during five two-week OBS training courses organized

by CABTAL. Later, several other stories were added that were worldview specific. After four sessions of crafting stories, these two storytellers started to train other Kejom storytellers. They were asked to share the stories with men with priestly functions and note their feedback. Initially, the storytellers did not understand why they needed to focus on only men with priestly functions and thus shared with other groups also. They also had difficulty in keeping a record of those with whom they shared stories and in noting their responses. After the pilot project had gone on for about a year, the training was accelerated to involve more Kejom people and start an implementation phase. However, this did not take off as planned, as a political conflict which had begun in 2016 became increasingly violent and caused serious insecurity in the region. The storytellers in Keku continued to meet a few times; however, due to lack of communication and my inability to go there, I had to discontinue the supervision of the storytellers in Keku.

The storytellers in Ketingu carried on whenever possible, and they began to focus on the target groups (men with priestly functions). They shared stories with a group of men in their quarter, who, after some time, wanted to be trained as storytellers. By then it was clear that the original storytellers had started to 'own' the idea of storytelling. They made frequent visits to a remote quarter that was less affected by the political instability to share stories, and some of the men there decided to become followers of Jesus. Some of the new believers expressed their desire to be trained as storytellers. After finally reconnecting with the two original storytellers/trainers in Ketingu, I gave more direction concerning the order stories could be shared and encouraged the storytellers to revisit the people to whom they had told stories. After some months the storytellers also took the initiative to go to another part of the village that had until then had little contact with storytelling.

Graph 6.1: Overview of categories of listeners



The first six categories with whom the storytellers shared their stories were all men that were either involved in priestly functions, the authority structure, or other societies that are involved in ATR practices but do not fulfil a priestly function. It is possible that among the other categories (unspecified men and internally displaced people) there were also men involved in priestly functions and ATR rituals.

6.2 *Difficulties encountered*

The biggest obstacle was the insecurity in the region, especially when we started the implementation phase of the OBS project in August 2018. The political crisis in the anglophone region started in 2016. When we started the pilot project in 2017, I could visit the villages without any hindrance. However, from August 2018 onward there was an escalation of violence between the military and separatist forces. It made movement to the region impossible for me, and during certain periods there was little or no communication possible. Due to the insecurity, the implementation went much slower than planned and was not completed at the end of the research.

Due to these difficulties, I was unable to give sufficient guidance concerning which stories to share or when to do more follow-up visits. However, after I was able to communicate more easily with some of the storytellers, they started making additional visits to those with whom they had shared stories.

Especially at the beginning of the pilot project, the target group described in this dissertation was not always focus on by the storytellers. Whenever the storytellers would share with a larger group, this group would be a mixed audience, some of whom had priestly functions and others who did not.

I had to abandon my involvement with the storytellers in Keku due to the insecurity, lack of communication, and lack of follow-up.

The process of crafting and recording stories, back translating them into English, and checking the final versions is a lengthy process which requires finances, much preparation, and input from specialists. Even so, the Kejom project is not the only one of its kind. CABTAL has implemented this approach in twenty-five different languages in the region. Similar projects are also happening in other areas of Cameroon, as well as in other

countries. Once the stories are crafted, the process becomes easier. The stories can be taught to representatives of the different churches who then can go out and share them in as many contexts as they find themselves.

6.3 Opportunities

In spite of the insecurity in the region, there were some very positive developments. The most positive was that the Kejom trainers/storytellers in Ketingu started to 'own' the project. They continued even when there was not much communication and input during the period of escalating insecurity.

After hearing some of the stories, one group of men requested that the storytellers come regularly to share stories that could help them address the problems they were facing. After a while, these men requested to be trained as storytellers themselves. The storytellers in Ketingu handled the training sessions on their own. The newly trained storytellers then started sharing the stories they had learned.

Storytelling in a remote quarter resulted in a church plant where discipling using storytelling is ongoing. Some members of this group were also trained as storytellers. Storytelling was extended to another part of the village that had not been included in the storytelling before. The storytellers are continuing to share the stories there even after the phase of gathering information was concluded.

The insecurity made people more receptive to listen to the stories. Some men who had to flee their quarter testified that the powers in which they had put their trust had disappointed them, and they wanted to put their trust in God instead. People who had witnessed violence, had to leave their homes, and had witnessed sudden death, started to realize that life can end at any time.

6.4 Recommendations

The storytellers operated in only four quarters of the village. If the different denominations are willing to adopt this OBS approach in their churches, the impact of storytelling will likely be felt in more churches and in their outreach into the community.

The findings of this research can be taken to church leaders at the denominational level, so that the pastors can see the results of sharing oral Bible stories. Other language groups in the region have similar cultural backgrounds, and the outcome of this research could be applied to them as well.

The priestly role of a believer can be instrumental in the transformation of families, churches, and communities. The leadership and priestly role Kejom men once fulfilled in the traditional authority structure, now practiced as followers of Christ, will be needed to bring reconciliation in their communities and region once the political conflict is resolved.

7. Conclusions

This article investigates why men are largely absent in the churches in Kejom in the North West region of Cameroon. It describes the strategies church leaders in Kejom have used to reach men who are involved in ATR rituals. It also describes their beliefs concerning God and the spirit world, as well as the roles of the *fòyn*, the *kwi'fòyn*, the *əfən* society, and family heads—all of whom fulfill priestly functions.

Based on a comparison of the biblical view and the Kejom view of God and the spirit world, points of contact are established which could be used to reach adherents of ATR in Kejom.

When someone from an ATR background becomes a follower of Christ, a worldview change is needed. Effective discipleship is crucial so that Christianity occupies the whole person, in the same way that ATR has done. Many working with oral communities claim that the best way to disciple oral learners is through oral storying. Based on the fact that the Kejom society is an oral society, I propose an oral approach to minister to men with an ATR background.

Church leaders need to give attention to how to integrate men who are leadership figures in their extended families and in the community into the church. One possibility is that the men's groups which meet in most churches could disciple new believers for some time before integrating them into a church. The church leaders could also help build biblical leadership skills in these men so that they can be used in the church context.

Finally, this article describes the implementation of oral Bible storying to reach Kejom men. This approach has been well received; it meets the needs of oral learners, and since the stories are told in their mother tongue, listeners have no difficulty understanding them.

The storytellers who eventually became trainers of other storytellers started to take ownership of the storytelling project. They took the initiative to share stories in other quarters, started a church plant, and trained other men who were interested in becoming storytellers.

Despite the difficulties encountered, this research has nevertheless shown that OBS is an effective means of communicating God's Word to men with priestly functions from an oral society.

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Jesus as Creator in the Miraculous Signs of the Fourth Gospel and the Influence of Isaiah's Creation Theology

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Abstract

In this essay, the investigation focuses on the portrayal of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs, as proposed by some scholars. The traditionally accepted seven miraculous signs present several significant features which portray Jesus as Creator. The features depict Jesus as the Word incarnate, who utters words to effect creative transformation. He is sent by the Father to the world in order to accomplish the work of new creation, which is partly expressed in the miraculous signs. The depiction of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs corresponds with the ideas in Isaiah 55:11. The 'sending' of the Son in the miraculous signs (John) parallels the 'going forth' of Yahweh's word from his mouth (Isa 55:11) and the efficacy of Jesus's words corresponds with the efficacy of Yahweh's word (*dbr*; LXX: *rhēma*). The efficacy of Yahweh's word is witnessed in Jesus Christ.

Keywords

High Priest, creation theology, servant of the Lord, Isaiah, Fourth Gospel

1. Introduction

The Fourth Gospel presents the theme of creation right from the beginning of the Gospel (John 1:1–3, 10). The prologue alludes to the Genesis creation narrative when it opens with the phrase “in the beginning” (*en archē*), resembling Genesis 1:1 LXX. It explicitly mentions the Word (*logos*), identified as Jesus (1:14–18), as the agent of creation who has come into the world he created. Since the prologue serves “as an entry point in which key themes are broached and woven together in a liturgical celebration of the advent of the divine Word” (Lioy 2005, 57; cf. Carson 1991, 111; Coloe 2011, 2; Köstenberger 2009, 176; Kruse 2003, 20; Lindars 1972, 81; and Marshall 1982, 1082), it is assumed that the theme of creation also appears in the rest of the Gospel. Consequently, some interpreters have identified the theme of creation in the signs (*sēmeia*), which John depicts in the first half of his Gospel (ch. 2–12) (e.g., Brown 2010, 286–288; Moore 2013; Rae 2008, 302–308). In conjunction with the theme, Jesus is also portrayed as Creator in the miraculous signs.

This essay is the first in a two-part series, which is written based on the author’s capstone project (dissertation) under the supervision of Prof. Dan Lioy at the South African Theological Seminary. In this particular essay, the investigation focuses on the portrayal of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs, which appear in the book of signs (John 2–12).

The study begins with a brief literature survey on the theme of creation in the miraculous signs in order to set a foundation for the subsequent investigation. Then, it analyses the constitution of the signs

since interpreters differ concerning what these are. This analysis provides a delimitation to the study area. In the subsequent two sections following the analysis, the essay centres on the main focus of the entire treatise—the portrayal of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs and how they seem to be influenced by Isaiah’s creation theology.

2. The Theme of Creation in the Miraculous Signs: Literature Survey

Interpreters such as Brown (2010), Moore (2013) and Rae (2008) have identified the theme of creation in the miraculous signs. Brown (2010) accepts the traditional seven signs and agrees with Painter (2002, 77) that Jesus’s signs “are miracles, new acts of creation.” Brown argues that the signs “point ahead in the narrative toward that final and greatest of signs, the resurrection of the Messiah—the first moment of re-creation.” (p. 287; cf. Wright 2004, 131). She further contends that John presents the seven signs in order to “echo the seven days of creation, offering a final and eighth sign precisely to indicate the arrival of renewed creation” (p. 287). She points out as evidence Jesus’s declaration in the temple concerning the “rebuilding” of the temple of his body when the Jewish authority demands a sign (*semeion*; John 2:18). She also highlights the connection between the first and the seventh signs, pointing out the foreshadowing of Jesus’s resurrection as the eighth sign in the raising of Lazarus.

Moore (2013) agrees with Brown on several matters. He accepts the traditional seven signs and argues that there is an eighth sign, which is the resurrection. He also supports Brown’s contention that the signs echo the seven days of creation and goes further in detailing how each of the seven signs is seen “to correspond to the ‘seven days’ of creation” (p. 131; cf. pp. 135–192). The eighth sign, he says, “completes the sequence, representing

the octave day of the ordering of creation, the work of Jesus continuing beyond his earthly life and ministry into the ‘new week’” through the commissioning of the apostles (p. 132).

Rae (2008, 302–308) argues that the series of seven signs in the Gospel of John alludes to the seven days of creation. However, Rae’s view of what the signs are excludes the miracle of Jesus walking on water and includes as the seventh sign at Jesus’s great hour: “his mother, the cross, and the issue of blood and water from Jesus’s side (John 19:25–37)” (p. 304). Rae contends that the signs are to be understood as a foreshadowing of Jesus’s crucifixion-glorification and “a participation ahead of time in the new life that is to come” (p. 303). Following a chiasmic arrangement (cf. Girard 1980, 315–324; Grassi 1986, 67–80) which centres on the multiplication of loaves and fish (John 6), Rae argues that the pairing between the first and the seventh signs, the second and the sixth signs and the third and the fifth signs “is concerned unmistakably with the redemptive transformation of the old creation and the ushering in of the new” (p. 304).

The brief literature survey on the theme of creation in the Fourth Gospel reveals three common features. First, the scholars indicate that the signs are God’s acts of renewing creation. Second, they see Jesus as performing the role of Creator in the renewal of creation. Third, they perceive a connection between the creation theme in the gospel with the creation narrative in Genesis, thus suggesting that Genesis provides the background and influence for the theme of creation in the Gospel. This study follows the features but diverges in this way: the portrayal of Jesus’s role as Creator in the Gospel of John is influenced by Isaiah’s creation theology rather than by Genesis alone.

3. The Constitution of the Signs (*sēmeia*)

This investigation requires a brief analysis of what constitutes the signs, since interpreters differ concerning what they are. The analysis provides delimitation of the area where the investigation focuses.

Generally, the seven supernatural acts of Jesus in the book of signs (John 2–12) have been accepted as constituting the signs. However, an analysis of the seven signs reveals that only five of them have been explicitly identified as signs (*sēmeia*) in the Gospel. They are, (1) the turning of water into wine (2:11), (2) the healing of a royal official's son (4:54), (3) the feeding of the 5,000 (6:14), (4) the healing of a man born blind (9:16), and (5) the raising of Lazarus from the dead (12:18). The healing of a sick man at the Pool of Bethesda is not called a 'sign' but a 'work' (*ergon*) (7:21; cf. 5:17). In the Fourth Gospel, however, "signs' are the 'works' which Jesus willingly performs in order to bring people to believe in him" (Just 2013, §3 [Signs]). "What Jesus meant by works was identical with what John meant by signs." (Guthrie 1967, 79).

The act of walking on water has no reference to being a sign or a work. Consequently, some scholars do not consider this as a sign (e.g., Köstenberger 1995, 97; 2009, 330; Rae 2008, 304). Köstenberger (1995, 92–93) excludes this act from the seven signs because it does not fit the three general characteristics of signs, which he identifies as: (1) "signs are public works of Jesus's," (2) "signs are explicitly identified as such in the Fourth Gospel," and (3) "signs, with their concomitant symbolism, point to God's glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God's authentic representative." Consequently, instead of the act of walking on water, Köstenberger argues for Jesus's cleansing of the temple complex as a sign since it fits all his general characteristics (pp. 96–101).

Nevertheless, this study does not exclude Jesus’s act of walking on water in the examination of Jesus’s role as Creator. This act is a supernatural feat that can only be accomplished by someone who possesses a creator-like power. It is the only incident among all the miraculous events in the Gospel of John where Jesus seems to imitate Yahweh’s self-identification *’anî hû’* (LXX: *egō eimi*) (cf. Exod 3:15–16; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 44:6; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6) when he speaks to his disciples saying, “I am; be not afraid” (*egō eimi; mē phobeisthe*) (John 6:20). Ball (1996, 181–185) insists that the expression in John 6:20 alludes strongly to Isaiah 43:1–13, which, in turn, provides a theological explanation for Jesus’s act of domination over the tempestuous Sea of Galilee and rescuing his disciples. All this makes this particular incident unique in comparison to other miraculous events in the Gospel. Therefore, the investigation of Jesus’s role as Creator in the signs here focuses on the seven miraculous events in John’s Gospel.

4. Significant Features Portraying Jesus as Creator in the Miraculous Signs in Relation to the Entire Gospel

One may observe three significant features arising from an analysis of the miraculous signs. The subsections below discuss these features, which portray Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs. The features present Jesus as uttering words to accomplish miracles, performing (*poieō*) miraculous signs (*sēmeion*) or work (*ergon*), and being sent by the Father.

4.1 Jesus utters words to accomplish things

The words Jesus utters accomplish what they are intended to do. This idea is observed in four instances. In the first instance—the healing of the official’s son—Jesus’s words, “your son will live,” take effect at precisely the

time when Jesus uttered the healing statement (John 4:53). Köstenberger (2004, 98, 171) indicates that Jesus “not only cures the royal official’s son but does so long-distance, a highly unusual way of working miracles (4:50–53)” (p. 98). The healing of the sick child at Jesus’s words suggests that his words entail regenerative power that can accomplish long-distance healing. As the Creator-Word, Jesus can accomplish things that are extraordinary by his words and actions. He grants life to the official’s son by his utterance.

In the second instance, the occasion occurs in the healing of the paralysed man at the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus’s command for the paralysed man to get up, pick up his mat and walk goes against the person’s current condition and prompted immediate healing (John 5:8–9). The command demands action from the man. The effect of Jesus’s words was instant. There seems to be a supernatural, regenerative power in his words of command. The power of his words reconstructs and restructures the paralysed parts of the man so that the old, sick parts are renewed.

The third incident occurs in the healing of the man born blind. Jesus’s instruction to wash in the Pool of Siloam is met with the man’s obedience and an act of faith, resulting in his healing (John 9:7). In this case, the combination of Jesus’s actions and words of command occurs in the whole process of healing. Jesus “spat” (*eptusen*) on the ground, “made” (*epoiēsen*) mud (*pēlon*) from the saliva, “spread” or “rubbed” (*epechrisen*) the mud on the man’s eyes, and “said” (*eipen*) to the man to “go” (*hupage*, imperative) and “wash” (*nipsai*, imperative) in the Pool of Siloam. The man goes to the pool as instructed and comes back seeing (*blepōn*).

In the fourth instance, Jesus’s loud voice calling Lazarus to come out from the grave produces life in Lazarus’s dead body (John 11:43–44). His shout of command is “wonderfully succinct” (Morris 1995, 498, note 89; cf. Barrett 1978, 403) and one “of raw authority” (Burge 2000, 320). The Creator-

Word raises the dead through his life-giving words. It can be said that Jesus's words have given Lazarus a new life. A reconstruction of Lazarus's decomposing body and all the elements inside it may have happened. The power of his voice expresses "the power of God by which the dead are brought to life" (Ridderbos 1997, 406). He can bring back life because he is the Creator of life, exercising his "Creator-like power" (Brodie 1993, 397).

In all four instances, the Greek term *legō* (speak, say; *legei* [John 4:50; 5:8]; *eipen* [9:7]) and the statement *phōnē megalē ekraugasen* ("he shouted with a loud voice" [11:43]) are employed to indicate that Jesus utters something. Although the term and statement inform readers that Jesus speaks, the effect of the words which come forth from his mouth makes *legō* and *phōnē megalē ekraugasen* significant. Thus, in his role as Creator, Jesus's words are effective in accomplishing what they are meant to do. He is the Creator-Word, whose utterances are sovereign and authoritative, powerful and effective.

The idea that Jesus accomplishes things by his utterances is enhanced when one considers the notions of the *logos* and *rhēma* in connection with Jesus. Special use of the term *logos* (Word) occurs in the prologue when John associates it (*logos*) with Jesus. The prologue identifies Jesus as the incarnate Word. In the rest of the Gospel, the term is used thirty-six times. McDonough (2009, 218) shows that the majority of the thirty-six usages cluster around words connected to Jesus and God. In most cases (twenty-two times), John employs *logos* to describe the words that Jesus speaks (2:22; 4:41, 50; 5:24; 6:60; 7:36, 40; 8:31, 37, 43, 51, 52; 10:19; 12:48; 14:23, 24 [twice]; 15:3, 20 [twice]; 18:9, 32). In some instances, the usages describe reports about Jesus by different people (4:39 [the Samaritan woman]; 17:20 [the disciples]; 19:8, 13 [the Jewish leaders]). In several cases, *logos* is used to speak about God's Word, whether directly (5:38; 8:55; 10:35; 17:6, 14, 17) or by means of the Scriptures (4:37; 12:38; 15:25).

The clustering of the *logos* usages around words connected to Jesus and God is not surprising because in the Gospel of John, “Jesus’s words are God’s words” (McDonough 2009, 218). In John 14:24, Jesus tells his disciples, “the word that you hear is not mine but of the Father who sent me.” Moreover, the use of the phrase “the word of Jesus” (*ho logos tou Iēsou*) in conjunction with the fulfilment formula (“might be fulfilled” [*hina ... plērōthē*]) (John 18:32; cf. 12:32–33) “indicates that Jesus’s words are tantamount to Scripture” (McDonough 2009, 219). Since Scripture is understood as God’s Word, the fulfilment of Jesus’s word is no less than the fulfilment of God’s Word.

Therefore, when Jesus speaks, he speaks as the Creator-Word. He speaks God’s words. Indeed, “the identity between Jesus’s word of proclamation and God’s word is grounded in Jesus’s being as the Word” (Silva 2014c, 166). Schnackenburg (1968, 483) points out that Jesus’s words “have the force of God’s words because he is the *Logos*, that is, the divine revealer and redeemer.” The fact that Jesus speaks the words of God is made clear in John 3:34: “For he whom God has sent utters the words [*rhēma*] of God.” Even though *rhēma* is used instead of *logos* here, it clearly describes Jesus, the Creator-Word, as uttering God’s words.

4.2 Jesus performs (poieō) miraculous signs (sēmeion) or work (ergon)

Jesus’s performance of the miraculous signs involves the use of the Greek word *poieō* (do, perform) in conjunction with the word *sēmeion* (sign) or *ergon* (work). This juxtaposition of terms is observed in all the miraculous signs except in the instance of walking on water. Jesus is portrayed as the one who performs (*poieō*) the signs (*sēmeia*) (John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14; 9:16; 12:18) or the work (*ergon*) (7:21). The combination of these terms also appears in several instances with similar connotation (2:23; 3:2; 6:2, 30; 7:31; 11:47; 12:37; 20:30). Since the LXX word for the Hebrew ‘create’ (*bara*) in Genesis 1:1 is

poieō, it seems reasonable to posit that when the Gospel of John refers to Jesus performing a miraculous sign, it denotes an act of creation.

Nevertheless, the signs are not replications of the primal creation. Rather, they are an expression of Jesus doing the Father's work of new creation. In this sense, Jesus is not only portrayed as Creator of the primordial creation but also of the new creation. He is the "new Creator" (Du Rand 2005, 43). He renews all creation, including human life, which has been marred by sin. Rae (2008, 295–296) contends that the work Jesus does is the work of creation. The work was established at the beginning and continues toward its consummation at the end through redemption. The miraculous signs are works of "redemptive transformation of the old creation and the ushering of the new" (Rae 2008, 304).

Since the miraculous signs are an expression of the Father's work through Jesus, it is instructive to examine the concept of 'work' (*ergon*) in the Fourth Gospel in subsequent discussions. That work is linked to creation can be seen in the language Jesus uses in his statements concerning God's work. The echo to Genesis 2:1–3 is noticeable. First, the phrase "his work(s)" (*autou to ergon* [John 4:34]; *ta erga autou* [14:10]) in John is similar to that in Genesis LXX (*ta erga autou* [Gen 2:2]; *tōn ergōn autou* [2:2, 3]). Second, the verb *poieō* in relation to doing the work appears in both places (Gen 2:2 [twice], 3; John 4:34; 5:36; 7:21; 10:25, 37, 38; 14:10, 12; 15:24; 17:4). Third, the use of the root verb *teleioō* occurs in both cases (*sunetelestēsān, sunetelesen* [Gen 2:1, 2]; *teleiōsō* [John 4:34; 5:36]). Fourth, the relation of work to the Sabbath appears in Genesis 2 and John. In Genesis, God rests on the Sabbath from all the works that he has done (Gen 2:1–3); in John, Jesus carries on the works of God and performs them even on the Sabbath (John 5:16–18; cf. 9:14–16). Fifth, the description of the work Jesus does as "good works" (*erga kala* [John 10:32]; *kalou ergou* [10:33]) seems to echo God's declaration that

the work of creation is “good” (*kalon* [Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18]; *kala* (vv. 21, 25); *kalian* [v. 31]).

Through these links, John signals that the work Jesus does in the incarnation is the work of creation. His activities in the incarnation constitute the work of restoration of creation after the Fall. The healing of the paralysed man and its aftermath in John 5, in particular, reveals that Jesus’s work (John 7:21; cf. 5:17) is a work of creation (cf. Rae 2008, 295). When the Jews criticize him for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus responds, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (5:17). The Jews perceive Jesus’s statement as making himself equal to the Creator-God since it was understood among the Jewish rabbis of Jesus’s day that God was continually working on the Sabbath (Carson 1991, 247; *Genesis Rabbah* 11:10; *Exodus Rabbah* 30:9). For example, *Genesis Rabbah* 11:10 indicates that God “rested from the work of [creating] His world, but not from the work of the wicked and the work of the righteous” because he works with both groups, showing their “essential character” (Freedman and Simon 1961, 86). Brown (1970, 217) points out that many rabbinic statements show God continually being active on the Sabbath because “otherwise, the rabbis reasoned, all nature and life would cease to exist.”

The healing of the paralysed man on the Sabbath can be seen as Jesus’s work of restoration in maintaining the existence of God’s creation. In the same way, the restoration of sight to the man born blind on the Sabbath (John 9) is a work of creation, restoration, or renewal. Both miraculous signs, Köstenberger (2009, 351) asserts, “are designed to elicit faith among the Jews.” They are also a display of Jesus, “the Creator and that Word-made-flesh,” engaging in his messianic activity “in powerful extension and escalation of creation and new creation theology.” Indeed, “as the Creator, Jesus is the Giver and Restorer of life, and the one who has authority over the Sabbath.”

Rae's (2008, 296–300) examination of three significant passages in the Gospel where Jesus speaks of his work—John 5:16–47; 10:22–39; 14:1–14—reveals four noteworthy themes. First, Jesus's work is “linked with the theme of life” (p. 296). The work of creation is brought to its consummation in eternal life through the work of Christ. Second, “the requirement of belief [is] set against the prevalence of unbelief” (p. 297). Participation in the new creation requires belief in Jesus. Third, “Jesus's works are said to provide testimony to him.” Knowing Jesus's works means to discern the fulfilment of God's purpose in creation in the works that Jesus performs (pp. 297–298). Fourth, the work testifies to “the intimate relationship between the Son and the Father,” thus bringing a transformation of life formed by God's creative word (p. 298). The last theme concurs with McDonough's (2009, 233) assertion concerning Jesus's agency in creation—that the act of creation and redemption of humanity is performed within the framework of a loving relationship between the Father and the Son.

The work that Jesus says he is sent to accomplish (John 4:34; cf. 5:36) is reaching its completion at the cross when, “knowing that all things are now finished [*tetelestai*]” (John 19:28), Jesus declares, “It is finished [*tetelestai*]” (19:30). Several scholars see the connection between John 4–5 where Jesus clarifies his given task of finishing the work of the Father who sends him, and John 19:28, 30 where Jesus declares the completion of “all things” (e.g., Brown 2010, 284–385; Brown 1970, 908; Keener 2003, 1147; Lincoln 2005, 478). Jesus's declaration “It is finished” (John 19:20) at the cross, followed immediately by John's mention that the Sabbath is about to begin (19:31) reveals a significant image concerning Jesus's act of completing the work of creation. Besides echoing the creation narrative in Genesis where God ceases from his creative work on the Sabbath (Gen 2:2–3) (Brown 2010, 286; Brown 1970, 908; Keener 2003, 1147; Wright 2004, 139), the narrative also

signals the completion of God's work (in creation) through the death of Jesus, "ushering in Sabbath rest and re-creation" (Brown 2010, 286).

4.3 *Jesus is sent by the Father*

Jesus indicates that the Father sends him to accomplish his (God's) work. Jesus repeats the idea of being sent by the Father in three instances of the miraculous signs. First, in the dialogue that follows the healing of the paralysed man, Jesus indicates that the Father sends him. In the passage where Jesus speaks about the testimonies concerning him, he declares: "The Father who sent me has himself testified about me" (*ho pempas me patēr ekeinos memarturēken peri emou*; John 5:37). Second, in the interchange following the feeding of the crowd, Jesus indicates several times that the Father is the one who sends him (John 6:29, 39, 44, 57). The idea of being sent coincides with the idea of him coming down from heaven (6:32, 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). The Father sends him. He comes down. He returns to his sender. Jesus's question—"What if you see the Son of Man going up to where he was before?" (6:62)—implies a returning to the Father. Third, Jesus utters the idea of being sent in his prayer to the Father at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus prays to his Father so that the crowd "may believe that you sent me" (*hina pisteusōsin hoti su me apesteilas*; John 11:42). The fact that the Father sends him is testified to by the works which he does (John 5:36; cf. 10:25). They are works of creation (Rae 2008, 295–296).

The theme of sending also appears in several other texts scattered throughout the Gospel of John. The theme is expressed by the Greek verbs *pempō* and *apostellō*. Both verbs appear a total of sixty times in the Gospel—*pempō* thirty-two times and *apostellō* twenty-eight times. John uses both verbs without any obvious semantic difference (cf. John 4:34, 38; 5:36–38; 7:28–29; 20:21) (Silva 2014c, 703–704). Of the total number of occurrences,

thirty-nine are found in Jesus's speeches. Most of the time, he speaks about the one who sends him in the third person. Only in seven occurrences does Jesus speak to the Father directly using second-person language (11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 27 [all use *apostellō*]). The relationship between God's works and the sending occurs in John 4:34 and 5:36, where both motifs coincide. In 4:34, Jesus indicates the centrality of his task in accomplishing the work of the one who sends him. In 5:36, Jesus asserts that the work(s) that he does testify to the fact that the Father has sent him (cf. 10:25). In most cases, Jesus reiterates the idea that he is doing the will of the Father who sends him. Mercer (1992, 457) points out that "the primary thrust of the motif is that God sends Jesus into the world with a special commission." Arguably, that commission is to bring redemption to humanity through the work of new creation (cf. Rae 2008, 295–296).

The theme of sending concerns the concept of agency. The sent one is an agent of the one who sends. In order to understand the concept of agency, McDonough (2009, 226–234) analyses several instances where sending is modelled by Jesus. The examples include the calling of the first disciples (John 1:35–51), the aftermath of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), the story of the man born blind (John 9), the account of Lazarus raised from the dead and its aftermath (John 11), the passion narrative (John 13–17, 20:21), and a reflection of the disciple whom Jesus loved. Two of the examples are part of the miraculous signs. In the story of the man born blind, Jesus telling the man to wash his eyes at the Pool of Siloam serves "to reinforce the gospel's emphasis on Jesus as the sent one" and "to highlight the healed man's role as a sent witness to Jesus's as evidenced later in the story" (McDonough 2009, 229). In the story of Lazarus's miraculous restoration to life, Lazarus is deemed to be "a visible sign of God's glory" (p. 230). McDonough's analysis of the significance of all

the instances leads him to conclude that “personal relationship” is the main emphasis, “that it [personal relationship] is manifestly a central part of his [John] theological vision” (p. 231). Thus, it becomes apparent that between the Father and the Son, loving relationships are so central that they “are an end in themselves” (p. 232; cf. John 17:23–26).

McDonough (2009, 233) further argues that the transference of the work of creation to Jesus “serves the deeper purpose of enacting and nurturing the Father’s love for the Son.” Because of the Father’s love for the Son, he (the Father) shares all things with him, including the Messiah’s participation in his (the Father’s) life and work, “including the work of creation” (McDonough 2009, 233). The Messiah, therefore, is not a mere tool in creation but “the fully personal executor of God’s will,” and as the Creator-Word, “He is the one who brings to realization the desire, ‘Let there be ...’ of Genesis 1.” Thus, whatever the Son does on behalf of the Father and whatever the Father does for the Son are seen within the framework of a loving relationship. The Son’s activity is “a constitutive element” of their love for one another. He “expresses his love for the Father by actively creating the world according to the Father’s will and rescuing it from its fallen state” through the work of new creation (McDonough 2009, 233).

4.4 Jesus as creator in the miraculous signs: a synthesis

The characterisation of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs seems to fall within a framework that involves the incarnation of the Creator-Word in Jesus. The incarnation of the Creator-Word seems to coincide with the depiction of the Father sending his Son. The Son comes from the Father into the world to accomplish the work he is sent to do, which is partly expressed in the miraculous signs.

In a concise statement, the characterisation can be written in this way: the Son, who is also the Word (*logos*), is sent by God the Father to the world in order to accomplish the work of new creation. This statement is similar to Du Rand's (2005, 23–24) assertion concerning the creation motif, which underlies the theological perspective of John's Gospel. He states that "God's mission in this world is manifested through the pre-existent *Logos*, the Son of God, who became man, destined to return to the Father after a mission of glorification" (p. 24).

5. The Influence of Isaiah's Creation Theology

The framework of Jesus's characterisation as Creator noted previously (4.5) corresponds to the ideas depicted in Isaiah 55:11. The text (Isa 55:11) highlights two components: (1) the efficacy of God's word (cf. Friesen 2009, 346–347; Motyer 1993, 457–458; Young 1972, 383) and (2) the "going forth" of the word from God (Dahms 1981, 78–88). Both are tied with the theme of accomplishing what the word is intended to do.

Isaiah 55:11 in context is considered a creation passage despite the absence of explicit creation references (in the cosmological sense) in the text. There exist indications in the context (Isa 55:6–13) that creation in the redemptive and eschatological sense is in view. In the redemptive sense, the reference to repentance in verses 6 to 7 is, in essence, creative because it involves God's transforming act in dealing with human hearts. In the eschatological sense, the allusion to the new creation in verses 12 to 13 depicts a transformed environment restored to its original condition before the Fall (cf. Motyer 1993, 458). The context of Isaiah 55:11 (i.e., vv. 6–13), therefore, emphasizes new creation rather than the cosmological aspect. Yahweh's word is efficacious in the regeneration of the sinner's heart (v. 11). When sinners respond to God's word calling them to repent (vv. 6–7), the

effective power of that word (v. 11) brings them into an experience of God's love, forgiveness (v. 7) and peace (v. 12) and "lifts them into membership of a new world of eternal duration" (Motyer 1993, 458). Concerning Isaiah 55:11, Friesen (2009) remarks: "The word calling for light flowed from God's mouth" then "the creation of light accomplished the purpose for which the word was spoken" (pp. 346–347).

The influence of the two components in Isaiah 55:11 on the framework concerning Jesus's role as Creator in the miraculous signs may be discerned through three correspondences: (1) the sending of the Son and the going forth of Yahweh's word, (2) Jesus's utterances and the word from Yahweh's mouth, and (3) Jesus's works and the accomplishing of Yahweh's will.

5.1 *The sending of the Son and the going forth of Yahweh's word*

The sending of the Son in the miraculous signs seems to parallel the going forth of Yahweh's word from his mouth in Isaiah 55:11. The origin of the Son, who is the Word, is the Father in heaven. The origin of the word in Isaiah 55:11 is Yahweh. The concept of sending is related to the idea of origin or "coming forth from" God. The Greek word used in the Gospel of John is *exēlthon* (aorist of *exerchomai*). The Greek word reflects the idea of "going forth" of the word (*rhēma*) from Yahweh's mouth in Isaiah 55:11 LXX which uses the aorist form of *exerchomai* (*exēlthē*) as in the Gospel of John.

John 8:42 and 17:8 indicate that the idea of coming/going forth from God or the Father is analogous to being sent by God or the Father. In 8:42, Jesus mentions that he came from (*exēlthon*) God, not on his own but sent (*apeteilen* [*apostellō*]) by God. The context depicts Jesus as repeatedly speaking of the fact that the Father has sent him (8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42). God sends Jesus as "God's messenger" (Michaels 2010, exposition §III.L). The aorist tense *exēlthon* "indicates that the reference is rather to the mission

of the Son, in other words, the Incarnation” (Brown 1966, 357). In 17:8, Jesus again indicates that he has come from the Father. The phrase “I came from [exēlthon] you” seems to parallel “you sent me [apesteilas].” The last part of verse 8 can be put in this way (cf. Mueller 2019, 3):

They truly understood that I came from you
 ...they believed that you sent me

The parallel suggests that ‘coming from’ God or the Father may be the same as being ‘sent’ by God or the Father. Morris (1995, 641–642) posits that the two expressions are very similar and yet not identical. The first phrase (“I came from you”) “concerns the Son’s divine origin” while the second one (“you sent me”) deals with his mission. “Jesus was sent to perform a divine task. It was this that the disciples had come to believe” (p. 642).

The parallel between coming/going forth from and being sent signifies strong Isaianic (Isa 55:11) influence on the concept of sending in John (cf. miraculous signs). The picture is that the Creator-Word is sent by the Father to carry on the work of new creation in the incarnation. The Son is being sent on his Father’s mission, just as the word goes forth from the Lord’s mouth to accomplish its mission.

5.2 Jesus’s utterances and the word from Yahweh’s mouth

The efficacy of Jesus’s words seems to parallel the efficacy of Yahweh’s word (*dbr*; LXX: *rhēma*) in Isaiah 55:11 (cf. 48:3, 13). The idea of God’s efficacious word in the work of creation may have influenced the way some miraculous signs portray Jesus’s act of speaking to accomplish something. Jesus’s utterances accomplish their purpose and are expected to result in those who witness the signs believing that Jesus is the Messiah (cf. John 20:31).

In several instances of the miraculous signs, Jesus speaks in order to

effect transformation in the created order. When he speaks, he also acts to accomplish what he speaks about. Speaking itself is his act of accomplishing restoration. For instance, in the healing of the paralysed man at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus asks the man, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6). He acts to accomplish the healing by commanding the man to get up, pick up his bedroll and walk. The aftermath of this healing features Jesus speaking a long discourse. The raising of the dead Lazarus to life provides another example. Jesus repeatedly mentions his intention to wake Lazarus up from the dead (11:11, 23, 25–26, 40). He acts to fulfil what he speaks about by commanding Lazarus to come out of the tomb (11:43–44). His voice carries creative force to effect the restoration of life to the dead body.

Isaiah’s creation theology presents a similar idea. Yahweh speaks and acts on accomplishing what he speaks about. In Isaiah 48:3, Yahweh declares (*ngd*) past events long before they happen. He acts (*sh*) on what he speaks about and it occurs. Again, in 48:13, Yahweh calls (*qr*) the earth and the heavens and they “stood up together.” The calling of the earth and the heavens parallels Yahweh using his hands to create them.

A remarkable depiction of the concept of speaking-acting can be observed in Isaiah 44:24–28. Isaiah 44:24 introduces Yahweh as “your redeemer who formed [*ytsr*] you from the womb.” He speaks to Israel, identifying himself as the Lord who creates. Focusing on verses 26–28, one can see that Yahweh also identifies himself as one “who says [*mr*] to Jerusalem/cities of Judah ... who says [*mr*] to the depths of the sea ... who says [*mr*] to Cyrus” (emphasis mine). In each self-revelation, Yahweh announces what will happen (“she will be inhabited/they will be rebuilt ... be dry ... my shepherd”) then declares his promise to fulfil them (“I will restore her ruins ... I will dry up your rivers ... he will fulfil all my pleasure”).

The context of Isaiah 44:24–28 is Yahweh’s announcement of the restoration of Israel through Cyrus. This restoration is sometimes called

the second exodus. It is a creative act of redemption of Israel. Similarly, the contexts of the healing of the paralysed man and the raising of Lazarus fall within a broad picture of the restoration of humanity. On the one hand, the restoration involves an individual's transformation of both the physical and spiritual life. On the other hand, the two miraculous signs serve the purpose of inviting people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing they will have life in his name (John 20:30–30). This transformation and restoration of humanity is a creative act of redemption, a re-creation of humanity.

Perhaps the most helpful example of how Jesus's words or utterances are affecting people's hearts and accomplishing what the words are intended to do can be observed in the discourse of the bread of life (John 6:26–59). One can see the progression of the effect of Jesus's words on those who hear him. Jesus's words intend to persuade them to accept and believe him through the bread of life discourse. Their response to the discourse progresses from simple questions and statements to intensified misunderstanding. The Jews's complaints about Jesus's origin (vv. 41–44) and further misunderstanding of Jesus's speech about eating his flesh in verse 52 reveal how Jesus's words are affecting the hearts and decisions of the Jews.

Following the discourse is the response of those who heard Jesus's teaching (John 6:60–71). John's Gospel refers to this particular teaching of Jesus as *logos* (v. 60). The passage reveals that the words (*rhēmata*) that Jesus has spoken are spirit and life (v. 63). Peter's answer to Jesus in verses 68 to 69 exposes the truth about Jesus possessing the words (*rhēmata*) of eternal life. The words (*rhēmata*) that Jesus has spoken have taken effect in Peter's heart to the extent that he has come to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. In other words, Jesus's words have accomplished the purpose

for which they were uttered. An allusion to Isaiah 55:11 can be observed here. Yahweh's word (*rhēma*) goes forth to accomplish what it is intended to do.

There is a further connection between Isaiah 55:10–11 LXX and John 6:28–71 (cf. Burkett 1991:131–132; Endo 2002:241). John 6 describes Jesus as the living bread sent by God (vv. 29, 38, 39, 44, 57) from heaven (*ek tou ouranou*, v. 33) to do the will (*thelema*, v. 38) of the Father who sends him. This description corresponds with the description of Yahweh's word in Isaiah 55:11—the word comes forth from God (v. 11), descending like the rain and snow from heaven (*ek tou ouranou*, vv. 10–11) to do the will (*ēthelēsa*, v. 11) of God who sends it. The will of the Father is to give life to the world (as implied repeatedly in John 3:16; 5:21, 26; 6:39–40; 12:50) and the ministry of the Son is said to accomplish the Father's will (as indicated in 6:38: "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me") (Endo 2002, 242).

5.3 Jesus's works and the accomplishing of Yahweh's will

Jesus, the Word (*logos*), seems to embody all the will of the Lord in the word (*δbr*; LXX: *rhēma*) that goes forth from the Lord's mouth in Isaiah 55:11. In other words, the efficacy of the word (*rhēma*) of Yahweh is witnessed in the person of the Word (*logos*) and the works that he performs in his incarnation. However, Jesus is not to be equated with Yahweh's word itself, emanating from the Father. Despite the portrayal of Yahweh's word in a personified manner in Isaiah 55:11, it is not Jesus Christ. The correspondence, however, is remarkable. Just as Yahweh's word accomplishes repentance and regeneration of hearts in God's people (Isa 55:11), so the Word (**logos**) in John's Gospel accomplishes repentance and regeneration of spiritual life through his works in those who believe him.

The problem of associating Jesus Christ, the Word, with Yahweh's word in Isaiah 55:11 is that both use different Greek terminology. In the Johannine prologue, the Word is *logos*, while in Isaiah 55:11, Yahweh's word (*dbr*) is rendered as *rhēma* in the LXX. The case can be resolved by considering that both words can be, or are, used interchangeably in both Isaiah and John. In the LXX, the word *dbr* is rendered with *rhēma* more than 500 times, and even more frequently with *logos*. In fact, "in some passages where *dbr* is repeated, the LXX alternates between the two Greek terms (e.g., Exod 34:27–28; 2 Sam 14:20–21)" (Silva 2014, 4:207). In the Gospel of John, there seems to be hardly any distinction between the use of *rhēma* and *logos* (outside of the prologue). For instance, there is hardly a real difference in John 12:48: "The one rejecting me and not receiving my words [*rhēmata*] has one who judges him; the word [*logos*] that I have spoken, that will judge him on the last day." Again, in 17:8a, 14: "... the words [*rhēmata*] that you gave me, I have given to them ... I have given them your word [*logos*]...."

The theme of the new creation is a conceptual link that can be drawn from what Jesus performs in John's Gospel and what the word accomplishes in Isaiah 55:11. The concept of new creation in Isaiah is depicted in two strands—historical-redemptive and eschatological. The first strand (historical-redemptive) appears more prominently in Isaiah 40 to 55, where Yahweh is portrayed as performing something new (Isa 42:9; 43:18–19; 48:6), redeeming Israel from exile. Yahweh's involvement in the deliverance of his people means that he is doing a new thing. The second strand (eschatological) occurs mainly in Isaiah 65 to 66, where Yahweh declares his intention to create new heavens and a new earth (65:17). "This act of God involves complete reorganization of life; the hazards of life are removed (65:19–20, 23, 25)" and the redeemed people of God will forever live in a safe environment and with the certainty of life (Towner 1996,

New Creation). Implied in both strands is the idea of reconstruction and transformation.

The Fourth Gospel depicts Jesus performing miraculous signs involving reconstruction and transformation of individuals and their situations. By performing the Father's work, which is expressed through the miraculous signs, Jesus is fulfilling or accomplishing Yahweh's will in his word.

Further enhancing the idea that Jesus embodies the fulfilment of Yahweh's will is an intriguing correspondence between Jesus finishing the work he is sent to do (John 19:28, 30; cf. 4:34; 5:36) and the accomplishing of the will of God (Isa 55:11 LXX) with a creation connotation. The connection can be seen by associating Genesis 2:3, Isaiah 55:11 and John 4:34; 19:28, 30 by means of the words 'finish' (*teleō*) and 'work' (*ergon*). Thus, *tetelestai* (John 19:28, 30), *teleiōsō*, *ergon* (4:34), *suntelesthē* (Isa 55:11), *sunetelesen*, and *erga* (Gen 2:2) all suggest a connection between Isaiah and John in terms of creation. The completed work is a work of creation (John 4:34; cf. Gen 2:2). The one who is sent to finish the work is Jesus Christ (John 4:34) by his death on the cross (19:28, 30). Correspondingly, Yahweh's word goes forth from his mouth to accomplish what the word was willed to do (Isa 55:11). Yahweh's word accomplishes both creation and redemption.

6. Conclusion

The Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus as Creator in the series of seven miraculous signs. Several scholars have identified the theme of creation and new creation in the signs. Despite the differences in perspectives on what constitutes the seven signs, these scholars agree that the seven signs allude to the creation narrative in Genesis. This study follows the traditional seven signs but diverges from focusing mainly on allusions to

the creation narrative in Genesis. It contends that Jesus's role as Creator in John is influenced by Isaiah's creation theology rather than the Genesis creation account alone.

The analysis of the miraculous signs from a creational perspective reveals that Jesus, the Son, who is also the Word (*logos*), is sent by the Father to the world in order to accomplish the work of new creation through the utterances of his words (*rhēmata*) and the performance (*poieō*) of the signs (*sēmeion*) and deeds (*ergon*). This depiction of the Creator-Word seems to resemble the idea depicted in Isaiah 55:11 that Yahweh's word is efficacious and that it goes forth from him. Both are tied to the idea that Yahweh's word accomplishes what it is intended to do, which is a renewal of creation in the redemptive and eschatological sense.

The characterisation of Jesus's role as Creator in the Fourth Gospel corresponds with Isaiah 55:11 in three ways. First, the sending of the Son parallels the going forth of Yahweh's word. The Son, who is the Creator-Word, is being sent on his Father's mission just as Yahweh's word goes forth to accomplish Yahweh's will. Second, the efficacy of Jesus's utterances corresponds to the efficacy of Yahweh's word. Just as Yahweh's word accomplishes what it is intended to do, Jesus's utterances accomplish miraculous effects. Third, Jesus's works (deeds) resemble the accomplishing of Yahweh's will. Jesus embodies all the will of the Lord. The efficacy of Yahweh's word is seen in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the word (*logos*), and the works that he performs. Thus, Isaiah's creation theology influences the characterisation of Jesus's role as Creator in the Fourth Gospel.

The manner in which Isaiah 55:11 influences Jesus's portrayal as Creator in the miraculous signs seems to resemble how the role and function of Yahweh's Servant are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the Fourth Gospel. This resemblance presents an intriguing

connection between Yahweh's word (*rhēma*) in Isaiah 55:11 and his Servant as witnessed in Jesus Christ. The second part of this essay series pursues this intrigue.

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A Critical Study of the Doctrine of Impartation in the Church of God Denomination

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Abstract

Research reveals that many of the major Pentecostal denominations, including the Church of God, accept the biblical doctrine of impartation and practice it in their assemblies. However, inconsistency in how ‘impartation’ is to be understood has created a lot of controversy among church leaders. The problem surrounding the doctrine relates to two main areas: (1) the theoretical, which refers to an unbiblical understanding of the doctrine, and (2) the practical, which is the manner in which impartation is practiced in the churches. This article is a summary of the author’s dissertation written under the supervision of Dr Callie Joubert and must be seen as an attempt to formulate a correct theological understanding of the doctrine of impartation that could serve as a model for adoption and implementation by Pentecostalism and, more specifically, the Church of God.

Keywords

Doctrine, gifts of the Spirit, impartation, sovereignty of God

1. Introduction

The biblical doctrine of impartation, and its theological meaning and understanding, has been perceived by many Bible commentators, expositors, and Christians in general as synonymous with Pentecostalism.¹ However, there is some definite inconsistency in how the term ‘impartation’ is understood among Pentecostals, including the Church of God, and has consequently created a lot of controversy among church leaders. The problem surrounding the doctrine relates to two main areas: (1) the theoretical, which refers to an unbiblical understanding of the doctrine, and (2) the practical, which is the manner in which impartation is practiced in the churches. The Greek word for impart is μεταδίδωμι, which means to “give over” or “to give a share.” Some Pentecostals and charismatics incorrectly view μεταδίδωμι to mean the ability to volitionally transfer one’s own anointing and/or spiritual gift or gifts to another person or persons. Also of consequence is the belief among some Pentecostals that they are free to seek impartations from the deceased by visiting their gravesites and the unscriptural bias towards the impartation of extraordinary gifts over and above those gifts considered to be “ordinary.” For example, although much emphasis has been placed on the impartation of “extraordinary” gifts such as the word of wisdom, the working of miracles, or the gift of

¹ Pentecostalism is used here to include, classical Pentecostals, charismatics, and the ‘third wave’ movement. Although they often disagree in theology, most people place these groups under the same umbrella (Grudem 1996; Hanegraaff 2001; MacArthur 1992; McConnell 1995; Yun 2003).

faith (1 Cor 12), Wuest (1973, 21–22) understands the meaning of μεταδίδωμι to include the ordinary gifts that, according to Budiselic (2011, 250) and Stitzinger (2003, 174), refer to those gracious gifts shared in the physical as well as spiritual realm (Rom 12:8), such as the sharing a coat (Luke 3:11), money (Eph 4:28) and sharing the gospel or one's soul (1 Thess 2:8). Yet these ordinary gifts have seemingly been ignored by Pentecostals who are proponents of impartation. This, in turn, has led some to conclude that the definition of impartation has become so hermeneutically skewed and misunderstood that it consequently distorts the nature and intention of God's gifts.

This brief summary is intended to capture the wider results of the researcher's study. As such, it indicates that, although impartation is a valid biblical doctrine, there is no biblical evidence to support the view of some Pentecostals that believers are free to seek impartations from the dead, initiate healings, and blessings at will or volitionally impart their spiritual gifts and anointings to other persons at times and places as they see fit. Rather, Scripture reveals that God imparts his gifts and blessings sovereignly, and that all gifts are spiritual in origin and available for impartation.

To address the research problem, the research project comprises four objectives: to give a historical overview of the doctrine of impartation in the Church of God, to give an analysis of Romans 1:11, to present an overview of the current theological and doctrinal views on impartation, and to give an assessment of the model of impartation in the Church of God. The summary concludes with a discussion on the contemporary significance of impartation.

2. Historical Overview of the Doctrine of Impartation in Pentecostalism and the Church of God

Pentecostalism as a movement identifies its origin with the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. However, if looked at in its modern or, more specifically, its contemporary form, Pentecostalism's roots can be traced to primarily the revivalist era of Methodism (Bare 1993, 32; Kay 2011, 1). One outcome of that era of spiritual renewal was the birth and organizing of the Church of God with its headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee, in the USA. The roots of the denomination can be traced to the year 1886 and a small group of believers who had grown weary of the creeds and traditions that had stifled spiritual vitality in the churches (Sims 1995, 77); and who, during a prayer service, received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the speaking in tongues as its sign (Conn 2008, 29; Juillerat 1922, 7–14).

Conn (2008, 47–54) notes that Pentecostalism and, more specifically, the Church of God was immediately endangered by individuals who sought to introduce unscriptural doctrines and impartation practices into the church. As a result, multiple erroneous views were promulgated in relation to the impartation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and his gifts (Conn 1963, 12; Horton 1986, 200; Hughes 1986, 171; Phillips 2014, 119–136).

Although the Church of God was adamant about its beliefs in the reality of the impartation, abuse of the doctrine and unscriptural practices led its leaders to formulate a codified list of “Doctrinal Commitments” to help combat these and, by doing so, to bring greater ecclesiastical and theological stability to the church (Conn 2008, 134–140; Phillips 2014, 363–370). However, while the codified list of beliefs helped to bring doctrinal clarity, it remains a fact that the doctrine of impartation has not been adequately defined or theologically understood within Pentecostalism or the Church of God. This fact is evident in the anomalous ways

denominational leaders, educators, and pastors define impartation, the abuse that is associated with the practice, and the continued emphasis on the impartation of “extraordinary” gifts above those that are seen as “ordinary.” These concerns indicate the need for a doctrinal position on impartation for the Church of God that is biblically grounded and theologically sound.²

3. An Analysis of Romans 1:11 (the Anchor Text)

The aim of the second objective is to conduct an analysis of the anchor text (Rom 1:11). In a word, the hermeneutical understanding of Romans 1:11 has had a decisive influence on the theology of Pentecostalism and the Church of God. It was therefore deemed necessary to determine whether Paul’s promise to impart spiritual gifts to the Roman believers provides biblical support for the Church of God’s doctrine of impartation.

On the one hand, the hermeneutical understanding of Romans 1:11 has led to the belief and teaching that impartations have numerous possibilities: believers can receive impartations of the Holy Spirit, including an anointing for special purposes, spiritual gifts, and unusual blessings. On the other hand, while Paul was convinced that God would use him to impart gifts to the Roman believers, a distortion of Paul’s meaning has led to a misappropriation of the text by Pentecostals (Arrington 2016).

Anomalies, such as the following, demonstrate Pentecostals’ underlying assumptions about impartation. Many believers in

2 Pastors, leaders and educators defined “impartation” to be (1) “the passing on of godly information received,” (2) “the taking of something you have been given by God and bestowing, sharing, or giving it to someone else,” and (3) as “something essentially occurring through direction on the part of God and desire on the part of the recipient for the purpose of equipping people and for the edification of believers” (taken from a survey conducted from 24 June, 2016 to 10 January, 2017).

Pentecostalism get attracted to personalities in the hope of receiving their much-desired gift. Questionable practices, such as prophecy and manipulation of believers through the use of peculiar words or phrases, are used when attempting to impart gifts. Others have visited the gravesites of deceased men and women for impartations from them. Consequently, Pentecostals are potentially deceived by those who believe that gifts or other spiritual blessings can be imparted by or through corpses, volitionally from one person to another, or through various other manipulative practices (Budiselic 2011, 246). Given this situation, a careful exegetical analysis of the anchor text is appropriate.

3.1 The implication of Paul's desire to impart gifts

Paul unmistakably had a strong desire to be in the presence of the Roman believers. While writing, the apostle first states, “[I have been] making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you” (Rom 1:9–10). Briscoe (1982, 32) suggests that by the phrase “some means” Paul “meant [that] he was open to all possibilities.” Next, Paul reveals the reason for his wish to visit them: “that I may impart to you some spiritual gift.” According to Moo (1996, 59), Paul “really advances only one reason, which he delineates in three roughly parallel purposive statements: ‘to share some spiritual gift’ (v. 11); ‘to have a harvest’ (v. 13); [and] ‘to preach the gospel.’” In sum, the implied meaning of Paul’s words for the Roman believers is this: When he arrives they will be imparted with some spiritual gift (Schreiner 1988, 52). The text neither stipulates the gift nor the manner in which the gift will be imparted.

3.2 *The recipients of the impartation*

That Paul intended to impart spiritual gifts is quite clear. However, the question is, who were the intended recipients? Paul's answer is very specific.

3.2.1 They are called

Paul's expression in Romans 1:6, "[a]mong whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ," identifies believers who will receive gifts as the "called." They are "the called who belong to Christ." Yet, κλητός (called) is not used in the epistles to refer to someone who is invited by another. Rather, οί κλητοί (the called) are already believers, "the effectually called; those who are so called by God as to be made obedient to the call" (Hodge 1947, 22; Wuest 1973, 1:18).

3.2.2 They are saints

Paul further identifies the recipients of the gift as saints. He writes: "[t]o all who are in Rome, beloved of God called to be saints" (Rom 1:7). Hodge (1947, 23) points out that κλητός to be ἅγιος (saints) means "they are saints because they are a community separated from the world and consecrated to God."

3.2.3 They are people of faith

Paul also classifies the Roman believers as being people of faith. He does so in Romans 1:8 where he says, "your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Undoubtedly, their faith had become a regular topic of conversation (Briscoe 1982, 31). Wuest (1973, 19) suggests πίστις (faith) refers to the faith that was characteristic of the Roman Christians' experience and daily living.

3.3 *The means of imparting spiritual gifts*

Although Paul informs his readers that when he visits them, he will impart to them spiritual gifts, he does not say through which means that would happen. The expression μεταδίδωμι (impart) means to “give over, to transmit” or “to give a share” (Vine 1952, 149). Both the Roman believer and contemporary reader can, therefore, only assume how the gifts will be imparted after a consideration of various possibilities gleaned from the letter or elsewhere in Scripture.

First, Paul may have referred to the laying on of hands. However, he does not. As Robinson (2008, 266) suggests, “since the imparting of a spiritual gift through handlaying and prophecy is noted in 1 Tim 4:14, that handlaying was intended cannot be ruled out, nor substantiated either.” Straube is more convinced of this method (2010, 209). He points out that the word χάρισμα (charisma), which means “divine gratuity or a spiritual endowment,” together with the root χάρις (grace) (Rom 1:11; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6), suggests that “the laying on of hands was instrumental in the impartation of spiritual gifts” (p. 209).

Second, Paul may have intended to impart the gifts through his preaching or exhortation. According to Cranfield (1975, 79), at first sight, the natural inclination is to conclude that the χάρισμα πνευματικὸν³ (spiritual gift) is what Paul presents in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Stott (1994, 56) regards Cranfield’s (1975, 79) view as problematic and states that “there seems to be a fatal objection to this, however; namely that in those other passages the gifts are bestowed by the sovereign decision of God.” Hence, Paul appears to speak in a more general sense which perhaps could mean

3 The Greek text used in this summary is taken from *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament* by James Denney.

that he will impart whatever the believers are to receive through his own teaching or exhortation when he arrives (Stott 1994, 56; cf. MacArthur 1994, 42–43).

There is a third possibility. Denney (1900, 588) believes that Paul intended to impart his spiritual gift through the reading of the epistle. Fee (1994, 486–489) reflects a similar thought. He proposes that “the Spirit gift” in the context of the letter means that the apostle most likely wanted to share his understanding of the gospel. Longenecker (2016, 117) takes the same view.

Of all these perspectives on how Paul could have imparted the χάρισμα πνευματικόν (spiritual gift), the most favorable seems to be the laying on of hands. This view appears the most reasonable understanding of Romans 1:11, because it is an inductive inference based on teachings and practices elsewhere in Scripture (Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–6; 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6).

3.4 The gifts to be imparted

Paul explicitly expresses his reason for wanting to visit the Roman believers: ἵνα μεταδῶ ὑμῖν τι χάρισμα πνευματικόν (that I may impart to you some spiritual gift). It is arguably the case that the apostle created interest in what those gifts might be. The verb μεταδίδωμι (impart) was certainly not foreign to Paul. The usage appears in several of his letters (Rom 12:8; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:8). According to Longenecker (2016, 114–115), Paul used the noun χάρισμα (gift) in reference to: (1) gifts of righteousness and eternal life (Rom 5:15; 6:23), (2) special gifts given to people individually and corporately for the building of the kingdom (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4–9, 30–31), (3) gifts of celibacy and marriage (1 Cor 7:7), (4) gifts of wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9), and (5) the gift of an office in the church mediated by the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). However, according to Longenecker (2016, 115)

and Moo (1996, 59), in Paul's letters Romans 1:11 is the only occasion where the noun χάρισμα and the adjective πνευματικόν are brought together into the one expression of "spiritual gift." It explains why the combination of χάρισμα πνευματικόν with the addition of the neuter indefinite pronoun τι (some) resulted in various interpretations, which will be presented next.

3.4.1 Official office in the church

Parratt (1967, 79) proposes that the χάρισμα Paul wanted to impart was most likely an office in the church that would be mediated through the laying on of hands. Impartations of confirmation or acknowledgement of authority of an office is consistent with that of Moses and Joshua and the deacons in Acts 6:6.

3.4.2 Ordinary and extraordinary gifts

Paul's terminology, μεταδῶ τι χάρισμα πνευματικόν (impart some spiritual gift), has been defined by Pentecostals so as to include extraordinary and ordinary gifts. By definition, ordinary gifts include abilities such as teaching, giving, pastoring, and helping (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) that manifest within the natural interaction between believers as an expression of God's providence to and through one another. Extraordinary gifts, such as healing, prophesy, faith, and the working of miracles (1 Cor 12:7–11) pertain to gifts in which God's power is applied to change the natural order (Stitzinger 2003, 161). Although Paul does not delineate the terms "ordinary" and "extraordinary" in Romans 1:11, he does differentiate between the gifts in the overall presentation of his literary message (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11; Eph 4:7–12). In short, Wuest (1973, 21–22) and Hodge (1947, 25–26) believe that μεταδίδωμι refers to such ordinary blessings as the gift of salvation

and grace, in addition to extraordinary gifts such as healing, prophecy, the word of wisdom and tongues. Although Morris (1988, 60) feels that the indefinite expression *τι χάρισμα* favors ordinary gifts, he admits that the idea presented in the noun *χάρισμα* is normally used for the special gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit (i.e., gifts of healing, miracles, faith, speaking in tongues, prophecy). Thus, *χάρισμα* as it is used in Romans 1:11 can refer to any grace or endowment from God.

With the use of *χάρισμα πνευματικόν* (spiritual gift) in Romans 1:11, Paul may have intended to impart some extraordinary gift that he himself had. On the other hand, he may have intended to visit with the hope that his arrival would be accompanied by a manifestation of the Spirit that would result in an impartation of gifts (Budiselic 2011, 254). The definition of *μεταδίδωμι* along with Paul's disclaimer (1 Cor 12:7–11) that the Spirit is the one who distributes the gifts seems to favor the latter option. Hence, Paul's use of *χάρισμα πνευματικόν* coupled with *μεταδίδωμι* creates a viable argument for Pentecostals and Church of God leaders who practice the impartation of spiritual gifts.

3.4.3 Indefinite gifts

The third possibility is that Paul would have imparted indefinite gifts to the Roman believers. Moo (1996, 60), Longenecker (2016, 116), and Stott (1994, 57) suggest that there may be a good reason why Paul is tentative with his *μεταδίδωμι τι χάρισμα πνευματικόν* (impart some spiritual gift). The reason is because the apostle, although he wanted to impart gifts to the Roman believers, could not have specified the particular gifts to be imparted until he saw what their needs were. Or, as Budiselic (2011, 253) suggests, the expression *τι* (some) “probably points to the fact that Paul does not define the gift(s) of the Spirit he wants to impart to them, but he is

open for the possibility that some of the gifts of the Spirit will accompany his coming to Rome.”

3.5 The purpose for the impartation

Although there may be ambiguity with regard to the method and nature of Paul’s impartation, the apostle is forthright about his purpose: he wanted to impart gifts to the Roman believers εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ στηριχθῆναι (so that you may be established). Godet (1977, 87) points out that the words “strengthen” or “establish” were not intended to mean that Paul is coming to “confirm” them, but rather to assist the believers in remaining firmly in that which they had already received.

3.6 The anchor text and the Church of God

The Church of God is resolute that the gifts Paul promised in Romans 1:11 to impart (μεταδίδωμι) to the Roman believers are experiential gifts, that they have historical value but also present reality. However, while this passage supports the Church of God’s belief in the doctrine of impartation, the analysis of the anchor text only reveals that Paul intended to impart a “spiritual gift” to the Roman believers who were “called” and committed “saints” of God. Although Church of God leaders may follow the path of interpreting Romans 1:11 through an experiential hermeneutic, Paul in no way asserts that the extraordinary gifts of tongues and prophecy are to be given preferential treatment above the ordinary gifts of giving and exhortation. The use of μεταδίδωμι in supportive passages such as Luke 3:11, Romans 12:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, and Ephesians 4:28 contradicts this notion. Furthermore, the analysis was in no way able to confirm that Paul stated or implied that believers can receive impartations through visiting

the graves of the deceased or that leaders can volitionally convey their gifts and anointings to others as they see fit.

4. Current Theological and Doctrinal Views on Impartation

The aim of the third objective is to present a brief summary of a select number of current theological and doctrinal views on impartation that are influencing the body of Christ, the fulcrum of the Church of God, and Pentecostal theology.

4.1 Eddie Rogers

Eddie Rogers is the founder of Revival in Power Ministry and the former apostolic leader of The Revival Center in Bremen, Georgia. For him, impartations are primarily given to persons who follow “their perspective spiritual fathers ... [who are also] teachers and mentors” (Rogers 2006, 13–14). He cites as examples Joshua, who received an impartation from Moses, and Timothy who received one from the Apostle Paul. According to Rogers (2006, 19–20), impartations are received on the human level. That means that the more time people spend with the imparter, the more they replicate his or her ideas and gestures. Rogers also teaches that impartations involve prophecy (1 Tim 4:14) and that “spiritual fathers” can impart gifts to their “spiritual sons and daughters” through the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 2006, 36). However, Rogers is incorrect in arguing that “without sons and daughters pursuing the relationship, the impartation dies with the fathers” (2006, 62–63). He is also biblically incorrect to teach that impartations are received through the giving of tithes and offerings to those in the five-fold ministry. This is most questionable, if not also heretical.

4.2 *Phillip Rich*

Phillip Rich (2007, 2) defines μεταδίδωμι as: “to give over—to share based on connection and association.” Taking that meaning as his working definition, Rich (2007, 13) teaches that persons can impart their personal anointing or “giftings” to others and that impartations are primarily given or received through associating with or entering into a covenant relationship with those who are in the five-fold ministry. He uses as his warrant Ephesians 4:11–12 and 1 John 2:27. He also cites Matthew 13:13–15 and John 4:1–30 and argues that impartations are received through “perception” and “reception.” In other words, before a believer can receive an impartation from a person in the five-fold ministry, he or she must know what gifts are being manifested in and through that so-called leader. Rich’s views are highly problematic since none of the passages he references supports his claims. Rather, Ephesians 4:11–12 and 1 John 2:27 clearly indicate that God is the imparter of anointings and gifts. Furthermore, perception of gifts in a leader is not a scriptural criteria for receiving an impartation, nor is the imparting of gifts and anointing restricted to those in the five-fold ministry (cf. Acts 9:10–18; 1 Cor 12:1–11).

4.3 *Ervin Budiselić*

Ervin Budiselić serves as the Academic Dean for the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, Croatia. The institute was founded by the Council of Churches of Christ in Croatia and has a cooperative agreement with the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Church of God in Croatia. Budiselić (2011, 246) opines that Christians are being taught by Pentecostal leaders that if they can visit the right places, go to the right conferences, get the right persons to pray for them, or visit the right graveyards, they can receive an impartation

of “God’s anointing, spiritual gifts and other blessings.” Budiselíc (2011, 246) shares his concern that those who teach that spiritual gifts can be imparted from one person to another are misinterpreting the Scriptures. He argues that the term μεταδίδωμι is misconstrued and passages such as Romans 1:11 and 1 Timothy 4:14 are being misinterpreted by practitioners to support their own subjective theoretical position and to formulate a new concept of impartation. Or, as Joubert and Maartens (2017, 105) have shown, Scriptures are decontextualized and recontextualized to support erroneous decisions and ecclesiastical practices when they do not.⁴ Budiselíc (2011, 251) rightly contends that the presentation of χάρισμα in 1 Timothy 4:14 implies spiritual gifts or grace gifts. But the addition of πνευματικόν with χάρισμα in Romans 1:11 means “gifts of the Spirit” and those are not imparted volitionally by the laying on of hands “because one does not possess such gifts” (Budiselíc 2011, 251).

4.4 Paul Goulet

Paul Goulet is senior pastor of the International Church of Las Vegas and became acquainted with the power of impartation after being prayed for by Argentinean pastor, Claudio Freidzon. μεταδίδωμι is defined by Goulet (n.d., 31; 2007, xx) as “to give over, or to share,” to “confer, bestow, hand over, put, place, and inherit.” For him, according to Philippians 2:17, impartation is about being filled with the Holy Spirit so that those receiving the impartation of the Holy Spirit might pour it into the life of someone else (Goulet 2007, xiii). Goulet cites the example of Elijah and Elisha and contends that one-way impartations can be received by searching for

4 See Joubert and Maartens (2017, 105–132) for a better view of this practice and misuse of Scripture.

persons who already have the gifts that are desired. Furthermore, Goulet (n.d., 125–144) stresses that believers, like Jesus, should seek multiple impartations. However, several of Goulet’s views fail to pass the test of good hermeneutics. For instance, Philippians 2:17 does not state or imply that imparted believers can “pour” their impartations into other believers, nor is there a single scriptural passage that gives the slightest indication that Jesus needed or received multiple impartations of the Spirit.

4.5 Michael Chung

Chung’s (2019) theology on the doctrine of impartation is presented in a dissertation entitled “Paul’s Understanding of Spiritual Formation: Christian Formation and Impartation.” He believes, that “the most dominant foundational meaning of *metadi, dwmi* [*sic*] is for one entity to share something with another” (172; emphasis in the original). However, rather than focusing on the impartation of ordinary and/or extraordinary gifts per se, Chung chooses to concentrate on the Apostle Paul’s use of impartation as a means to help converts reach spiritual maturity (17–18). Using Romans 1:11 and 1 Thessalonians 2:8–10 as his warrant, he argues that Paul, in partnership with “the divine agency,” was able to impart into his converts and help perfect their faith (170–172).⁵ In this way, Paul imparted to his converts through methods such as his letters, personal mentorship, and the use of three dimensions Chung (2009, 245–292) calls: cognitive, relational, and affective. In other words, Paul taught his converts knowledge, he lived among them, but above all, he loved them (315–319).

5 Chung (2009, 85) uses “divine agency” to mean the work of God or the Holy Spirit.

4.6 Randy Clark

Randy Clark is founder of Global Awakening, a teaching, healing, and impartation ministry in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Clark (2013, 16) defines “impartation” as the “transference of the anointing” which may include “a gift or gifts of the Spirit, a filling of the Holy Spirit (especially for power) or the baptism in the Holy Spirit.” He asserts that impartations are conveyed primarily through the laying on of hands and “waiting on God,” and cites Numbers 11:16–18, 2 Kings 2:9–14 and Hebrews 6:1–2 for support. Clark acknowledges that impartations are commonly conveyed in the NT through the act of ordination and the laying on of hands (Acts 13:1–3; 1 Tim 4:14). He also contends that the laying on of hands was commonly used to convey impartations such as healing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts of the Spirit (19–26; cf. Clark 2015, 17–40). Another way Clark emphasizes that impartations are transferred or conveyed to a believer is through “blessing” them with “spoken words” in the manner that Jesus blessed the adults and children in Matthew 19:13–15 and Mark 10:16 (cf. Garborg 2003, 22–24). However, an analysis of his claims shows that he often decontextualizes scriptural passages to support his own and preferred views on impartation.

5. An Assessment of the Model of Impartation in the Church of God

Thus far an attempt has been made to explore the doctrine and practice of impartation from a historical, theological, and literary perspective. The anchor text, Romans 1:11, has also been given considerable attention. However, to assess the Church of God’s doctrine of impartation, an inductive study and synthesis of informing and developing biblical texts was conducted further critically. Although space does not permit a detailed

discussion of those texts, it was determined that Paul based his model of impartation upon his experiential knowledge and biblical precedent (Rom 4:3; 1 Cor 15:4). Thus, attention is next focused on the fourth objective, namely, to assess the model of impartation in the Church of God in order to determine how it compares to Paul's model and the consistencies and inconsistencies that may exist in practice.

The theological synthesis of Romans 1:11 and a selection of other texts provide several concepts that, together, comprise the biblical model of impartation. It is therefore vital to discuss whether or not this model is biblically consistent with the practice of impartation in the Church of God. At the outset it should be stated that the same informing and developing theology based on the biblical accounts of impartation in the OT and NT that set the context for Paul's practice of impartation is also the one that influenced the practice of impartation within the Church of God.

The analysis found that there is consistency between the theological model of Paul and that of the Church of God in relation to the spiritual gifts that may be imparted to believers. Paul's list of πνευματικά (1 Cor 12:1–11), χαρίσματα (Rom 12:6–8), and δόματα (Eph 4:8–11) are gifts believed to be apropos for effective ministry in the church (Gause 1986, 170–171). Hence, Richie's (2020, 106) claim that "spiritual gifts should operate in the assembly with both freedom and order."

However, at least two inconsistencies exist between Paul's model and that of the Church of God. First, unlike Paul, a much greater emphasis is placed upon the impartation of extraordinary gifts over that of ordinary gifts. This inconsistency is reflected in literary form as well as in church meetings. It suffices to say, in worship services there are multiple opportunities for the impartation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, healing, and miracles, as opposed to gifts such as giving, exhortation, and mercy.

In order to remain scriptural in practice, the Church of God must have a biblical and theoretical model that provides equal opportunity for the impartation of both ordinary and extraordinary gifts and other spiritual blessings.

Second, inconsistency is found in the erroneous view that spiritual gifts are the permanent possession of believers and can therefore be imparted to other believers at will and how and when they see fit. Several authors noted the error and offered a biblical rebuttal to that belief and practice (Bay and Martinez n.d.; Conn 1986, 55–56; Hughes 1986, 174). What they emphasize is that Ephesians 4:7–11 and 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11 teach that spiritual gifts are the φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος (manifestation of the Spirit) and sovereignly distributed by God.⁶

What the Church of God believes about the methods of impartation is also consistent with the theological model represented in Scripture. Leaders resolutely affirm and teach that God sovereignly imparts gifts and blessings without intermediary human action (Tipei 2009, 183), and that spoken words are a means of imparting blessings and healing (Hill 2016; Tipei 2009, 18–20, 176–178). However, there is strong resistance to the unscriptural idea that believers create blessings or healings through their own creative ability through the use of certain words or phrases. No evidence was found in the theological synthesis to support this view. In contrast, believers activate God’s power through invoking the name of Jesus

6 Conn (1996, 105) and Lowery (2004, 187–189) contend that spiritual gifts are not permanently invested in believers but are given to the church and therefore cannot be imparted from one person to another. In contrast, while Arrington (2003, 243–244) believes that “for individuals to receive gifts means that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts on the church,” possession of gifts cannot mean that believers can say “I own, I control, I operate, I manipulate” my gift whenever he or she so wishes.

in conjunction with proclamations of Scripture or words spoken that are consistent with the clear teachings of Scripture.

The Church of God's doctrine of impartation is also consistent with the model of impartation in Scripture in that gifts and blessings may be imparted to believers through the laying on of hands (Arrington 2008, 300; Tipei 2009, 217; Tomberlin 2010, 225–237). Nevertheless, two inconsistencies require attention. First, it is unscriptural to think that gifts and blessings can be imparted volitionally by believers with the laying on of hands. The informing and developing texts neither state nor imply a theological model to support that belief. Simply put, while God may use believers in the impartation process, He alone is the initiator and impartor of spiritual gifts and blessings (Lombard and Daffe 2008, 197; Triplett 1970, 131). Second, and in contrast with the teachings of Scripture, leaders have a tendency to equate impartations of the Holy Spirit with certain preconceived emotional experiences. Neither the informing nor developing texts present the idea that one must go through some emotional catharsis as a way to confirm an impartation of gifts or blessings (Gause 2009, 124–126; Hughes 1986, 171). There is therefore no scriptural mandate to encourage the repetition of words or the manipulation of others in an attempt to replicate the experience of speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the beliefs of the Church of God are also consistent with impartation through acts of service. Leaders are not reticent to mention the gifts listed by Paul in Romans 12:6–8. Lowery (1997, 142–143) views Paul's list as motivational gifts that should move believers to serve one another better. Arrington (2003, 323) views Paul's list of service gifts as important in Christian service and exceeding accomplishments through natural talents and abilities. However, there is an unwelcome attitude among

Church of God leaders towards the gifts of mercy, exhortation, teaching, and giving that contrasts sharply with what Paul teaches about these gifts. The unfortunate consequence is that believers view these gifts as being so ordinary that some may not even realize that they are gifts of God (Lombard and Daffe 2008, 180).

In short, the impartation of these gifts is vitally important if the Church of God wishes to remain consistent with the scriptural model of impartation and if leaders wish to effectively impart gifts to others through mentorship, material goods, comfort and/or mercy (Luke 3:11; Rom 12:8; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:8). Put differently, greater emphasis on rendering service along that way will allow the church to provide holistic care to the body of Christ.

6. The Contemporary Significance of Impartation

Although it was determined that impartation is a valid practice in both the OT and NT, in order for the doctrine to have contemporary significance and to be practiced in accordance with biblical teaching, several positional thoughts must be given consideration.

6.1 What is spiritual impartation?

The Greek word μεταδίδωμι, as noted earlier, means to “give over” or “to give a share.” For the purpose of the study, it was defined as follows: “Spiritual impartation is the giving to or sharing of God’s grace with the lives of his people by way of blessings, spiritual gifts or material goods in answer to their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs” (cf. Luke 3:11; Rom 1:11; 12:8; 1 Cor 12:1–11; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:8).

6.2 *What are the scriptural guidelines for the practice of impartation?*

A casual reading of what Scripture teaches about spiritual gifts leads to the conclusion that God is a God of procedure and order. Generally speaking, in church meetings, “all things [have to] be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). In other words, the omnipotent Imparter demands that spiritual things be handled with “propriety” and in a “fitting” way (Fee 1987, 713). It therefore raises the question: What are the scriptural guidelines for the practice of impartation?

First, the recipients of impartations are persons who have a relationship with Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:15–17; 19:1–6; Rom 1:11; 12:1–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11; Arrington 2003, 234; Gause 2009, 114, 126). Second, since the term *μεταδίδωμι* is thought to include gifts such as salvation, healing, and mercy, unbelievers may and should be the recipients of these kinds of impartations (Cranfield 1975, 78–79; Hodge 1947, 25–26). Third, it is understood that impartations are not limited to a particular location, means, ritual or regimented form of worship. However, impartations may occur while persons engage in worship or while praying at the altar (Richie 2020, 124; Tomberlin 2010, 18–28). Fourth, believers may also receive impartations through the laying on of hands, and this is arguably the most prominent method through which believers receive impartations (Robinson 2008; Tipei 2009). However, as Fee (1994, 774) points out, the laying on of hands by believers and ministers is secondary to the work of God. Fifth, God’s blessings and gifts are imparted through spoken words. This entails that the sovereign power of God is made effective only when believers make proclamations in the name of, or through the authority of, Jesus (Mark 16:15–18; John 14:12–14; 16:23–24).⁷ Fifth, impartation of ordinary gifts such as mercy and giving are conveyed through acts of service. Put differently, believers are sovereignly imparted with the spiritual gift of giving and

mercy but are at liberty to choose the place, the person and time of its manifestation.

6.3 Which biblical impartations are valid for continual practice and how are they to be understood?

Impartations believed to have contemporary significance include the baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing, blessings, as well as πνευματικά, χαρίσματα, and δόματα gifts. They should be understood as a way to empower the believer (Acts 1:8), edify the body of Christ (1 Cor 14), confirm the gospel (Mark 16:14–20; Heb 2:1–4) and provide health and good will to both believers and unbelievers (Jas 5:13–16). Moreover, impartations are conveyed freely as a result of God’s grace and consequently cannot be attained through adherence to preconceived styles of worship, rituals or the practice of tithing and giving (Gause 2009, 124–126). Although believers may engage in one or all of these practices, these are not elements of a biblical theology of impartation.

6.4 Steps to discourage the abuse of the doctrine of impartation

One of the problems that caused Pentecostalism to be misunderstood by and misrepresented to non-Pentecostals concerns the abuse of the doctrine of impartation. Aberrant manifestations and theological error have led many outside Pentecostalism to see them as heretics. In order to correct this picture and to ensure that the practice of impartation within the Church of God is congruent with biblical teaching, steps must be taken to

7 In Acts 2:38 “name” signifies the authority and power of Jesus, thus identifying the source of Peter’s power and authority to heal the lame man (Arrington 2008, 97–98, Bruce 1981, 390–391).

discourage abuse of the doctrine of impartation, and especially of faulty teachings inherited from the past. Although a thorough exposition of every theoretical misunderstanding and problematic practice in the assembly would be beyond the scope of this summary, it is nevertheless useful to offer a brief positional statement for practice.

- Impartation of blessings and gifts are a legitimate biblical practice.
- Texts such as Acts 8:14–17 and 19:1–6, Romans 1:11, 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, Ephesians 4:7–13 and James 5:13–15 allow leaders to identify, describe, and explain the gifts that are relevant to believers. Moreover, Matthew 7:11, Acts 5:32 and Romans 12:1–8 explain what is required of the believer in order to receive those impartations.⁸ Furthermore, Mark 16:17–18 and Hebrews 2:4 indicate that believers who are imparted with gifts and blessings will experience the manifestation of those impartations in their lives as a sign of their reception. Hence, a correct theoretical and theological view on impartation that expunges heresy can only become a reality through sound biblical instruction.
- Imparted gifts are not natural human abilities; they are acquired abilities through the power of the Spirit and are to be used for the benefit of the body of Christ. Consequently, believers should desire to know God’s will from Scripture when utilizing their gifts and imparting to others.
- False teaching about impartation must be uprooted. Paul urged Timothy to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim 4:3–4). In other words, when dealing with questionable doctrinal practices, “The

8 Triplett (1970, 85–87) says “The disuse of the gifts can be traced to our failure in teaching their proper use.” He believes instruction is a must because, “gifts are not playthings for inexperienced children” (ibid.). Constable (2017, 63) stresses that, “Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with.”

best way to test what is spiritual is to ask if it is scriptural” (Triplett 1970, 86). Just as important is the willingness of leaders to intervene biblically when heretical views on impartation are being propagated or practiced. When open rebuke is not appropriate, then reproof must be dealt with privately and expeditiously (Matt 18:15–17). Correction can also be made in the form of written documents such as doctrinal position papers. Other effective means are disciplinary boards of inquiry that hold leaders accountable for what they teach and their integrity.

- Gifts, especially prophecies with impartation as purpose, ought to be properly judged in the light of the teaching and authority of Scripture. Those that are misused or found wanting need to be rectified. Leaders or other believers who use their gifts to deceive and/or manipulate others in order to benefit themselves should be removed from all leadership positions (cf. Joubert and Maartens 2017, 105–132).

7. Conclusion

The aim of this summary article has been to give a brief synopsis of some of the theoretical and practical misunderstandings related to the doctrine of impartation. The assessment focused primarily on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, healing, and blessings. It was determined that Scripture lends ample evidence that the doctrine of impartation is still valid for Pentecostalism and the Church of God. Hopefully, the information contained herein will provide further theological clarity that will minimize misunderstanding and/or abuse of the doctrine in practice, if not in Pentecostalism as a whole, then at least for leaders of the Church of God.

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The Emergence of Ancient Israel: A Model of Coherence between Archaeology and the Bible

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Abstract

The emergence of ancient Israel in the land of Canaan, in the thirteenth century BC, has been debated and re-debated for at least the last one hundred years. The initial model, setting forth how Israel emerged in Canaan, was known as the conquest model (biblical model) set forth by Albright in the 1920s. This model dominated the biblical and archaeological scene until the 1960s. As the conquest/biblical model's influence diminished, two other models were proposed; the peaceful infiltration model by Alt and Noth and the peasant revolt model set forth by Mendenhall and Gottwald. Other models would follow: the symbiosis model championed by Fritz and Finkelstein and the auto-ethnogenesis model suggested by Bunimovitz and Lederman. Part of the aftermath of these ongoing debates was the archaeological world's conclusion that archaeology had received the short end of the stick—that is, the biblical texts (the Bible) had for too long set

the agenda and determined the interpretation of the material culture that was unearthed. In an attempt to correct this practice, archaeologists set forth to move the pendulum back toward a favouring of archaeology as the preeminent source in terms of setting agendas for excavations and interpreting the uncovered material. To this end, the pendulum had not only swung back in favour of archaeology over the Bible, the effect of the swinging pendulum was to sever the Bible from the discussion almost entirely. Archaeologists who gave the Bible any credibility did so with major disclaimers attached, most often noting that the stories or events were not true or historical, but did contain some memories or kernel of truth in regard to the way the people remembered, or wanted to remember, Israel's emergence in Canaan. This dissertation focuses on presenting archaeology and the Bible as separate yet equally important disciplines in the discussion of the emergence of Israel in Canaan. It seeks to present a model (an eclectic model) in which the material data from archaeology and the biblical texts cohere, in other words, the many instances of convergences do not suggest an either/or, but both. This work demonstrates a model of coherence between archaeology and the Bible.

Keywords

origin models, archaeology/Bible, convergence/coherence, eclectic model

1. Is There One Model?

Is there one model or theory that definitively demonstrates how ancient Israel emerged in thirteenth-century Canaan? The question of the origin of Israel in the land of Canaan has been debated and re-debated for at least a hundred years. The initial model (the conquest model) set forth by

W. F. Albright in the 1920s dominated the biblical and archaeology scene until the 1960s. With the diminishing influence of Albright's model, two others were proffered: (1) the peaceful infiltration model by Alt and Noth, and (2) the peasant revolt model proposed by Mendenhall and Gottwald. Others would follow: the symbiosis hypothesis championed by Fritz and Finkelstein and the auto-ethnogenesis model set forth by Bunimovitz, Lederman, and Dever.

As the debate heated and cooled over the years, the archaeological world came to the conclusion that archaeology had received the short end of the stick—that is, the biblical texts (the Bible) had set the agenda and determined the interpretation of the material culture that was unearthed. In an attempt to correct this practice, archaeologists set forth to move the pendulum back toward a favouring of archaeology as the preeminent source in terms of setting agendas for excavations and interpreting the uncovered material. To this end, the pendulum had not only swung in the direction of the preeminence of archaeology over the Bible, the Bible became severed from the discussion almost entirely. Archaeologists who still give the Bible some credence do so with major disclaimers attached to their comments, most often noting that the stories or events were not true or historical, but did contain some memories or some kernel of truth in regard to the way the people remembered, or wanted to remember, Israel's emergence in Canaan.

My dissertation focuses on presenting archaeology and the Bible as separate yet important players in the discussion of the emergence of Israel in Canaan. The many significant lines of convergence between the archaeological data and biblical texts demonstrate a clear coherence between the two. Thus, often it is not a question of either/or, but rather both. That is, neither the archaeology data nor the biblical text has the

final word, but both contribute in their own way to the interpretation of the material.

The answer to the initial question is, no, there is not one model or theory that definitively explains the emergence of ancient Israel in Canaan. Rather, it was the result of a combination of models/theories (an eclectic model) that, when viewed together, illustrate how ancient Israel eventually (over a two-hundred-year period) secured the land of Canaan given to them by God.¹

2. The Beginning—A Worthy Project or Not?

I was first introduced to the difficult task of properly associating the material culture unearthed during an excavation project with the biblical text during my early days of excavating at Tel Beth-Shemesh, Israel.² Occasionally, I was privy to conversations between co-directors, the field director and supervisors discussing how to interpret items (artefacts) that surfaced during the dig. Questions often focused on whether or not the material finds were related to the Canaanites, Israelites, or Philistines. Other questions dealt with what the finds had to do with the cultural milieu of a border-town so close to the Philistines. Admittedly, some decisions were reversed after further investigation or another season of work, while others have been maintained, and will be at least until something proves different.

Working at a site (Tel Beth-Shemesh) where an array of tenth-century material architecture has been surfaced, my interest in the topic of

1 I am deeply thankful for the patient guidance provided by Dr. Bill Domeris. His sage advice transformed my work into a well-ordered presentation.

2 My first year working at Tel Beth-Shemesh was 2000; the summer of 2019 marked my 16th season.

when and how Israel emerged in Canaan was fuelled. However, the tipping point was a lecture presented by Tel Beth-Shemesh Field Director, Dr Dale W Manor, at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama in 2012.³

Manor's presentation covered the major proposals for the origin of Israel in Canaan: Albright's biblical model that eventually came to be known as the conquest model, the peaceful infiltration model, the peasant revolt model, the symbiotic model, and the auto-ethnogenesis model. It was during Manor's remarks on the auto-ethnogenesis model that my decision to pursue a detailed study of the origin of Israel was formulated. Manor quoted Faust, who noted that "the consensus today is that all previous suggestions have some truth regarding the origins of the ancient Israelites ... [although] the percentage and weight given to each process varies" (Faust 2006, 173). Manor went on to say that Faust had failed to integrate biblical elements into the narrative (2013, 102).

After hearing Manor quote from Faust, I decided it would be a worthy project to integrate relevant biblical texts into archaeological data and note lines of agreement (convergences) as well as areas where neither offered any light on the question of Israel's emergence in Canaan. I discovered that the relationship between the Bible and archaeology is fluid, not static. Both can help understand the other, and neither can, nor should, be used as a critique of the other. Merling correctly notes, "They must live separately and be blended and amended together cautiously" (2004, 29–42). It has been a profitable and worthy journey.

The journey began with a brief introduction of the models for Israel's emergence in Canaan set forth by scholars over the past ninety-plus

3 Manor's topic was *The Emergence of Israel: The Bible and Archaeology* (2013, 90–110).

years. A full treatment of each model, and the role it played, if any, in the emergence of Israel in Canaan, was left until later in the thesis.

Dever (2001, 7) pointed out that the mainstream European biblical scholarship had virtually given up on writing a satisfactory history of ancient Israel. Halpern (2010, 279) noted that the investigation of the Israelite settlement and the discussion of textual-archaeological correlations had grown sterile and stale. This led Dever (2001, 76) to observe that judging by the scant discussions in the literature, the notion of “theory” was met with apathy at best and often with open hostility.

My research revealed that most American archaeologists have shown some interest in what is usually called “theory and method”; however, their understanding of method has generally been only improved digging and recording techniques. This lack of inquiry into the very intellectual foundations of the discipline, basically absent in American archaeological circles, causes Israelis to view the few attempts at theory-building by Americans with scepticism (Dever 2001, 76).

It is exciting to find that the relationship between the archaeological world and the realm of biblical history seems at times to work more closely than in past years. At least the language of some influential archaeologists reflects a desire to find some role for the biblical texts in the discussion of the history of Israel. Particularly Bunimovitz and Faust have offered a positive view toward the integration of archaeology and the Bible, noting that using the Bible as a cultural document to answer questions will restore its central place in the archaeological discourse of the biblical period:

Conceiving of both the biblical text and the ancient material artifacts as cultural documents, we believe that their inspection will be fruitful and enlightening. Words and artifacts can give

us access to the mindset of the people of the biblical period.
(Bunimovitz and Faust 2010:43)

The position suggested by these two fine scholars is very interesting for those of us who consider the Bible to be more than just a “cultural document.” I do not consider it a problem that they suggest a new archaeological agenda lead the way, rather than the agenda being dictated by the biblical texts (Bunimovitz and Faust 2010, 44). However, I do find it discouraging that the majority of scholarship, not just the minimalists, continue to view the biblical texts as non-historical. Murray wrote in 1988:

It does not matter whether the stories ... are true ... And even a forgery is an important piece of evidence for the period that perpetrated it.... This principle of unconscious revelation through representation ... is one of the most powerful tools in the modern historian’s study of mentalities. (1988, xxxi).

Bunimovitz and Faust’s positive statement concerning the relationship of the Bible and the archaeological agenda is essentially negated in their agreement with Murray’s statement from some ten years earlier (2010, 48).

More than thirty years ago (in the 1980s), Dever (2010, 349) argued for the separation of what was then popularly referred to as “biblical archaeology” from biblical studies in general, and theological studies in particular. Later in the 1990s, Dever, one of the most vocal advocates in favour of a secular Syro-Palestinian archaeology, called for a “new biblical archaeology” (1993, 706–722). Disappointingly, Dever’s plea for a new biblical archaeology along new lines of construction went generally unheeded (Bunimovitz and Faust 2010, 47).

Bunimovitz and Faust applauded the effort to bring to the forefront a new biblical archaeology. However, they suggested that the this would

not directly address the need for a more sophisticated integration between the biblical texts and archaeological finds, nor would new methodologies necessarily transform an old agenda (2010, 47; Clarke 1973, 11). The positive rhetoric suggesting that the Bible once again be at the heart of the archaeological discourse (Bunimovitz and Faust 2010, 50) is quickly diminished by a critical analysis of the language used in regard to this so-called return.

While the state of the relationship between archaeology and biblical history is encouraging, there is still a wide gulf between men and women of faith and the true adherent to the preeminence of archaeology over the Bible. Although noting that the Bible is valuable in the new archaeological agenda, it is especially disheartening to read Bunimovitz and Faust's description of the Bible as an "unconscious revelation" (2010, 50).

3. Joshua and Judges

A critical aspect of the research hinged on an examination and application of two important sources—the biblical books of Joshua and Judges. In fact, Dever (1990, 40) notes that the first category of evidence for the emergence of Israel in Canaan comes from the biblical texts themselves. Butler (2014a, 337) notes that the literary unity of Joshua 24, 29–32 is a major indicator that the book of Judges is presented as a sequel to the book of Joshua. Judges begins with the death of Joshua and the question of who would lead the nation against the Canaanites. Both Judges and Joshua provide the historical picture of how God intended the Israelite nation to secure the land promised to Abraham, and what was actually accomplished by the Israelites in the process. Both stories reveal the Lord God of Israel as faithful to his promises, even in the face of Israel's failures to comply fully with his directives.

The chief question, in regard to the biblical text and the origins of ancient Israel, is how the biblical texts pertaining to the emergence of Israel in Canaan are to be understood, and how they are to be illuminated by the archaeological data. Coote and Whitelam (2010, 14) point out that the Bible has been the most influential source of the prevailing ideas about the nature of Israel from its inception to the present—ultimately functioning as a document of faith that preserves the life, shape, and identity of many communities of faith. Ben-Tor's (1992, 9) powerful statement that “if one eliminates the Bible from the archaeology of the land of Israel in the second and first millennia BCE, you have deprived it of its soul,” should be considered by every archaeologist working in the land of Israel.

Without going into a detailed analysis, it has been suggested that the book of Judges presents a significantly different and more accurate picture of the taking of the land of Canaan by the Israelite tribes than the book of Joshua (Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999, 65; Dever 1990, 79). After the demise of Albright's conquest theory, Joshua was viewed as problematic history, and attention was directed to Judges, which seemed to tell a story that at least did not contradict the archaeological evidence (Moore and Kelle 2011, 107). The two accounts definitely offer a striking contrast in places as to the emergence of Israel in Canaan and the extent to which the Israelites initially possessed the land.

Clearly, the purpose of the book of Judges is to portray the unfolding of Israel's history from the death of Joshua down to the advent of the monarchy—an era referred to as “the period of the judges” (Goslinga 1986, 196). The biblical text has little to say about the day-to-day activities of many of the judges, although it does seem to distinguish the activities of major judges who saved the people from imminent dangers, as opposed to judges with no such deeds attributed to them (Isserlin 2001, 68). Judges

primarily presents a general picture of an essentially rural society linked by a common faith living in turbulent times where “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Isserlin 2001:67; Judg 21:25, KJV).⁴ The first three chapters of Judges broadly outline the conduct of the Israelites during the period of the judges with regard to the Canaanites and their gods, and with regard to the Lord himself (Goslinga 1986, 197).

On the one hand, Judges 2:11–23 evokes an era in which the Israelites and Canaanites lived side by side, sometimes amicably and at other times antagonistically (Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999, 65). On the other hand, Joshua reflects a more theologically-based document, highlighting the direct involvement of the Lord in the eventual securing of the land of promise. A superficial reading of Joshua can give the impression that the Israelites occupied Canaan by means of a divinely-enabled blitzkrieg that put them in control of the entire country and encouraged all the Canaanites to leave (Goldingay 2011, 90). However, Judges clearly shows this was not this case. In fact, Judges 1 presents a very human process in which the Israelite occupation of Canaan was actually quite piecemeal (Goldingay 2011, 90).

Goldingay notes that an examination of how Joshua works as a narrative is important, if one is to truly understand the message of the book:

The whole is put together as a sequence: the introductory challenge, the taking of the land, the allocation of the land and the closing challenges. The book gives much weight to certain stories (notable Rahab, Jericho, Ai) and skips over the detail of many of the other events. (Goldingay 2015, 148)

4 All subsequent scripture references, are from the ESV unless otherwise stated, but this one is from the KJV.

Goldingay's (2015, 149) comments give credence to the fact that Joshua's account is highly theological rather than giving the chronological historical details of Israel's emergence in Canaan. While maintaining that the stories are not fictional, Goldingay contends that they are basically factual stories that use the techniques of their culture, which are different from those of modern Western storytelling.

The twelfth and eleventh centuries BC in Palestine are usually labelled as either the period of the judges, following biblical historiography, or the pre-monarchical period (Ahlstrom 1993, 371). Chronology is vague in Judges concerning single events and the total length of the period (Isserlin 2001, 67). In general, the material found in the book of Judges demands exhaustive critical analysis on a par with the book of Joshua (Bloch-Smith 1999, 65). Judges begins with a flashback into the book of Joshua when Judah and Simeon had generally exterminated their enemies and relatively secured their allotments (Judges 1:1–21; Manor 2005, 14). However, the remaining tribes had failed to secure their allotments, and they are pictured as living as neighbours with the Canaanites (Judges 1:22–36). Judges presents a picture of the occupation of Palestine that makes it clear it was a long process, accomplished by the efforts of individual clans, and only partially completed (Bright 2000, 129). This process is best seen in the first chapter of the book of Judges.

Judges obviously deals with leadership or a crisis in leadership (Judg 2:10). The crisis was born out of the failure of Joshua's generation to properly train the next generation (Butler 2009, lxxvii). Judges also deals with the fact of Israel's disobedience to the will of God, which is defined twice (Judg 2:11; 3:7). The people never passed God's test (Judg 3:4), which resulted in their limited occupation of the land of Canaan. In some sections of Judges, God's guidance and specific intentions are clearly spoken of, while

in others it is as if God left the nation to itself for a time: this is especially true of chapters 17 to 21 (Goslinga 1986, 201). Here, Israel's political and social troubles can be traced directly to the people's failure to follow the example of Joshua's generation (Judg 2:17). Judges 2:11–19 presents a deliberate sketch of the course of Israel's history during this period (Goslinga 1986, 199).

Rather than attempting a strict chronology, Judges presents a theological history with a geographical and moral framework (Butler 2009, lxvi). As a source for examining the emergence of Israel in Canaan, opinions differ as to the usefulness of Judges. The traditional view is represented by Keil (2001, 248), who maintains that Judges was written during the time of Samuel based on oral and written documents. Ahlstrom (1993, 375) represents the postmodern Scandinavian approach, noting that the author of Judges did not intend to describe actual events, since such a literary pattern cannot be used for writing history. Butler (2009, lxxi) views Judges as a necessary historical construct by the editor, who collected and combined the hero stories.

Halpern (1988, 276–277) argued in his work *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* that a historical core in Judges is evident and recoverable. Moore and Kelle (2011, 107–108) wrote:

Halpern's defense of Judges was the most complete and systematic expression of the nonminimalist position, and most historians have continued to use Judges as a historical source. Few have included specific scenarios or people from Judges in history, but most at least note that Judges and archaeology do not appear to contradict each other.

Moore and Kelle (2011, 108) further argued that Judges exhibits exactly the kind of society that would produce monarchical states such as Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon, and should not be discounted.

It is clear that the book of Joshua highlights only three military campaigns (Josh 6–8; 10; 11). Merling (1996, 210) asks whether it is possible that Joshua was written, not so much as a book of conquest, but rather as a book of confirmation. In other words, perhaps the primary goal of the book of Joshua was to confirm and reaffirm the uniqueness of Israel, as evidenced by the presence and guidance of God (Merling 1996, 155). The first half of the book of Joshua tells of the military exploits of Israel, with special emphasis on the work of God, rather than providing details of the battles and the extent of the devastation of the cities. The material gleaned from a study of the source books, Joshua and Judges, is very important when comparing the archaeological data with the biblical texts.

4. Excavations of Canaanite Mounds and Regional Surveys

The major source of archaeological data used to research and present evidence for the early models suggested for the emergence of Israel in Canaan came from the excavation of significant Canaanite mounds during the twentieth century. Obviously, the mounds were excavated prior to the advent of modern procedures and protocols that began to develop and continue to be honed even into the twenty-first century. Several of the major sites such as Hazor, Jericho, Ai, Lachish, Dan, and Jerusalem were investigated by studying conclusions drawn by the major excavators at each of these sites and by reading the analysis of major scholars in the field.

As one might surmise, there are a variety of opinions as to whether or not the evidence, or lack of evidence, favors an Israelite conquest of these sites or whether some other nation attacked these cities. In the early stages of discussing the large mounds, an argument for or against is not presented, just the major tenets offered from the excavation reports. Later in my thesis, I dig deeper into the results and make application and

demonstrate convergences, or at least possibilities, of destruction brought upon these cities by the nation of Israel.

The importance of the large Canaanite mounds excavation is pertinent to the question of the origin of Israel in Canaan; however, these excavations only tell part of the story. A significant development, a missing part of the puzzle, is added when the regional surveys are analyzed and the results added to the total data gathered from the mounds. I intentionally refrained from a full discussion of the results of the excavations at the mounds and the regional surveys until later in my thesis. At that point a more thorough description of the results at such sites as Jericho, Ai, Hazor, and others was presented in view of how the material finds concur with the biblical text along with conclusions as to how this evidence contributes to the understanding of ancient Israel emergence in Canaan.

5. The Emerging Models

As my thesis moved closer to its conclusion, I necessarily included some repetition of material, such as the five major models, in order to bring the reader up to speed without them having to refer back. However, I also expanded the dialogue to include the reasons to reject each model as the definitive primary theory explaining the origin of Israel in Canaan.

For example, Albright recognized the “elusive” difficulty associated with the task of determining the origin of ancient Israel (Albright 1935, 10). Despite acknowledging some difficulties with the conquest model, he defended it from the 1920s until his death in 1971 (Dever 2003, 41). However, with the onslaught of new archaeological data, the question of Israelite origins grew more and more intractable.

A few years prior to his death, Albright recognized the need for a revision of the conquest model, since the emerging archaeological picture

was difficult to mesh with the biblical account. In his own words, Albright (1965:95) noted, “at present we cannot propose any safe reconstruction of the actual course of events during the period of the Israelite settlement in Palestine.” In addition, Wright, who earned his PhD under Albright’s supervision and who is probably the best spokesman for the conquest model, said:

It has now become necessary, however, to modify the common scholarly view. For one thing, a closer reading of the Deuteronomic historian’s work in Joshua makes it quite clear that while he claims spectacular success in overrunning the country for Joshua, he is quite aware of much left to be done (cf. 11:13, 22). (Wright 1962,69)

It should be noted that tempering or adjusting the conquest model did not mean redefining what conquest meant—it remained just that, a belief that Israel acquired the land of Canaan by means of war. As late as 1982, Yadin (1982, 18) said that “in its broad outline the archaeological record supports the narrative in Joshua and Judges as Albright said.”

I followed the same line of reasoning in examining the peaceful infiltration model, peasant revolt model, symbiosis hypothesis, and auto-ethnogenesis model. In each case, the individual models failed to offer a conclusive explanation of the emergence of ancient Israel in Canaan.

6. A New Perspective

In preparation for the presentation of a new model, I set forth to present a new perspective, a new way of looking at and thinking about how ancient Israel emerged in Canaan in the twelfth century BC. I showed that the preponderance of evidence in favor of there being a significant ‘tightness of

fit' or convergence in so many scenarios substantially supported my thesis and will play a role in future enquiries regarding the manner in which ancient Israel emerged in Canaan.

In the process, I took each of the models and compared them with source material (Joshua and Judges), the excavation data from the large Canaanite mounds, and the findings from the regional surveys. During this final in-depth look at the models, other contributory subjects were intermingled with the analysis—subjects such as the importance of the Merneptah Stele (the Israel Stele), ethnic markers (the four-room house, cisterns, collared-rim jars, silos, the cessation of eating pork), and the question of the continuity of Late Bronze Age culture (particularly pottery assemblages) into the Iron Age I period.

7. The Emergence of Israel in Canaan: An Eclectic Model

Writing as a man of faith, the biblical text is very important in all arenas of my life, whether during worship or during excavations in Israel at Tel Beth-Shemesh. It never crossed my mind to write this thesis in order to convince archaeologists such as Faust and Bunimovitz, and others, to embrace the word of God, the Bible, as fully inspired and without error;⁵ rather, my argument centers upon asking that the Bible be given its just due in terms of what it can and cannot do in regard to the study of the origin of ancient Israel in Canaan.

5 While the author of this thesis believes by faith that the Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word of God—recognition is also made concerning places where obvious exaggeration has occurred and texts reflect theological reality and not necessarily the current reality—it has been noted several times that the book of Joshua has a theological component that emphasizes God's role in giving the land of Canaan to the Israelites—not that they followed his command to take it and destroy the Canaanite population.

I noted early on in my thesis that I am at ease with allowing the archaeological data to set the agenda for excavators, as noted by Bunimovitz and Faust (2010, 43):

We envision a different integration between archaeology and the Bible. On the one hand, an archaeological agenda, independent of the biblical text, will open a much wider range of social and cultural questions. On the other hand, using the Bible as a cultural document to answer these questions will restore its central place in the archaeological discourse of the biblical period. Conceiving both biblical texts and ancient material artifacts as cultural documents, we believe that their inspection will be fruitful and enlightening.

However, I am absolutely against the tendency of modern archaeologists to dismiss the Bible completely, except when it seems to confirm or bolster their particular viewpoint or conclusion.

Bunimovitz and Faust (2010, 43) speak of the Bible, as well as artefacts, as cultural documents. A cursory reading of this could lead one to believe that the two entities are equals. However, this is not the case, as can be seen in further extracts that clearly reflect their position:

While 'liberating' the research agenda from the 'shackles' of the Bible, it is rather the new approach to biblical archaeology suggested here that reinstates the Bible at the heart of the archaeological discourse of the Iron Age.... We propose to reverse the usual scientific procedure in biblical archaeology.... From a cultural perspective, the Bible as an 'unconscious revelation' is invaluable. (Bunimovitz and Faust 2010, 50)

Bunimovitz and Faust (2010, 48) are in agreement with Murray, whom they quote as saying:

As Murray (1998, xxxi) wrote: ‘It does not matter whether the stories ... are true ... This principle of unconscious revelation through representation...is one of the most powerful tools in the modern historian’s study of mentalities.

Statements referring to the Bible as “unconscious revelation” do not compute. Further, it is hard to fathom how one can propose that the Bible be returned to its central place in the study of archaeology and then refer to the Bible as an unconscious revelation that has shackled the field of archaeology for years. According to Bunimovitz and Faust (2010, 48), the biblical text is problematic as a source for comprehensive historical reconstruction.

8. Final Thoughts

The appeal of my thesis is for readers to give serious consideration to the numerous, clearly demonstrated lines of convergence and some that are highly likely. In so doing, it is my hope and prayer that a plausible case is successfully made for an eclectic model that demonstrates the coherence of the archaeological data and the biblical text—a model showing the emergence of Israel as a complex journey carried out over a lengthy period of time—some two hundred years.⁶

I am cognizant of the fact that the proposed eclectic model is not the end to all questions concerning the origin of ancient Israel in Canaan;

6 From their entry into the land around 1207 BC or a bit earlier, to the time of David’s kingship over Israel in the tenth century BC.

however, it may serve as a starting point for future conversation about this slippery topic. Perhaps it is fitting to close out this brief article, as I did in the larger thesis, reflecting on the words of William Dever. He noted that when biblical and archaeological lines converge, one arrives at what historians often refer to as “the balance of probability,” or what is known in jurisprudence as “a preponderance of evidence” (Dever 2017, 44). He continues by correctly pointing out that these convergences may not provide iron-clad proof for either the archaeological data or the biblical texts; but, they do offer what can be known and what we need to know in order to get on with our lives (Dever 2017, 44).

I intend to move on with life while continuing to contemplate and study the complex questions of how ancient Israel emerged in the land of Canaan. If my work has contributed anything worthwhile to the subject of Israel’s emergence in Canaan, may it be that whoever continues the search will always be even-handed with both the archaeological data and the biblical text allowing each one to play its role, if any, in the pursuit of truth.

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Chiasmus as a Literary Device for Understanding Judges

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Abstract

Since all Scripture is inspired by God and focused on the history of redemption, this essay will establish that the final editor of the Book of Judges convincingly contributes to the discipline of biblical theology by using two stylistic figures that undeniably contribute to the understanding of the book. First, we will demonstrate that the almost permanent use of chiasmus goes beyond its usual function as a stylistic figure and is akin to a literary genre, thus allowing a more relevant interpretation of the text. Then, but to a lesser extent, we will indicate how irony permeates almost all of the stories in Judges, giving them not only a secondary level of meaning but frequently a humorous touch.

1. Introduction

The book of Judges is probably one of the most difficult books of the Bible to read. Historically, it is the continuation of the book of Joshua; one ends where the other begins, with the death of Joshua (Josh 24:29–31, Judg 2:6–9). When one leaves the account at the end of the book of Joshua (ch.

24), military success has been achieved through four major battles and all the tribes of Israel are gathered in Shechem to renew their attachment to God by making a covenant with him through their leader, Joshua. This is a reminder of the covenant established in Sinai (Exod 19–24) and renewed in Moab (Deut 29). Quite understandably, the success of Joshua’s conquest fostered hope for an equally successful period of consolidation when the individual tribes took possession of their respective territories, but the book of Judges is both surprising and perplexing, for we see Israel’s flagrant failure to clean out the pockets of resistance and thus obey the commandments of the Lord. The contrast between the two books could not be more stark and many questions arise, notably: Why this failure? What are the theological themes that the final editor wished to emphasize? Is the literary style important and does it contribute to the understanding of the book?

2. Methodology

First of all, I will demonstrate how we arrived at the final, “canonical” version of the text, starting with the oral transmission of the major heroic exploits and ending with the addition of introductions and conclusions by the final editor. This will include a review of the Deuteronomist theses of Noth and his successors regarding the development of the text. We will also take into account both the contribution of various disciplines of biblical criticism and more recent studies in order to arrive at a synthesis that corresponds to the data available to date.

Secondly, I will establish the validity of the particular use of chiasmus as a literary genre in the book of Judges by tracing the phenomenon from its use in ancient literature to its use in biblical literature.

Thirdly, I will indicate how the use of chiasmus contributes to a relevant interpretation of Judges by identifying the main theological themes that could otherwise remain opaque. Finally, I will comment briefly and illustrate the function of irony in Judges.

3. Scholarship on the Composition Of Judges

Most commentators and scholars believe that the book of Judges is the result of several different sources in its final form. But that is where the convergence of ideas ends. It would be normal to encounter some minor variations in the theories about the composition of any book, but in the case of Judges there is an astonishing polarization with irreconcilable differences. Even among evangelical commentators the differences are substantial, forcing us to evaluate and choose.

3.1 *The influence of Martin Noth*

Is Deuteronomy the last book of the Pentateuch or the first of the historical books? Here, in simple terms, is the question that caused a major theological tsunami in the early twentieth century when Noth (1943) wrote his book *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Deuteronomist History). Here is a resumé of Noth's essential ideas, particularly in relation to Judges:

3.1.1 A uniform literary work

By emphasizing the impressive “Deuteronomistic” content from Joshua to 2 Kings, Noth detached Deuteronomy from the Pentateuch (the remaining four books becoming the Tetrateuch) and affirmed that all the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings are part of the same work written by the same anonymous sixth century writer to whom he gave the title “Deuteronomist.”

Noth affirmed that the term “author” is accurate, as it is not an editor who has made minor additions or clarifications to existing texts.

Although he conceded that the author used different sources, he claimed that these sources are integrated into a new, unique and uniform literary work. In addition, he also claimed that this work was written during or after the Babylonian exile, but, in any case, in the sixth century BC after the fall of the two kingdoms.

3.1.2 A theological explanation of the exile

He likewise claimed that the oldest traditions found in the Pentateuch cannot for the most part be verified. He contended moreover, that the author or Deuteronomist did not intend to reconstruct the history of the people of Israel but rather to give a theological explanation of the exile. Noth was not as preoccupied with the historical accuracy of the period of the Judges as he was about the historical situation of the sixth century—that of the exile. Consequently, this vast writing project would have been the result of the philosophy of the Deuteronomist who integrated into his final work several more or less fictionalized heroic narratives from the past, including those of the Judges.

3.1.3 Structure of Israel during the period of Judges

He also put forward the idea that before the establishment of the monarchy, Israel functioned as an amphictyony, that is to say as a close confederation of tribes gathered around the same sanctuary.

3.1.4 Literary structure of Judges

Noth’s approach to Judges is illuminating especially as we consider what he has eliminated from the book. First, he considered that the period of

Judges begins at Judges 2:6 (the second introduction), which he juxtaposes with Joshua 23, and ends with the farewell speech of Samuel, the last judge, in 1 Samuel 12. From this observation, he concluded that since the story of Jephthah is common to both texts (Judg 10 and 1 Sam 12) it must constitute the turning point or pivot of the book. This is both a curious, even hasty conclusion, because how to explain that both Gideon and Baraq (Bedân) are also found in these same two texts? He also juxtaposed Judges 13:1 and 1 Samuel 1:1, thus eliminating the account of Samson and the two conclusions or epilogues affirming that they were not included in the original manuscript as not fitting in with the philosophy of the Deuteronomist.

Not everything should be rejected in the ideas put forward by Noth, because few historians or scholars contest that the Deuteronomist History was the product or compilation of several manuscripts from different sources, and therefore of various editors, over a fairly long period.

3.2 Noth's successors

Noth's successors, while following his basic thesis of the Deuteronomist History, moved away from the idea of a single author, advocating the idea of several editors and multiple additions or layers to the book over a fairly long period of time. Wenham (2000, 46), a convinced Deuteronomist, succinctly summarized the ideas of these scholars when he wrote:

Within the so-called deuteronomistic history of Deuteronomy to 2 Kings there are sufficient differences between different books to make it likely that they were not all out of the same literary mould. Though there is a theological outlook common to them all, which may be broadly termed deuteronomic/istic, the books have their own distinctive features which suggest that they are of diverse origin. As far as Judges is concerned we

shall be following the trend in modern studies to read the book as a work in its own right, not just as one volume in a unified history of pre-exilic Israel.

Over the past decades, Noth's ideas have been studied and reinvented *ad infinitum*.¹

3.3 *The influence of biblical criticism*

Beginning with source criticism we can see a progression, albeit with a dotted line, to the compositional approach, through the observation of the complementarity between canonical and literary criticism.

At the risk of oversimplifying the history of biblical criticism of the last two centuries, it nevertheless seems fair to point out that Crossan, Boling, Auld, Childs, Alter, Clines, and Klein, the last two from the Sheffield School, are among the scholars who embody an innovative approach to narrative texts. Unfortunately, whether intentional or not, these authors create an artificial divide between a historical approach to the texts, in other words, a study of the texts to reconstruct the history of the time, and a literary approach that seeks to extract theological themes from the text. This division is regrettable because narrative texts should contribute to our knowledge of history on an epistemological level, but also inform us theologically. Reducing the narratives of the judges to more or less romanticized legends only widens the gap between the two camps. This short excerpt from Krentz (1975, 64–66) is very timely:

¹ I highly recommend reading the detailed evaluation of Noth by Jeremy Hutton. 2009. *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Critical methods used with common sense and operating within a framework that does not exclude the supernatural are an important and necessary aid to biblical interpretation. The result is a better understanding of the grammatical and historical meaning of the Bible. The course of biblical history is clarified and it is possible to see more clearly the gaps in our knowledge. The historical character of the Bible is emphasized, the great differences in culture and society between the biblical and modern worlds are highlighted, as well as the purpose of a passage. All this leads to a better theological understanding.

As we move from source criticism through to literary criticism, it would be incongruous not to mention the compositional approach, which seeks to establish links between the macro-propositions of a text. According to one of the secular protagonists of this discipline, Jean-Michel Adam (2009), any text of a certain length is composed of a number, sometimes quite large, of interdependent sections that are part of a predefined plan or text and lead to the final text.

One of the main Biblical protagonists of this approach is John Sailhamer. He postulates that the message of the text depends as much on “how it is written” as on “what it means” (1987, 308). He writes:

The task of a compositional analysis ... is to propose the method and techniques employed by an author to produce a final text. What major units of text did the author use to construct the final text? What functions do the different units of the final text play in the light of the whole? What are the final touches given to the text by the author that determine how the text will be read and received? What is the religious and theological perspective of the final text? (Sailhamer 1987, 308)

According to Sailhamer, the way an author has assembled the macro-propositions to create his text reflects the theological perspective of the text. The compositional approach focuses on the connection between the different sections (macro-propositions) in order to create a theologically meaningful text.

The model proposed here takes seriously the idea that biblical texts have authors and that the meanings intended by them can be discovered by reading their texts. The notion of authorship is the recognition of a decisive moment in the history of a text when it becomes an entity in itself and is therefore capable of being read in its entirety and in its parts. Editorial authorship implies intentionality, purpose and meaning. It is a recognition of the intelligent design of a text. (Sailhamer 2009, 162)

This approach has the following advantages. First of all, it makes it possible to take the final form of a text or a book of the Bible seriously. Secondly, it allows us to understand how different sections are put together to form a coherent whole.

4. Scholarship on Chiasmus

The word chiasmus is the Latin term from Greek χιάσμα (crossing), from the Greek χιάζω, *chiázō*, (to shape like the letter X).

A chiasmus is an inversion of parallelism that tends towards a central idea or moves away from it, and that highlights the interpretation of a text, either by comparisons which are reinforced by exact repetitions or synonyms, or by contrasts indicated by antitheses.

4.1 History of chiasmus in antiquity

Before being recognized and defined as a figure of style, chiasmus was already identified as a literary genre in writings dating from the third millennium BC, some say from the eleventh millennium BC in Chinese texts. But it was elevated to the status of a rhetorical art by the Greeks in the fourth century BC, which gave rise to speeches of great beauty and proverbs that have survived through time, such as: It is not the oath that makes us believe the man, but the man the oath (Aeschylus, Fragment 385). Since then, chiasmus has been regarded more as a style of rhetoric than as a literary genre.

Evolved forms of chiasmus in Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic and Greek texts have been amply demonstrated. Douglas (2007) states that anthropological studies have discovered chiasmus in Austronesian, Indonesian, Hawaiian and Vietnamese texts, as well as in the languages of Papua, Thailand and Myanmar.

Even more astonishingly, she points out that chiastic inversions in Chinese literature have been discovered from the eleventh millennium BC. According to Douglas, this was linked to a form of divination that interpreted the marks on turtle shells. The turtle represents the cosmos and its upper rounded shell symbolizes the sky while the lower flat shell evokes the earth. On the upper part, five horizontal lines are divided by a line running from head to tail. These lines represent the five elements: water, iron, earth, fire and wood and communicate a primitive form of reading by inversion. Over the centuries, this form of divination has been absorbed into the cosmological model of Yin and Yang (Vandermeersch, 1989).

4.2 *History of chiasmus in Bible literature*

The importance of chiasmus in the exegesis of biblical texts was recognized in the eighteenth century through the work of John Bengel (1742) and by an Anglican bishop, Robert Lowth, who gave a series of lectures on biblical poetry at Oxford in 1753. Despite this, the following decades were marked by skepticism and even disdain. Fortunately, chiasmus has enjoyed a revival of interest and gained prominence thanks to the remarkable works of Lund (1942) and Welch (2007).

It was Nils Lund who popularized the importance of chiasmus in the approach to biblical texts. He made it possible to go beyond the question of the simple existence of chiasmus and to address the question of its usefulness or *raison d'être*. It was a major step forward.

Since then, the question that has arisen concerns the limits of the chiastic structure in Scripture. Is it reserved only for poems and proverbs? Can it be present in narrative texts? Another question that needs to be asked concerns the length of chiastic texts. Here again, we see that chiasmus exists in more complicated structures encompassing whole sections or even entire books.

4.3 *Objectives of chiasmus*

According to Miesner (1974, 36), chiasmus has four functions: (1) to clarify the meaning of the whole (macro), (2) to understand the use of words (micro), (3) to help remember and memorize, and (4) literary aesthetics.

Meynet (1997) agrees with Miesner in many respects, but he goes much further by asserting that the human authors of the Bible used these common literary structures of the time in order to arouse curiosity and increase emotional impact.

Douglas (2007) perceptively points out that writing without the body language and intonation of the voice can seem flat, and that this diminishes the emotional impact. The chiasmic structure fills this “physical” void with symmetries, analogies, ambiguities, and double entendres.

McCoy, together with Meynet, Blomberg, Welch, and Webb insist that this structure is indispensable for the exegesis of a text.

Although the majority of biblical scholars today recognize the use of chiasmus in Old and New Testament literature, some still tend to see it primarily as a literary curiosity. Therefore, although the use of chiasmus in biblical texts may be openly acknowledged as a manifestation of the author’s literary art, it is often considered of little importance in interpreting the meaning of a text. Such an attitude ignores the fact that the structural organization of any communication, whether written or oral, contributes integrally to its overall message. (McCoy 2003, 30)

In line with this, Welch (1977, 172) writes, “The meaning of a literary work is communicated as much by the structure of the work as by its content.”

It is important to emphasize that writers were previously faced with two difficulties concerning markers in the text that no longer exist today. The first is the division into chapters, paragraphs and verses, which was only added in the thirteenth century. The second is the existence of markers that we have become accustomed to recognizing thanks to the invention of printing. These markers alert us to the importance of certain ideas through techniques underlining, bold or italic characters, indentations, changing font size, and alphanumeric additions (e.g., I, II; A, B, C).

In the absence of these markers, an author had to structure his text to make it easier for the reader. Repetitions of words, but especially

of sentences, as well as the organization of the material were therefore essential as memo techniques.

4.4 Criteria for determining the presence of chiasmus

It is of paramount importance to consider the objective criteria that the student must use to detect chiasmus. Some texts are very short and the possibility of error is minimal, but for longer texts caution should be exercised. The longer the text, especially if it is the size of a whole book, the more concordant criteria are needed to affirm the existence of a chiasmus. Space does not allow me to examine the criteria but I especially recommend *Thinking in Circles* by Mary Douglas listed in the references.

5. Chiasmus as a Literary Device in Judges

When studying any biblical text, some fundamental questions must be asked in order to make a correct exegesis: What does the text say? What does the text mean? Why does the text say what it says?

It is important to answer all these questions when studying a text. However, it should also be recognized that the answers are not always clearly stated or easy to detect in the text. Before these questions can be answered, therefore, the structure of the text must also be examined.

5.1 Overview of the chiastic structure of Judges

5.1.1 Preliminary overview

Virtually all commentators, whatever their opinion on chiastic structure, recognize that the book is divided into three main sections and do not hesitate to affirm that an intentional structure is already apparent in the phenomenon of two introductions and two conclusions.

1. Two prologues or introductions (1:1–3:6)
2. Major heroic stories (3:7–16:31)
3. Two epilogues or conclusions (chs. 17–21)

5.1.2 Traditional menu of Judges

They also recognize that there is an intentional “menu” for all of the heroic stories of Judges which is observable in the following table.

Table 1: The chiasmic “menu” of the major heroic stories in Judges

“MENU” OF THE HEROIC TEXTS							
FORMULA	OTHNIEL	EHUD	DEBORAH	GIDEON	ABIMELECH	JEPHTHAH	SAMSON
The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord (3:7)	•	•	•	•		•	•
Yahweh sold them into the hands of their enemies (3:8)	•	•	•	•		•	•
Israel cried out to Yahweh (3:9)	•	•	•	•		•	
Yahweh raised up a savior (3:9)	•	•	•	•		•	•
The land had peace for ... (3:11)	•	•	•	•			

5.1.3 Detailed chiasitic structure of Judges

Judges demonstrates the progressive decline of the people and their leaders towards apostasy and idolatry. The following table and commentary illustrate this trend.

Table 2: The arrows show the direction of the text

CHIASMUS BY INVERTED PARALLELISM IN JUDGES			
↗	4th Judge: Gideon Begins well by opposing idolatry Ends poorly by promoting idolatry		↘
↑	3rd Judge: Deborah/Barak Hymn of Deborah Sisera killed Head smashed by a woman The glory goes to a woman	The tyrant Abimelech Fable of Jotham Abimelech killed Head smashed by a woman Kill me lest people say: A woman killed him	↓
↑	2nd Judge: Ehud Enemy for 18 years: Moab, son of Lot Victory at the fords of the Jordan Ehud WITH Ephraim	5th Judge: Jephthah Enemy for 18 years: Ammon, son of Lot Calamity at the fords of the Jordan Jephthah AGAINST Ephraim	↓
↑	1st Judge: Othniel Good marriage Total victory	6th Judge: Samson Catastrophic marriages Partial victory	↓

↑	<p>2nd Introduction Idolatry introduced Solution: Seek God Culpable absence of Levites</p>	<p>1st Conclusion Idolatry institutionalized Solution: Seek a king Culpable presence of Levites</p>	↓
↑	<p>1st Introduction General Assembly of Israel Who will go? Judah! God with Judah ... but failure Against Canaan: their enemy Hērem</p>	<p>2nd Conclusion General Assembly of Israel Who will go? Judah! God with Judah ... but failure Against Benjamin: their brothers Hērem</p>	↓

5.I.4 Commentary on the table: main theological theses developed by the final editor

- I. Two all-tribal general assemblies are convened at the beginning and at the end of the book to determine which tribe should lead the military interventions against the Canaanites and against the Benjaminites. Note the following:
 - In both cases, Judah is chosen, which is certainly an indication of its pre-eminence in God’s sovereign plan since the monarchy will come out of this tribe and lead to the coming of the Messiah.
 - The people begin well by conquering the Canaanite *enemy*, but end badly in virtually eliminating their Benjaminite *brethren*. This trend is frequently observed in church history.
 - God’s miraculous interventions and the human means he uses must never be set against each other. Not everything is done by miracles, for the time factor is a vital component of his pedagogy to teach his

people perseverance, walking by faith and dependence. Evangelical triumphalism tends to blind us to the lessons that God wishes to teach his people through defeat and/or time.

2. Marriage proves to be an important factor in the unfolding of the book.
 - Marriage is part of the common grace that applies to all men, whatever their beliefs. Therefore, as this book demonstrates, prostitution, rape and adultery are condemned.
 - Marriage for the believer is within God's people and not with foreigners. The consequences in the lives of Othniel, Gideon, and Samson reveal the importance of such a choice and explain in part the success or failure of their period of leadership.
3. Israel's backsliding is explained at the beginning of the book as being the consequence of her abandoning of the Lord, and therefore as a spiritual problem. At the end of the book, the backsliding and chaos are seen as the result of the absence of a king and, therefore, as a structural problem. This principle is also verified in the history of the church. The systemic backsliding signals the failure of the theocracy.
4. The role of the Levites is very ambiguous in the book:
 - Their culpable absence partly explains why we read: "and there arose after them another generation that did not know Yahweh or the work that he had done for Israel" (2:10). Obviously, the Levites had neglected their teaching role.
 - Their culpable presence in the two conclusions: (1) a third-generation priest, Jonathan, the grandson of Moses, who prostitutes his priesthood for prestige and financial gain, and (2) the lack of moral courage of the Levite faced with the lust of the inhabitants of Gibeah. These incidents signal the failure of the priesthood.

5. The fratricide that we have already indicated in the second conclusion is developed progressively in the heroic narratives starting from that of Gideon:
 - Gideon is cruel and vengeful against the Israelites of Sukkoth and Penueel.
 - Abimelech condones the massacre of his seventy half-brothers as well as his compatriots of Shechem.
 - Jephthah, angry with the Ephraimites, slaughters 42,000 at the fords of the Jordan.
6. The judges are not perfect, but some seem to resist being transformed by the Lord and the Holy Spirit:
 - Gideon begins well and ends badly, because of his unbelief, fear, pride and idolatry.
 - Jephthah does not handle the rejection by his family well.
 - Samson frequently acts impulsively by following his sexual passions.
7. According to Douglas (2007), one of the main criteria for determining the presence of a chiasmus is that there must be a correspondence between the introductions and conclusions, in other words, there must be a turning point in the text. Although several commentators recognize the chiastic structure of Judges, they do not all agree on the turning point of the narrative. Noth, Boling, and Crossan believe that the story of Jephthah is the turning point at the center of the book. However, there is a greater consensus from Block, Younger, Gooding, Webb, Dorsey, and Way that shows Gideon to be the pivotal character in the book for several reasons:
 - Before Gideon, the judges fulfilled their mission without Scripture indicating that they had any character or moral flaw. Starting with Gideon, and followed by the tyrant Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson,

Scripture highlights their evident failings.

- Gideon himself began well by opposing idolatry, even in his father's house, but he ended up creating an idol that turned his own family and all Israel away from God. It is Gideon's account that marks the turning point from triumph to tragedy.
- In the beginning, Ophrah is the scene of clan idolatry (6:25–32); in the end, Ophrah is the focus of national idolatry (8:27; Block 1999, 250).
- Although the usual cyclical formula is used, the story becomes more complex, because this time the Lord sends a prophet (6:7–10) who reproaches the people for their apostasy before raising up the judge.
- This is the only story where there is a dialogue between the Lord and a judge. None of the other judges receive as much assurance from the Lord as Gideon.
- The central point of Gideon's story is not the victory over the Midianites, but his paralyzing fear that prevented him from believing in God's promises. His biblical illiteracy was a major problem in the development of the editor's theses.

In the flow of biblical theology, Judges teaches us that theocracy via God's chosen deliverers (judges) has failed; the priesthood has failed; and the choosing of a king is seen as the solution to their problems. However, a mere four centuries later the monarchy fails.

This is a major development in the history of redemption as it points us to the coming of: the perfect deliverer; the ultimate high priest; and the King of kings.

6. Irony as a Literary Device in Judges

The discovery of a more systematic use of irony in the Bible is one of the fruits of the new literary criticism.

Irony is a way of provoking a reader, or of making a reader or listener react. It is often used to denounce, criticize or gently make fun of something or someone. It is most often revealed through the use of hyperbole, innuendo or sudden and unexpected breaks in a text. Irony, therefore, invites the reader or listener to be attentive, as it can contain several layers of meaning.

Klein (1988, 191) proposes that irony in the book of Judges essentially revolves around the characterizations of the judges and that this irony gradually amplifies as the text progresses. Both epilogues, she argues, abound in irony:

Building on the rather non-ironic basis of the book's introduction, the sequence of stories increases in ironic intensity until the resolution from which the knowledge of the ironist par excellence, Yahweh, springs ... Through irony, the reader is invited to share Yahweh's judgment of Israel during the period of the wars for territorial conquest. The ironic structure dramatizes the interaction between the free but naive human will and the omniscient will of Yahweh. (Klein 1988, 191)

There are many instances of irony in the book of Judges, but for this essay we will concentrate on just one.

6.1 The unlikely choice of Judges

Throughout the book we see that the individuals chosen by God to deliver his people do not meet the cultural norms of the time or the criteria we would have established.

Othniel: The Lord raised up the youngest member of this noble clan as judge, ignoring all the primogeniture conventions of the time. This same

principle is illustrated in other OT accounts, notably those of Jacob, Joseph and David.

Ehud: The text tells us that Ehud is from the tribe of Benjamin and that his name means “son of my right hand,” although he did not use his right hand because he was left-handed. Later in the book we meet seven hundred elite Benjaminite soldiers who were also left-handed (Judg 20:16).

Deborah: One of the most remarkable characters in the book is a woman. Deborah implicitly recognizes that she was not called to lead the assault on the enemy and, therefore, summons Barak to lead in battle. Faced with his refusal, she agreed to go with him, all the while recognizing the anomalous situation. The fact that the glory was given to a woman for a military victory was not only unusual but highly ironic.

Gideon: Following God’s call, Gideon reveals himself to be the most hesitant of the judges. He has no desire to respond to God’s call and he gives his excuses for not doing so. He describes his family as being the poorest in Manasseh, even though the family estate is large and his father is one of the nobles who maintains a major shrine to Baal. Moreover, Gideon can easily call upon a dozen servants (Judg 6:27) to help him destroy the altar of Baal.

Jephthah: He is capable of being diplomatic with the Ammonites in inviting them to reflect on the true history of the conquest of the land but reacts impetuously and angrily to the provocation of Ephraim. Also, immediately after being endowed by the Holy Spirit, probably in the euphoria of the moment, he makes an excessive vow to sacrifice whatever comes out of his house if he wins the battle against the Ammonites. It is often in moments of exaltation that men are most vulnerable and capable of committing their worst mistakes.

Samson: This is the man who captures the imagination of children in Sunday school with his strength. Yet this strong man is the weakest man

in the book and the story devoted to him only underlines his paradoxes. In his case, the irony of God's choice reaches its peak:

- He is the only judge to be the object of divine intervention before his conception.
- He is the only judge who is the object of a Nazarite vow.
- He is empowered with the Holy Spirit four times; more than for any other judge.

7. Conclusion

Without knowing or being able to affirm the identity of the final editor of the Book of Judges, it must be said that, in its final form, this book has survived for centuries and has stimulated and fed the imagination of the people of God in both the old and new covenant eras. The intentions of the various authors of the different parts of the text—heroic tales, prologues and epilogues—are difficult to pin down, but the intentions of the final editor seem more accessible. It is the chiasmic form which, as we have shown, governs the text and makes it possible to discern the theological themes and tendencies of the period.

The editor has assembled and ordered the material, albeit not chronologically, in such a way that the moral and spiritual decline of the people and of the judges can be easily perceived. Gradually, he demonstrates that the judges embody the characteristics of the people they govern:

- The people compromise and adopt the beliefs, values and practices of the Canaanites.
- The judges, in turn, embody the characteristics of the enemy.
- The abusive treatment of women increases throughout the book.
- The systematic tendency towards fratricide.
- The priesthood becomes corrupt.

- The theocracy, with the Lord as sovereign, gives way to the aspiration for a monarchy.

However, there is one constant throughout this period: the surprising and inexhaustible grace of the Lord.

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Deriving Pedagogical Models for Theological Education from a Biblical Theology of the Acquisition, Transmission and Effects of the Knowledge of God

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Abstract

The practice of theological education throughout the world has been predominantly shaped by the research university model and has been characterized by fragmentation. Although numerous critiques have been made and alternative pedagogical practices proposed, there has been a paucity of integrative theological reflection on pedagogical practice. This study constructs a biblical theological foundation for the knowledge of God, and adopts an integrative, multidisciplinary approach to developing pedagogical models of theological education that better align with what the Bible says about the knowledge of God (i.e., theology). This is done by first engaging in a biblical theological analysis of how the knowledge of God is acquired and communicated throughout the canon, and what effect the knowledge of God has on those who know him. The results of

this analysis are then brought into conversation with the most significant contemporary pedagogical developments to determine which might best reflect a biblical understanding of how the knowledge of God is acquired and transmitted and so best serve the enterprise of theological education. The nature of divine self-revelation, the significance of Christian community, and expectations about personal transformation emerge as key factors in determining pedagogical approaches. Developments in transformative learning that acknowledge situated cognition, experiential learning, and problem-based learning are found to be particularly apt. The research concludes by proposing a new structure for theological curricula, organized around two poles (the word and the world), which lead toward one another, rather than the traditional silos of theological departments.

Keywords

Theological education, biblical theology, pedagogy, knowledge of God

1. Introduction

A growing sense of dissatisfaction with the results produced by contemporary models of formal theological education has led to many critiques of current practice (Elmer and Elmer 2020; Cairney 2018; Shaw 2014; Hibbert and Hibbert 2012; Smith 2012; Benefiel 2008; Ott 2001; Heywood 2000; Banks 1999; Kelsey 1993). Critiques often concentrate around aspects of perceived fragmentation; separation of elements within theological curricula; separation between theory and practice; and separation between the world of the academy and the needs of the church. Critiques and proposed solutions have approached the practice of theological education from historical, pedagogical, philosophical, pragmatic, theological, and biblical

perspectives. In order to address the fragmentation of the discipline, however, these various perspectives and the solutions that emerge from them, need to be synthesized and integrated. This dissertation responds to that need by developing a biblical theological foundation for the knowledge of God, and pursuing an integrative, multidisciplinary approach to arrive at conclusions regarding models of theological education.

The profound link between knowing God (theology) and serving God (ministry) is recognized in the use of the term “theological education” to refer to formal ministry training (Harkness 2001, 142). All those concerned with the training of future generations of Christian leaders must consider the extent to which the models of theological education they rely upon are consistent with how they believe God is known, and the impact they believe a knowledge of God ought to produce. Those who hold a theologically conservative view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the word of God should be concerned to see that the model of theological education they adopt reflects what the Bible teaches about the knowledge of God (Banks 1999, 75).

The first (and largest) part of this dissertation sets out to explore what the Bible teaches about:

- 1) How people acquire a knowledge of God,
- 2) How that knowledge is communicated from person to person, and
- 3) What effects that knowledge should produce in those who possess it.

A biblical theological approach that presupposes the centrality of Christ, the unity of the Scriptures, and God’s progressive self-revelation is followed. This approach self-consciously works toward the integration of insights from throughout the canon; taking note of the uniqueness of the parts, as they contribute to a developing and united whole. The study is structured around the examination of those three questions throughout

eight significant epochs in salvation history. Tracing answers to these questions throughout Scripture represents a new contribution to biblical theological studies.

The second part of this dissertation brings the results of that biblical theological analysis into conversation with the most significant contemporary pedagogical developments. While there is no one approach to teaching and learning that can be universally considered ‘best practice’ in higher education, there is an important relationship between any subject and the pedagogical approaches that are most appropriate for it (Entwistle 2010, 48; Palmer 1993, 29). The most significant pedagogical developments are identified through a literature survey of key texts in higher education. Special attention is be paid to developments which show promise in terms of addressing the concerns and priorities raised in the biblical theological analysis. The conversation is organized around an alignment of the three elements of the biblical theology mentioned above, with corresponding questions in secular pedagogical literature regarding: epistemological convictions, pedagogical practices, and desired learning outcomes.

Decisions made between alternatives in these three categories drive distinctive approaches to teaching and learning (Kolb and Kolb 2017, 28; Entwistle 2010; 17, 34, 48; Dabbagh 2005, 26).

The conversation between the conclusions of the biblical theological survey and the corresponding pedagogical alternatives provides a fresh perspective for the evaluation and development of models of theological education. This dissertation presents a mechanism by which the biblical data regarding the knowledge of God can supply a foundation upon which pedagogies of theological education can be built (cf. Shaw 2014, 68).

The final section of the dissertation presents a series of conclusions regarding a framework for theological education and puts forward a novel example curriculum constructed from these insights.

2. A Biblical Theology of the Knowledge of God

2.1 The knowledge of God in creation

In the creation accounts, Adam and Eve know God as his image bearers who share his “likeness” (Gen 1:26–27; cf. 3:5; Garr 2003, 175). The knowledge of God can also be deduced from observing the evidence of his character in what he creates (e.g., 2 Kgs 19:15, Job 38:4–8, Ps 19:1; 96:5; 119:90; 135:5–9; 146:6; Isa 41:21–26, Jer 32:17, Amos 4:13, Acts 4:24, Rom 1:20, Rev 4:11). Beyond what can be deduced by observation, however, God makes himself known through speaking. Through speaking God provides instruction and an interpretive lens through which his creation is to be understood (Thompson 2006, 63). God takes initiative in creation to make himself known, but also, in commanding Adam “not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17), sets clear limits on human knowledge.

2.2 The knowledge of God and the fall

The limits which God set are challenged and rebelled against in Genesis 3. Although many contemporary OT scholars argue that this chapter is primarily about the human acquisition of knowledge and ethical awareness (Zevit 2013, 261; Mettinger 2007, 1–4; Barr 1993, 4), Adam and Eve had knowledge before they took the fruit and already knew that taking it was wrong (Gen 3:2, 6). Their rebellion was a willful grab for a knowledge “that distrusted and excluded God” (Palmer 1993, 25). From that point forward, humanity has been separated from God and crippled by the noetic effects of sin, which renders people incapable of knowing God through intellect, wisdom or perception (Isa 44:17–20; Rom 1: 21–22, 25, 28; 1 Cor 1:21; 2 Cor 4:4; cf. John 1:13). This incapacity is further complicated by a persistent, stubborn, rebellious disposition that actively chooses to distrust God’s

wisdom or goodness, while asserting our own (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Rom 1:18; 3:10–12; 8:5–8; Col 1:21).

Recognizing the noetic effects of sin means that theological study must proceed on the basis of epistemic humility. Not only are we unable to come to know God by the power of our intellect, but we will not even necessarily be aware of our own rebellion or distorted perception. Human incapacity and rebellion mean that people can only come to know God if he chooses to give sight to the spiritually blind and reveal himself. Theological education must take account of the noetic effects of sin and be built around a reliance on divine revelation and illumination.

2.3 The knowledge of God in the patriarchal period

Throughout the patriarchal period, God made himself known primarily to and through the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He appeared to them, and especially to Abraham, with a physical immediacy unique in the OT. Even amid the appearances and the activity of God however, the patriarchs and their generations came to know God most profoundly through what he said, and especially through his making and keeping of covenantal promises. As the patriarchs sought to pass on what they knew of God, they focused on recounting these promises. This was how others came to know God; not through direct revelation themselves but through hearing the testimony of the patriarchs either directly or second-hand. Knowledge of these covenant promises, and the God who made them, was expected to produce a response of faith in the hearer that would be seen in a life of obedience and relational intimacy with this covenant God.

2.4 *The knowledge of God in the exodus and the law*

Throughout the period of the Exodus, God not only acted to redeem the nation of Israel, but he did so intentionally to make himself known (Blackburn 2012, 40–41). God made himself known most clearly through his speech which accompanied his action and appearances. In this regard, the giving of the law at Sinai provides an important point of transition in salvation history. God's appearances to Moses were intimate and proximate (as with the patriarchs) but less anthropomorphic than those experienced by Abraham. Moses was also more overtly designated as a mediator of God's self-revelation to others than the patriarchs were. He was instructed specifically so that he could instruct others.

As the nation prepared to enter the promised land without Moses as their leader, however, the way God continued to make himself known changed significantly. God's appearances shift from being forbiddingly potent before the exodus, to being more ephemeral beyond it. Once Yahweh had given the law at Sinai, the law became the chief means by which the people had access to the knowledge of God. God continued to be present, but the law set out the terms of the covenantal relationship from that point forward (Blackburn 2012, 112–113). There was no need for him to continue to appear to the whole nation to reveal himself.

Israel was to pass on the knowledge of God from generation to generation through teaching the law (Lev 10:11). In family homes and everyday life, the Israelites were to recall, recite, discuss, and meditate on the law. Every seven years they would come together as a nation to hear the Levitical priests read the law. The writing down and reading out of the law (Deut 31:11) would provide a consistent national point of reference, from which to test any claims of advanced knowledge of God or his will (Deut 18:22).

As Yahweh chose to reveal himself through history in action and speech, recounting these things (i.e., hearing the word of God), must be the basis for knowing God. Furthermore, the knowledge of God given in the period of the exodus was expected to effect real and observable change in the lives of those who knew God. The love of God that he revealed to the nation through Moses was to be reflected back to him, and also imitated in love for others. The knowledge of God was also expected to engender obedience, fear and worship.

The Deuteronomic pattern, based on God's self-revelation in the law, provides an integrated national system of theological education. The system, however, is incomplete. The self-revelation of God in the exodus was not exhaustive, and there are hints in the narrative that further revelation will follow (Niehaus 1995, 224). After Moses's death, there would need to be another prophet who was a covenant mediator, like him (Deut 18:15–18). We are pointed forward expectantly, and ultimately to God's self-revelation in the person of the Lord Jesus.

2.5 The knowledge of God while Israel occupies the promised land

In the period that Israel occupied the promised land from the time of Joshua through to the exile, God appeared less frequently than during the exodus, and by the end of this period these appearances were limited to the prophets through visions. The manner and frequency of God's speaking also changed and developed during this time. The prophets emerged as the key recipients and mediators of God's word. The prophets mediated the knowledge of God to ordinary people, firstly through the leaders and kings, but more directly as the period proceeded. While the prophets dialogue and sometimes bargain with God, this form of engagement was

not normative (cf. Job 38:1–2) and the nation was called to listen and obey, not to negotiate with God (Lamb 2012, 865).

The prophets consistently called people back to the covenant and reminded them of what they should already know of God through his past actions and words. This shift to calling the nation back began immediately with the transition from Moses's to Joshua's leadership, where Moses's words continued to be authoritative (Deut 34:9). In the years leading up to the exile, although God continued to reveal himself and appeal to his people through the prophets, due to the prevalence of false prophets, the prophetic office had fallen into significant disrepute (e.g., Isa 28:7; Jer 14:14–16; 23:9–40; Ezek 13:1–23; 21:29; 22:28; Eccl 5:7).

In contrast to this dwindling esteem, the Torah is elevated, and an expectation expressed that one could relate to the Torah in ways previously only used to describe how one would relate directly to God. Psalm 119 provides a valuable demonstration of this shift. The psalmist lifts his hands towards Yahweh's commandments, which he loves (Ps 119:48) and expresses trust in Yahweh's word (119:42) and faith in his commandments (119:66). Honor, love, trust and faith are characteristic responses to the knowledge of God, ordinarily expected to be directed toward Yahweh himself. Consistently through this psalm, however, the psalmist relates to the Torah, the commandments, the law and the word of Yahweh, as if relating directly to Yahweh himself. This is a significant shift in expectations about how one knows and relates to Yahweh in an immediate and personal way.

Psalm 119 also demonstrates a remarkable development in the language of visual appropriation of the knowledge of God. Verbs used to describe theophanies in the patriarchal and exodus narratives are applied by the psalmist to describe his gazing on the word (e.g., Ps 119:6, 15, 18). Rather than the psalmist having a visual experience which brings him

knowledge of God, he describes his “looking into,” or contemplating God’s word as the means of revelation. The effect of this shift is profound. Psalm 119 generates an expectation then, that God will continue to reveal himself, not necessarily directly through a theophanic pronouncement to select individuals, but to any who would gaze upon, that is seek to comprehend, his word.

In another development toward democratization, wisdom literature also arose during this period. The Israelite wisdom tradition was tied closely to the home and family rather than to the priests and temple. With its focus on the lordship of God in creation, wisdom literature engaged with the world as it could be observed and studied. Tradition, relationship, and character formation were prized above novelty and abstract cognition. The element of Israelite wisdom literature that distinguished it from all others, was its insistence that the fear of Yahweh was both the beginning and the goal of wisdom.

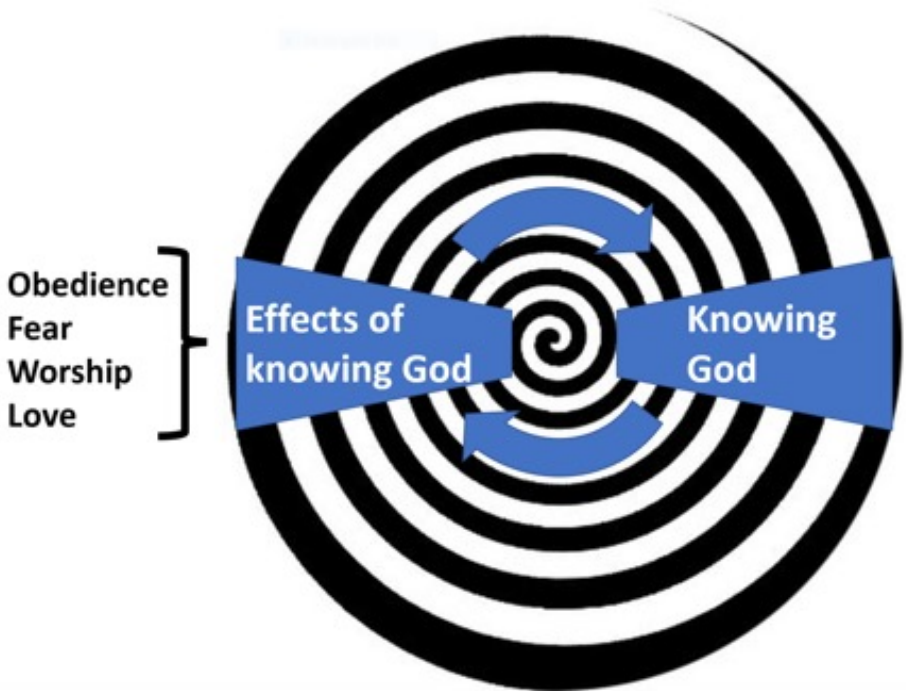
Knowledge of God and the fear of God grow together in a recursive¹⁶ relationship of deepening intimacy (See Figure 1). Reverential fear is the appropriate response to coming to know God (Prov 2:5, Eccl 12:13), but as a right disposition, it also provides the grounds for further growth in one’s knowledge of God (Psa 111:10, Prov 1:7, 9:10). This is so because people do not know God by virtue of human reason, but rather through God granting knowledge of himself. This knowledge of God depends upon, but eclipses, a true cognition of facts about God as it is a personal and relational knowledge. Knowing God in this manner is a transformative experience.

1 Although the term ‘recursive’ is most commonly used within mathematics, it has more recently been applied in a variety of fields, including linguistics and pedagogical literature. In these cases, it is used to refer to a repeatedly cyclical relationship between two or more elements.

Those who know God in this way fear him, obey him, worship him, and love him and others. Those who fear, obey, worship, and love God and others are well placed to grow in their knowledge of him (e.g., 2 Sam 23:3; Job 1:1; 2:3; 28:28; Ps 19:10; 111:10; Prov 1:7; 8:13; 9:10; 14:26-27; 15:33; 16:6; 22:4; Isa 11:3; 58:1-2). That is what is meant by a recursive relationship between knowing God and the effects of knowing God.

Taken with the repeated examples throughout the period of recalling narratives of God's great deeds and singing his praises together, this emerging focus on the written word of God provides shape for our

Figure 1: Recursive relationship between knowing God and the effects of knowing God



enterprise of developing models for theological education. It is a shape consistent with hearing, recounting, and responding to the word of God in community. A community in which this occurs should be characterized by increasing knowledge of God, evidenced in fear, obedience, worship, and love, and ought to stand in stark contrast to the Israelite nation that imploded throughout the period in the promised land, due to their culpable rejection and lack of knowledge of God.

2.6 The knowledge of God from the exile to Jesus

During the exilic and post-exilic periods, we witness a continued decline in appearances of God, accompanied by a further decline in the prophetic office, both in terms of prophets' reputations, and in terms of their intimacy with God. In contrast to the prophets themselves, during this period the writings of previous prophets were highly valued, becoming recognized and revered as the word of God. This marked a shift from prophecy to scribal teaching as the expected mode of God's self-revelation (Shead 2012, 267; Schniedewind 1995, 21).

The promised new covenant announced a coming day where the knowledge of God amongst his covenant people would be universal and unmediated. This knowledge would be based on God's forgiveness of iniquity and promise to remember sins no more, and would be accompanied by the gift of his Spirit and the writing of his word on the new heart of his people. There would continue to be a need for teachers to live exemplary lives and to recite and teach the word of God, but no longer would they have to exhort the people to "know the LORD," because all of the covenant people would know him (Jer 31:34). The people then should pass on the knowledge of God to one another through corporate remembering and teaching, including singing psalms to one another.

As we continue to work toward developing models of theological education, what emerges is a picture of a community of forgiven people who, with the help of the Spirit of God and a renewed corporate heart, teach one another the word of God and live in obedience to it.

2.7 The knowledge of God and the person of the Lord Jesus

Moving from the OT to the NT, we must reckon with the seismic shift in God's self-revelation that the incarnation of Jesus represents. All the ways in which God had made himself known in the past were surpassed as the Word became flesh and not only appeared, but lived in the midst of his people. In Jesus, God made himself known through manifestations of his divine power, through personal interactions demonstrating his grace, love, and compassion, and, most clearly, in his death and resurrection. To accept Jesus is to accept God, to reject Jesus is to reject God, and to know Jesus is to know God because Jesus is God (John 14:5–11; cf. Kruse 2003, 75). Even in the study of the Law and the Prophets, one's knowledge of God is obscured unless the Scriptures are read as pointing toward Jesus, and the Holy Spirit provides illumination (John 5:37–40; cf. Luke 16:31; Hays 2014, 16).

Jesus passed the knowledge of God on through teaching the truth about himself. His teaching came in the context of the situations that he and the disciples were in, including his actions which demonstrated the truth of what he said. The gospels describe both knowledge and pedagogy in personal and relational terms, centered around the Lord Jesus. The discipleship model which Jesus employed lends itself to a holistic and integrated approach to learning in all of life, where cognition, character and competency in ministry can be explored, modelled and developed in the context of personal relationships.

Evidence that one knows God through Jesus can be seen in a life of obedience and in relational intimacy, characterized by love for God and love for others. A lack of these things can be both evidence of ignorance of God, and a barrier to growth in knowledge of God. By implication, models of theological education consistent with the gospel accounts will also be centered around the pursuit of a personal knowledge of Jesus, in relationship with him and others. Loving relationships provide an appropriate context in which to grow in one's knowledge of God and should also be an expected outcome of attaining such knowledge.

2.8 The knowledge of God in the last days

The physical departure of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus ushered in the final period of redemptive history: the last days. No longer could people see or hear Jesus themselves, and thereby meet and know God. The witness of the apostles to the Lord Jesus, their exposition of the OT Scriptures in light of his fulfilment, and their explanation of the consequences of these things became the authoritative channel of divine self-revelation. Pentecost marked the beginning of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all God's people, enabling them to prophesy. This prophecy is described throughout the NT in various ways that draw attention to the bold speaking of all of God's people, that others may come to know him. The speaking of all of God's people pointed back to the apostolic witness to the Lord Jesus.

New Testament churches were characterized as learning communities, where the word of God would be read, heard, and taught, as each member spoke the truth to one another in love. These communities were to be transformed and transformative as members encouraged one another to respond appropriately to the relational knowledge of God that they had. The same recursive relationship between knowing God and the

effects of that knowledge (evidenced in transformed lives of ‘knowers’) that was observed in the OT is on view. One’s personal knowledge of God should lead to repentance and faith seen in a life of fruitful obedience, love and worship. Such a life opens a knower to possibilities of deepening relational knowledge of God, which would lead to further transformation, and so on (Rom 12:1–2; Col 1:9–10; 2 Pet 1:2–9). Theological education then, ought to be carried out in contexts of learning communities characterized by loving relationships between people who are committed to being transformed by, and growing in, their knowledge of God, as they pass that knowledge on to one another.

In the last days people can truly, but not fully, come to know God (Thompson 2006, 155). A consummation awaits where all of the promises and blessings of the new covenant will be realized, where God’s people will be with him and know fully, even as they are now fully known (Rev 21:3; 1 Cor 13:12, cf. Williamson 2007, 209–210). Until then, theological study ought to be characterized by an epistemic humility that acknowledges that God has sovereignly revealed himself in the Scriptures and that we rely on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to know him. Indeed, although the careful study of Scripture is commended, the comprehension of Scripture is no mere intellectual pursuit, so theological study ought to be characterized by prayer to the God who reveals himself.

3. A Conversation with Contemporary Pedagogical Approaches

We turn now to consider pedagogical approaches that may be adopted for theological education, bringing various contemporary alternatives into conversation with the details of our descriptive biblical theological analysis. Several standard education textbooks are used as key conversation partners to introduce a variety of alternative approaches and further scholarship.¹⁷

The three key research questions that have structured our engagement with the biblical material are closely related to three key elements underlying any pedagogical approach. We then structured our conversation around these three key synthetic questions:

- 1) What epistemological foundations best account for how the knowledge of God is acquired?
- 2) What pedagogical methodologies best align with what the Bible says about how the knowledge of God is passed on?
- 3) What pedagogical approaches are best designed to produce outcomes consistent with the Bible's descriptions of the effects that the knowledge of God has on knowers?

3.1 What epistemological foundations best account for how the knowledge of God is acquired?

Significant points of tension exist between the epistemological foundations that underlie most contemporary pedagogical approaches, and the emphasis we have seen through the Bible on divine revelation and the need for epistemic humility. Despite more than two hundred years of philosophical critique, models of contemporary higher education (and particularly the research university) are dominated by a Cartesian dualism that privileges reason and scientific method over other forms of knowledge,

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- 2 Due to their comprehensive breadth and widespread contemporary adoption as standard introductory texts in faculties of education around the world, Brookfield (2015), Merriam and Bierema (2014), and Schunk (2014) have been chosen as the key conversation partners. The conversation is not be limited to these key partners but they are used to provide a structure for considering a broad range of pedagogical approaches.

and assumes an objective separation between a knower and an object that might be known (Cairney 2018, 48; Meek 2011,18). Post-modern critiques of objectivism gave way to the rise of relativism and subjectivity which preserves Cartesian dualism but draws attention to the self and one's own perspective and away from any sense of an objective "other" (Meek 2011, 90). More recently this has led to a constructivist approach to epistemology, whereby each knower creates reality and knowledge in their own minds.

Christian theologians and educators have proposed several helpful alternatives or correctives to these dominant epistemological foundations. Critical realism seeks to preserve the existence of ontological, external reality that affirms that authors intend meaning and we have some access to this as we read, even if our access entails some subjectivity. Further, we can gain confidence in discerning truth as we engage texts critically, in relationship with others who are also seeking to discern truth. Critical realism needs further buttressing as an epistemological framework for knowing God however, because it doesn't account for the essentially relation nature of this knowledge as well as it might (Cairney 2018, 113–117; Smith 2009, 41; Clark 2003, 170; Palmer 1993, 14). We must not, however, draw a false dichotomy between personal and propositional knowledge (contra Hibbert and Hibbert 2016, 47; Palmer 1993, 47).

Following Polanyi (2005) and Palmer (1993), Meek's (2011) covenantal epistemology accords very well with what we have seen throughout the Bible. Rather than the purely cognitive and linear description of learning engendered by Cartesian dualism, Meek describes learning and knowing as interactive experimentation, observation, dialogue and integration of the previously disconnected or unknown. We are engaged and interact in the world as whole persons and we are in a form a personal relationship with all that we seek to come to know. In this context though, the word

of God functions as an authoritative self-disclosure of the God who wants to be known personally. Our knowledge of God is a work in progress, a “coming to know [that is] integrative and transformative, rather than deductive and linear” (Meek 2011, 70). This directly addresses the problems of fragmentation in theological education with which this study began. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7), dispassionate, detached objectivity is a wholly inadequate stance to take for one who seeks such knowledge. Jesus taught his disciples to know and relate to God conscious of their standing as beloved children before a graciously righteous Father (Matt 5:9ff; cf. Jer 3:19; Mal 2:10; 1 Pet 1:17; Moser 1999, 594).

The significance of this discussion about epistemology is brought into sharp focus as we see the implications of various epistemological assumptions not just on learning theories, but on qualification frameworks that influence higher education globally. The most prominent example of this is the adaptation of Bloom’s taxonomy for qualification and accreditation frameworks. This practice embeds an understanding of cognitive knowledge that increases in complexity and value in a linear fashion, culminating in novel creation (Shaw and Dharamraj 2018, 434; Merriam and Bierema 2014, 34). This embedded understanding sits at odds with the picture of the knowledge of God generated by our biblical theological survey, both in terms of being a linear progression (rather than recursive), and in terms of valuing analysis, evaluation and creation more highly than remembering, understanding, and applying knowledge.

3.2 What pedagogical methodologies best align with what the Bible says about how the knowledge of God is passed on?

Several contemporary pedagogical methodologies and insights hold promise for theological education due to their coherence with the biblical

theological insights gleaned regarding how the knowledge of God is communicated. *Situated cognition* is a methodology that recognizes that cognition (and the world of ideas) cannot be abstracted from physical context. The environment in which someone learns and especially the relationships that learners have with other learners and with their teachers is significantly formative. This account of learning resonates strongly with the biblical emphasis on discipleship, the significance of communities of learning, and the importance of the character of teachers (Cairney 2018, 17; Shaw 2014, 96–98; C. S. Smith 2012, 386; Meek 2011, 138).

The cycle of *experiential learning* provides an explanatory framework for a process that lines up closely with the recursive pattern observed throughout Scripture. Knowledge is gained as we encounter experiences, reflect, theorize, apply our new knowledge—which generates a new experience that we can reflect on—and so on (Kolb and Kolb 2017, 26–27). Building on experiential learning, *problem-based learning* offers a particular pedagogical methodology for working from experience toward integrated knowledge (Schunk 2014, 264ff). *Transformative learning* describes a broader category of pedagogical methodology that self-consciously works to achieve transformative goals for students by focusing on “deep learning” which is integrative of as many insights and experiences as possible (Weimer 2013, 30–31). Transformative learning may well engage experiential and problem-based learning strategies to achieve transformative goals. Transformative learning will also readily engage the use of narrative as a key learning strategy (Kolb and Kolb 2017, 180), and this too accords well with the Bible’s own commendation of the re-telling of the great acts of God, the gospel, as a key means for passing on the knowledge of God.

These methodologies all aim at and promise far more than the research university model in terms of forming people for ministry. The

expectations of teachers and learners in these models will be that cognitive apprehension of facts about God must go along with growth in relational awareness and the living out of the implications of this knowledge. The separation of these things is at the heart of the critiques of contemporary theological education based on the research university model.

3.3 What pedagogical approaches are best designed to produce outcomes consistent with the Bible's descriptions of the effects that the knowledge of God has on knowers?

Theological education should be intentionally designed to produce the transformative effects in students that the knowledge of God produces in the Bible, rather than simply passing on information. Educators can neither be satisfied with simply passing on information about God in the hope that application will follow, nor with providing a transformed practice or experience in the hope that knowledge of God will follow. The recursive pattern observed throughout Scripture leads us to expect that transformed behavior ought to both provide a foundation for knowing God better, and to be an appropriate expression of the knowledge of God that they already have. Following the lead of outcomes-based and competency-based education models, theological curricula should be designed with outcomes in mind (Cairney 2018, 7; Shaw 2014, 73; Ball 2012, 20). These outcomes ought to routinely embrace affective and behavioral elements, in addition to cognitive ones.

4. Principles and Proposals for Theological Education

A desire to improve approaches to theological education has motivated this research. We began by noting a broad discontent with the dominant,

research university model of theological education, and particularly around the fragmentation that regularly attends this model. On the understanding that approaches to theological education ought to reflect and express the nature of theology itself in some way, we undertook a biblical theological survey to determine how the knowledge of God was acquired and communicated throughout the Bible, and what impact that knowledge had on knowers. This survey provided a basis for examining contemporary pedagogical theory and practice.

The following principles and proposals are structured around three different elements of pedagogical approach: (1) The posture and content of theological education: Knowing the God who reveals himself, (2) The context of theological education: Knowing God in community, and (3) Theological pedagogy from two poles (the word and the world): Communicating the knowledge of God.

4.1 The posture and content of theological education: Knowing the God who reveals himself

We begin with a set of relevant principles drawn from the biblical data we have examined.

4.1.1 Epistemic humility

To be consistent with what can be seen throughout the biblical theological survey, theological education must adopt a posture of epistemic humility, seeking to know and respond to God as he has revealed himself. An approach to independent research which seeks to not only discover but create knowledge results in a posture that seeks to master the object of research and reject received orthodoxy (Shermer 2011, 135; Palmer 1993, 21).

This posture is unfitted for acquiring or growing in one's knowledge of God because a relational knowledge of God leads to submission and obedience rather than self-confident mastery.

4.1.2 Studying the written word of God

God has actively made himself known, progressively through salvation history and ultimately in his Son. Throughout this study a growing emphasis has been noted within the word of God, on God revealing himself through his written word. His written word preserves and transmits his progressive revelation, including the apostles' testimony of what they saw and heard from the Lord Jesus. More pointedly, the manner in which Jesus claimed to be the hermeneutic key to the OT Scriptures pushes us toward an approach to biblical studies which integrates rather than separates the study of OT and NT. The study of Scripture as a whole, and the various parts of Scripture in relationship to the whole, must therefore be the core content of any program of theological education.

4.1.3 Relying on divine illumination

There is every warrant for intellectual rigor in studying Scripture and its implications (Acts 17:2, 11; Deut 6:6-7; 11:18-20; Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2; 119:15; 97-99; 1 Cor 14:29; 1 Th 5:21; 1 John 4:1), but this must be applied in a context of prayerful dependence on the illumination of the Spirit (Keener 2016, 259). God must grant insight and understanding for anyone to know him. Even in a formal academic setting then, the study of Scripture must not be separated from the practice and posture of prayer and worship.

4.1.4 Integration of theology and life

Teachers and learners should increasingly exhibit lives transformed by what they know of God. Therefore, transformation in terms of repentance, faith, obedience, worship and love (amongst other fruit of the Spirit) should be evident among the intended outcomes of theological education. This transformation provides both evidence of an appropriate response to the knowledge of God and an epistemological foundation for further growth in that knowledge.

4.2 The context of theological education: Knowing God in community

Our consideration of the posture and content of theological education leads directly to the second set of principles that emerge from this study. Because knowledge of God is personal and relational, the context in which this knowledge is communicated is of the utmost importance. The NT presentation of churches as reciprocal learning communities, and its emphasis on the character of Christian leaders and teachers, has special relevance for our consideration of approaches to theological education.

Discipling relationships are a particularly potent expression of situated cognition that are employed by Jesus and Paul, and commended as an example to be followed. Whatever other formal structures and relationships might be created within an approach to theological education, the comprehensive sharing of life which is intrinsic to discipling relationships will be indispensable. A learning community characterized by mutually loving relationships provides a point of clear contrast with the competitive individualism that characterizes most Western education.

It is important to note that none of the above just automatically happens by getting people into the same physical space. Even residential

programs set up for this purpose will rely on the character of teachers and students, and intentionality in planning, for the formation and maintenance of communities of learning. Recent shifts toward more flexible study options, including part-time, distance, and online learning, raise questions about whether and how the need for Christian learning communities might be met in other ways. It is important that whatever models or modes of delivery are adopted, the notion of learning in Christian community is seen as intrinsic to the process and not an optional extra. Studying theology on your own is a fundamentally different activity from engaging the same material as part of a Christian community.

4.3 The structure of theological education: Pedagogy from two poles

4.3.1 Transformative learning

Our analysis of contemporary pedagogical methodologies concluded that an approach built around transformative learning would be well suited for theological education. Problem-based learning provides a structure for experiential, transformative learning that integrates growth in knowledge and development of practical skills around ‘real world’ problems. In theological education a problem-based learning approach that draws upon biblical, theological, historical, and practical ministry disciplines to work toward creating ministerial ‘solutions’ has significant integrative potential.

Transformative learning also embeds an expectation that learning ought to produce results beyond merely the cognitive. This expectation fits well with the recursive relationship observed in Scripture between the knowledge of God and the effects of that knowledge. Knowing God leads people to respond in faith, obedience, love, and worship. Those who are

faithful, obedient, and loving, and who worship God, are disposed to grow in their knowledge of him.

4.3.2 A proposed new structure

Theological study is traditionally structured around departments (OT, NT, theology, history of the church, and practical ministry) which functionally become silos of learning (Shaw 2014, 94; Farley 2005, 200; Moberly 2000, 5; see Figure 2). As a way of breaking down the fragmentary effect of this structure and implementing the insights of problem-based learning, formal theological education curriculum can be structured with subjects predominantly being taught from one of two poles (Figure 3). The first pole being the word, and the second pole the world. Subjects being taught from the word pole would begin with the word of God, and work toward application in the world; they would therefore comply with the transformative learning description of the use of narrative. Subjects being taught from the world pole would begin with problems or ministry tasks and utilize a problem-based learning approach to work toward integrating biblical, theological, historical, and ministerial knowledge and skills to provide a solution or develop a response.

In contrast to the innovative and excellent curriculum implemented at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) which Shaw (2014) presents and explains in *Transforming Theological Education*, this proposal preserves more than half of the curriculum for engagement with Scripture apart from problem-based learning subjects. Beginning with studying Scripture on its own terms and working toward application in the world better reflects God's divine initiative in revealing himself chiefly today through his written word.

Figure 2: Silos of theological learning



Figure 3: Pedagogy from two poles



4.3.3 Limitations and scope for further work

This research has been undertaken in a self-conscious attempt to push back against the drift toward fragmentation in theological education. The study has been far more wide-ranging and multidisciplinary than is traditional for doctoral dissertations. While this has been intentional, and has been fruitful in engaging and modelling a more integrative approach, it does

mean that there is great scope for further research. The biblical case for establishing how the knowledge of God is acquired and communicated, and what effects it has could be pursued at far greater detail with more focused research on individual books of the Bible. The contribution of the wisdom literature to these things is certainly a path ripe for further exploration, as is the post-exilic shift in further emphasis toward hearing God speak through the written word.

The range of pedagogical literature is enormous and unfamiliar to many in theological education. It is hoped that this work might present a framework for further multidisciplinary studies, providing Christian educators with a stronger theological basis for evaluating and developing pedagogical models, and theologians with an introduction to the world of pedagogical alternatives.

One further limitation of the model proposed here is that students taught through this model are unlikely to be as well prepared for post-graduate study as they might be under the current model. This is a point of tension. At one level, if the preparation of students for further academic research is a high priority, this model will be ill suited for that application. However, if growing people in their knowledge of God so that they might serve his people is the highest priority, this model offers great promise. A curriculum restructured in this way will rely on resources written by those who have engaged in specialized biblical and theological research. Can this kind of research be effectively ‘decoupled’ from its epistemological roots and re-tooled to better serve theological education as it has been described here?

5. Conclusion

Models of theological education must be centered around knowing God as he has revealed himself through his written word and situated in the context

of a Christian community committed to learning and being transformed by their relational knowledge of God. Formal theological studies should be intentionally transformative. Modelling teaching and learning around engagement with Scripture on its own terms and a problem-based learning approach to Christian life and ministry is consistent with the kind of personal and transformative knowledge of God that is described throughout Scripture. Theological education constructed along these lines should produce a learning experience where theology and ministry, academia and church, and indeed the various elements within a theological program, are far better integrated than is presently the case. All this that people may better know God and make him known.

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Art and Polarity—Towards a Theology of Art, with Special Reference to Ezekiel's Prophetic Sign-Acts

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Abstract

This dissertation is dedicated to the research of art and its theological significance. A summary of theologically relevant, art-theoretical conceptions of the underlying phenomenon serves as a starting point and allows for a reconsideration of prophetic sign-acts as artistic performances. Both art in general and prophetic sign-acts, particularly those in the book of Ezekiel, reveal polarity as a common and arguably defining feature. Thus, four polarities, which are art-theoretically relevant and prominently featured in Ezekiel's prophetic sign-acts, are studied in detail. The resulting insight, that polarity is a necessary element within the emergence of art, is associated with the revelatory nature of the latter. Thus, it is concluded that art should be considered as a manifestation of divine revelation. Finally, this conclusion is supplemented by an overview of its practical consequences within different theological disciplines as well as contemporary art.

Keywords

art, polarity, Ezekiel, sign-acts

1. Concepts of Art and their Development

1.1 Thesis

The thesis of this study is that the many structural, phenomenological, topical and even methodical similarities between art in general—regardless of its given genre—and prophetic sign-acts, particularly those in the book of Ezekiel, allow for the research of the latter according to art-theoretical considerations to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of art in its theological context and thus lay the systematic foundation for a biblical theology of art.

1.2 Genres of art

When considering different genres of art, and especially their classification throughout art history, a strong tendency towards polar categorizations becomes apparent. These may likely reflect the underlying nature of art which, according to the thesis of this study, is a central feature of art in general.

The first historically tangible example of this is Plato's differentiation between poietic arts and mimetic arts (Waibl 2009, 70–73). Here, the difference lies in whether a certain human activity is creating something, such as a vase, or whether it is re-creating the physical appearance of something, for instance, paintings of animals or people, possibly on a vase (cf. Schleiermacher 1965, 418–422). In Plato's writings, it becomes immediately apparent that the philosopher considered the latter to be of

inferior value (Hauskeller 2020, 9–14). This thought can even be found today, especially among abstract artists (Rebentisch 2013, 21), but it has also been criticized as the “philosophical disenfranchisement of art” (Danto 1988, 6–7). Furthermore, this differentiation hardly takes nonvisual genres of art into consideration and completely ignores both poetry and literature (Tatarkiewicz 2003, 144).

From at least the second century AD (Tatarkiewicz 2003, 82) throughout the Middle Ages, another classification became dominant that divided artistic genres into liberal arts and mechanical arts (Rieger 2003, 799). While neither of the two categories exclusively dealt with what modernity referred to as fine arts, they were divided according to the relative criterion that mechanical arts required some sort of tools or devices to be performed, whereas liberal arts did not (Bacher 2000). However, considering that even intangible faculties might be regarded as necessary tools for the performance of so-called liberal arts (linguistics and mathematics), the mediaeval classification of the arts was eventually challenged.

In 1766, Lessing (2016) suggested that artistic genres be divided into spatial arts and temporal arts. While the works of the first are considered to require space to unfold, such as paintings, sculptures, architecture, etc., the works of the latter are considered to require time, such as music, drama, and especially literature. According to Anglet (2005, 148), this classification is likely the poet’s attempt to elevate literature over other genres of art. A further development of this classification can be seen in Goodman’s differentiation between allographic arts and autographic arts, the first of which could be copied without changing their status as artworks, such as literature, drama or music, while copying the latter, such as paintings or sculptures, would result in forgery (Bertram 2005, 65). However, the

postmodern art appreciation (cf. Meese 2011) has shown that even this differentiation is largely obsolete.

Rather than dividing genres of art according to their respective material or content, Nietzsche divided them according to their psychological effects (cf. Bertram 2005, 68–72). In doing so, the philosopher referred back to the ancient Greek pantheon, and called the approach directed towards dreamful, beautiful, and harmonic illusion Apollonian, and the approach towards ecstasy and euphoria he called Dionysian (Kittler 2013, 29). This differentiation, however, is problematic because it does not allow for a precise categorization of artistic genres and is even less applicable in the context of prophetic sign-acts since they often combine elements of several different genres.

Thanks to the establishment of speech act theory in the early 1960s (cf. Austin 1962), the performative shift took place whose proponents rediscovered that art was essentially a process rather than a product. Even though this understanding had constantly existed from antiquity (Tatarkiewicz 2003, 29–34) until modernity (cf. Heidegger 1960), its practical implications had never actually been explored to the same extent as in the late twentieth century. This has led some art theorists to argue that both content and reception of art are eventually irrelevant from an aesthetic point of view (cf. Mersch 2002). In light of prophetic sign-acts, however, this position is hardly sustainable.

1.3 Models of art

While the above-mentioned attempts to categorize the different genres of art in juxtaposed and often contradictory groups have already indicated that art and polarity are related, an art-theoretical study is necessary to verify this impression and to better understand the nature of their relationship.

This approach has been chosen since art theories serve as explanatory tools for the analysis of pieces of art (Tatarkiewicz 2003, 175). In this context, theories that are based on the same paradigm have been condensed and are presented as models precisely because the main purpose of models is to illustrate paradigms (Barbour 1974, 6; cf. Bevans 2002, 30).

Theories that define and eventually even judge art according to its linguistic content are summarized in the communication model. The core assumption of this is that art generally conveys some sort of message (cf. Kandinsky 1952, 26; Han 2015). According to Schaeffer (2005, 205), for instance, art is the mere reflection of a contemporary worldview. Considering (post)modern art as well as prophetic sign-acts, however, it becomes apparent that in both cases there are numerous elements that cannot be deciphered (contra Friebel 1999; cf. Ott 2009), and whose linguistic content is, therefore, either nonexistent or at least hidden (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 250–255). This is why an opposing approach exists that is referred to as the institution model in the context of this study (cf. Bertram 2005, 32). Here, the central assumption is that the definition of art is the responsibility of certain institutions such as museums. What makes this model problematic, however, is that the establishment of the respective institutions has to be seen as a result of Hegelian aesthetics (Bubner 2005, 164). Thus, it is not logically consistent to assert that the Bible does not feature art because its texts are not intended to match the aesthetic canon of institutions that did not even exist at the time of its writing (Mazor 2009, 14).

An alternative art-theoretical approach is offered by the constitution model which assumes that artworks are constituted in a manner that allows the recipient to gain certain insights about reality (cf. Heidegger 1960, 19–34). This understanding is certainly based on the idealist art appreciation of the nineteenth century which expected every true artwork to reveal truth

(Eco 2010). However, even proponents of the constitution model (e.g., Han 2015, Wooddell 2011) claim that art requires some form of encryption or concealment. Thus, opponents propose a different approach, which can be referred to as the reception model, because it attempts to define art according to the effects it causes on the part of the recipient (e.g., Danto 1981, cf. Liessmann 1999, 149–158). Obviously, however, the respective effects can vary greatly, and in the case of Ezekiel’s prophetic sign-acts, recipients’ reactions are often not even recorded. Despite the fact that both art and prophecy are designed to provoke interaction, the manner of the interaction appears to not be a useful criterion for the definition of art.

Eventually, it seems hardly possible to define art at all. This may not be surprising, considering that definitions require boundaries, whereas art has a tendency to erase boundaries. Thus, much like God himself (cf. O’Connor 2016, 301), art cannot be defined. Characteristic features of art can, nonetheless, be identified. As the above has shown, one such feature is polarity.

1.4 The polarity of art

Polarity appears to be a precisely artistic feature that is evident throughout art history as well as in the history of philosophy. In this context, it is important to note that, within this study, polarity is used in reference to the juxtaposition of two opposing yet codependent extremes that are mutually exclusive even though they belong to a common phenomenon. To illustrate this concept, Johnson and Oswald (2009, 6) use the act of breathing, which consists of inhaling as well as exhaling. While both extremes are obviously vital, it is nonetheless impossible to perform them simultaneously. Despite that, however, this study argues for the simultaneous presence of two

otherwise incompatible extremes in art. This simultaneity is thus being considered as a hint at the divine nature of art.

Nevertheless, polarity is to be differentiated from duality since the latter usually implies an ontological difference between two juxtaposed extremes. As a consequence, the value of this study does not lie in an art-theoretical endorsement of the two natures doctrine. Instead, this research is designed to overcome the common consideration of prophetic sign-acts as mere analogy-acts (e.g., Ott 2009, 22–34) which will then allow for the reconsideration of prophecy in general in light of art. Thus, a biblical-theological foundation for a future theology of art will be laid from which systematic theology, biblical studies, art theory, and the arts themselves will profit.

In addition to the above, it may be mentioned that terms such as duplexity, ambivalence, or ambiguity could be used synonymously with polarity in most contexts. However, such is renounced here since each of these terms has a certain information-technological, psychological (cf. Trémeau et al. 2009), or rhetorical connotation due to its historical development and usage.

2. The Significance of the Book of Ezekiel for Art

While the Bible as a whole includes countless examples of art, the prophetic writings are particularly remarkable due to their formal polarity that features both prose and poetry (Seybold 2010, 15). Among the Prophets, the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are especially outstanding thanks to their numerous accounts of prophetic sign-acts (Friebel 1999, 79–369) which can be seen as prime examples of condensed artistic polarity. Arguably, the artistic nature of prophecy in general, and prophetic sign-acts in particular, are most prominently featured in Ezekiel's performances (Keen 2010). This

is why Ezek 4:1–5:5, 12:1–6, and 24:15–27 have been chosen to exemplify the artistic principles of polarity. The reconstruction of the respective sign-acts is predominantly based on the communication-theoretical considerations by Friebel (1999), while the general exegetical approach largely applies the so-called holistic method (Greenberg 1983, 18–27). This implies that the interpretation of the text relies mostly on the wording of the MT since that is presumably the oldest version of the text. Furthermore, apart from a few exceptions, text variants or translations, such as the LXX or p967, differ from the MT merely in terms of the composition of chapters, which is of little relevance in the context at hand, but not in terms of content (Lilly 2012).

2.1 Prophet vs. priest

The polar nature of art is not only apparent in Ezekiel's prophetic sign-acts, it is embedded in his ministry as a whole in that he serves as both prophet and priest. While one of the core tasks of a priest is to transmit the divine message (Lev 10:10), a prophet is expected to interpret the same (Koch 1987, 22). Thus, the addressee of the divine message is not least the prophet himself, which gives prophecy a certain self-referential dimension (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2004, 240–280). As a consequence, prophecy in general and prophetic sign-acts in particular are both representational and performative. Furthermore, a prophet functions as a foreboder (cf. Ezek 3:16–21), as somebody who has been called to call others in the name of God (cf. von Rad 1987, 18), and as a member of the divine council (Chalmers 2012, 47–48). Therefore, prophets have to be seen as representatives of God. While Israelite priests generally also function as representatives, they do not usually represent God before the people but they do represent the people before God (cf. Lev 16). This double role creates an artistic polarity which permeates Ezekiel's entire ministry.

2.2 Ezekiel as acting sign

Four times throughout the book of Ezekiel, the protagonist himself is called a sign (Ezek 12:6, 11; 24:24, 27), leaving no doubt that Ezekiel is expected to signify something. Therefore, he is to be located in the realm of representation. As Bolt (2004, 15) points out, representation can either refer to presenting something anew, or to the Cartesian concept of standing in place for an absent object. Considering that the content of Ezekiel's oracles deals with Israel's past and future alike, it is best to assume that both dimensions of representation are in effect in his ministry and performance. Furthermore, within semiotics, the Peircean model (cf. Chandler 2002, 36–42) distinguishes between three different modes that a sign can have: iconic, indexical, and symbolic. The differences exist in the nature of the relation between the signifier and the signified. However, there are numerous cases throughout Ezekiel's prophetic sign-acts where all three are simultaneously apparent.

Benjamin (1993), on the other hand, redefines what a symbol is in contrast to what he calls allegory. According to him, the difference between the two is that allegories can have an infinite number of different signifieds, while symbols hide their significance in themselves until the original state of the world—the unity of signifier and signified—is restored (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 250–255). According to Benjamin's terminology, symbols are, therefore, messianic. Nevertheless, the prophetic message is not altogether hidden since a polarity of allegory and symbol is evident in it. The allegorical aspects of the same are, nonetheless, qualitatively different from profane information inasmuch as the resurrection of the Messiah retrospectively lends it ultimate credibility (Bidy 2005, 25–26, cf. Pannenberg 1968, 131). Ezekiel essentially serves as the embodiment (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2004, 130–160) within which the allegorical and symbolic realms culminate.

3. The Polar Characteristics of Art

3.1 Beauty vs. ugliness

While the aesthetic phenomenon of ugliness was treated with little interest up until the nineteenth century (Rosenkranz 1853), and was then even regarded as mere negation of the superior phenomenon of beauty (cf. Liessmann 1999, 65–77), beauty has historically played an important role in theology and philosophy, and continues to do so today (Ensberg 2007). Nevertheless, for centuries both the appreciation and the research of beauty have been dominated by what Tatarkiewicz (2003, 176–184) refers to as “the great theory.” The basic assumption thereof is that beauty can be defined according to objective criteria, namely either perfect proportion (Waibl 2009, 37–38) or gloss (the reflection of light as metaphor for revelation and understanding). However, Bolt (2010, 123–148) criticizes the equation of an increase in brightness with an increase in understanding as a Eurocentric preconception. In addition, the great theory has also been challenged by those who considered beauty to be merely a subjective phenomenon (cf. Chaplin 2006, 33). The harmonization of the objectivist and subjectivist views was made possible by Kant (Friedlein 1962, 285, cf. Recki 2005, 135) who argued that there is indeed an objective criterion whose recognition is, however, an altogether subjective enterprise. According to him, uninterested pleasure serves as the respective criterion. This basically implies that pleasure can only be identified as being caused by beauty; if possible, interests, which may have led to the first, have been eliminated (Waibl 2009, 135). Therefore, uninterested pleasure is ultimately uninformed pleasure. As a consequence, beauty can only be recognized retrospectively and beauty is thus to be located in the past.

Ugliness, on the other hand, is an imminent phenomenon, which is why some philosophers doubt its existence (cf. Bachmetjevas 2007, 33). Nevertheless, Hagman (2003, 101) argues that the threatening imagination, which may be caused by an impending danger, proves that the phenomenon as such is a reality. However, since the recognition of ugliness is not based on personal experience, it has to be learned culturally. In the biblical context, the determining culture is ideally based on divine revelation. Thus, it is not surprising that the imminent phenomenon of ugliness often appears in the form of sinful behavior (cf. Exod 20:3–5). Ugliness is therefore not a merely aesthetic phenomenon but an ethical one, which is why its portrayal is an artistic imperative (Adorno 2009).

3.1.1 Beauty vs. ugliness in Ezekiel 24:15–27

This passage in Ezekiel features an account of the events surrounding the death of Ezekiel's wife whom the prophet loved very much (Eisemann 2003, 422). This is particularly important for the prophetic sign-act in the text since the prophet's non-participation in his wife's burial (contra Friebel 1999, 340–341) functions as an analogy for the imminent non-participation of his recipients in their relatives' burials (Greenberg 1997, 509). Furthermore, in that Ezekiel's wife is portrayed as the desire of the prophet's eyes (Ezek 24:16), her loss is likened to the loss of the Jerusalem temple (v. 21). In retrospect, there are, thus, two prime examples of beauty which are contrasted by the ugliness of death and destruction (cf. Nietzsche 1969, 1001–1002) which are being predicted as the result of, or punishment for, sin (Ezek 18:24, cf. Gen 2:17). Therefore, the apparent beauty, which is located in the past, and the apparent ugliness, which is to be located in the future, create what could be referred to as ultimate presence. As De Vries (2018, 278) remarks, the concept of presence is *per se* theocentric.

Consequently, it is not surprising that what lies at the center of the prophetic sign-act at hand is the recognition of God (Ezek 24:27). In the context of the book as a whole, it also becomes obvious that the recognition of God is not only brought about by his presence, which emerges out of the beauty-ugliness polarity, but that this presence culminates in (divine) glory (Ezek 1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–23; 43:2–5; 44:4).

3.2 Illusion vs. reality

The philosophy of the so-called Frankfurt School suggests that the world in itself is illusionary due to its imperfection (cf. Hirsch 2014, 67–69). Nevertheless, certain insights about reality can be gained by means of intuition, reason, and sensation (Locke 2011, 56). Interestingly, there is relatively broad agreement among philosophers that especially techniques of illusion allow for the adequate application of the three just-mentioned faculties (Waibl 2009, 149–180; 207–216). However, two types of illusion need to be differentiated, namely deceptive illusion (Lotter 2017, 29) and artistic illusion (Heidegger 1960, 79–80). While deceptive illusion is merely based on so-called empty signifiers (cf. Chandler 2002, 74), artistic illusion does have empirically measurable references.

With the above in mind, it is not to be considered sinful if, for instance, an actor pretends to be a different character than he is in his normal life since the purpose of acting is embodiment (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 130–160) rather than fraud. Thus, there is no conflict between acting or the creation of fiction, such as parables (e.g., Matt 22:11–13, Mark 4:26–29, Luke 7:41–43; 15), and Exodus 20:16 or Deuteronomy 5:20. Similarly, visual arts are not in conflict with Exodus 20:4 or Deuteronomy 5:8 since their purpose is not the worship of the works they bring forth (Boehm 2006, 330,

cf. m. 'Abod. Zar. 3:4). Instead, artistic illusion is even a necessity for the recognition of data-based or constructivist reality (cf. Danilina 2014, 50).

3.2.1 Illusion vs. reality in Ezekiel 12:1–16

This passage is framed by the revelation formula (v. 1) and the recognition formula (v. 15) and does, therefore, imply that the prophetic sign-act which the text describes, is ultimately directed towards the (deeper) understanding of God's actions. The illusionary aspect of the sign-act lies in the reenactment (Eisemann 2003, 204) or prediction (Friebel 1999, 271) of the forced exile, if not even the dramatic performance of Zedekiah's attempted escape (Greenberg 1983, 217). The presumably deliberate vagueness concerning the sign-act's historical references confirms Benjamin's concept of allegories (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2004, 250–255). According to Allen (1994, 170), Alexander (1986, 796), and Block (1997, 362), the sign-act itself was performed in the daytime (cf. v. 4) so that Ezekiel's fellow exiles would be able to witness it, which supports the theory that the act of seeing functions as a leitmotif in this passage (Friebel 1999, 262). During the performance of the sign-act, the prophet takes on several roles simultaneously—himself, the exiles, the Jerusalemites, the Babylonians, and God—which is why it can be described as reverse cross-casting (cf. Grotowski 2000). This implies that the polarity of the two epistemological extremes (illusion and reality) is not achieved by the mimetic quality of the illusion but by the content of the performance as a whole (cf. Bidy 2005). Given that there is no actual content beyond Christ (Fujimura 2006, 303), it can be concluded that the polarity of illusion and reality culminates in the divine quality of truth.

3.3 *Artwork vs. performance*

Arguably the most relevant debate within current art theory concerns the conservative view on one side (e.g., Gehlen 1986, 187), which considers contemporary works of art to be aimless, and the progressive view on the other side (e.g., Mersch 2002) which considers the work-related focus in itself as a hindrance of an adequate hermeneutics and especially an “erotics of art” (Sontag 2016, 22). While the first of these two approaches focuses on the outcome of the artistic process, namely the artwork, the latter focuses on the process itself, namely the performance. This general difference leads to far-reaching consequences concerning the definition of either artwork or performance. It can be summarized that artworks are representational (cf. Panofsky 1972), they require some sort of frame—either a spatial or a temporal one (Polanyi 2006, 159–160)—they provoke an inward response on part of the recipient, and they are generally directed towards perfection (cf. Danilina 2014, 52). Performances are, by contrast, self-referential (Bersis 2009), they do not require pre-existing frames and even tend to erase the same, they provoke an outward response or responsibility (Mersch 2002, 53), and they are generally directed towards imperfection (Bolt 2010, 76). Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that neither artwork nor performance exists in an absolute form. Therefore, the simultaneous presence of both is essentially inevitable. As a consequence, the favor of one of the two at the expense of the other cannot be justified—neither art-theoretically nor biblical-theologically. Instead, the tension created by the polarity of both extremes should be embraced as the mystery that surrounds art in general (cf. Seidler 2014, 223).

3.3.1 Artwork vs. performance in Ezekiel 4:4–17

The passage at hand features the pivotal part of a bigger sign-act (Ezek 4:1–5:5) whose middle section is being studied separately due to its thematic focus on the general fate of the kingdom of Judah, rather than of the city of Jerusalem in particular. Furthermore, Ezekiel 4:4–17 most prominently displays the polarity of performative as well as artwork-related elements. The beginning of this part of the sign-act is the divine command that Ezekiel should lie on his left and then right side for a certain period of time in order to either tolerate (Greenberg 1983, 104) or bear (Block 1997, 117) Israel's and Judah's iniquity, guilt of iniquity, or punishment for iniquity (cf. Alexander 1986, 771). While lying in this position, the prophet is expected to eat strictly rationed food (vv. 9–10) which may represent scarcity (cf. Block 1997, 185) as well as variety, considering that the loaves of bread are to be baked with six different ingredients. The manner in which Ezekiel is supposed to bake them is most unusual and provokes his objection which Phinney (2005, 75) considers a central element of the prophetic office whereby the objection shows that the prophet's ego is in dialogue with God as well as in action for him.

In summary, the sign-act at hand is framed spatially by the prophet's house (Ezek 3:24) and temporally by the commanded number of days, whose numeric significance was likely not immediately apparent to Ezekiel's audience, and which causes the reception of the sign-act to be performative. Furthermore, the accuracy concerning the ingredients of the prophet's food is obviously directed towards perfection, whereas the use of dung as fuel and the representation of scarcity imply imperfection. Thus, the sign-act is representational, which places it in the realm of artworks; however, the act of eating is a metabolic process which is why the sign-act has to be located in the realm of performances. In addition, the literary

context leaves no doubt that Ezekiel's performance is to provoke an inward and an outward response on the part of its recipients (Ezek 3:17–21). As a consequence, the prophetic sign-act at hand is simultaneously an artwork as well as a performance (contra Ott 2009, 22–34).

3.4 *Transcendence vs. immanence*

Artists (e.g., Kandinsky 1952, 26, Meese 2011), art theorists (e.g., Heidegger 1960, 30, Bertram 2005, 116–123; Danilina 2014, 50), and even art critics (e.g., Lessing 2016; Schmid 1981) generally agree that art enables its recipients and participants to encounter the transcendent, or to at least catch a glimpse of it. Their respective definitions of transcendence are, however, usually very vague. There appears to be general agreement that transcendence is beyond ordinary human experience. Thus, it has to be differentiated from intuition, reason, and sensation (cf. Locke 2011, 56). For the purpose of this study, transcendence has been further defined according to three criteria: its place, mode, and destination. Heaven in its different facets (Beinert 2006, 48), which are all beyond ordinary human experience (Gese 1983, 2011), can be identified as the place of transcendence. Furthermore, truth, as it can be recognized thanks to the polarity of illusion and reality (cf. Gebauer 2000, 250–251), is to be identified as the mode of transcendence. This has also been reflected in art theory since the nineteenth century (Scott 2006, 163). Lastly, eternity has to be identified as the destination of transcendence (Rombold 2004, 14).

Since the concepts of transcendence and immanence are necessarily interdependent in that both are dialectic (Greisch 2012, 196–197, cf. Nabert 1996), immanence is to be understood as the exact opposite of transcendence or the negation thereof (Deleuze 1996). Thus, art is to be defined by its mundanity, fallibility, and finitude. Furthermore, it becomes

apparent that neither transcendence nor immanence is simply available and can, therefore, not be produced or fabricated. Considering that the polarity of the two emerges within art, it has to be concluded that art cannot possibly be a human production either (contra Harbinson 2012).

3.4.1 Transcendence vs. immanence in Ezekiel 4:1–3 and 5:1–5

There are two different parts to be looked at: the first of which (Ezek 4:1–3) deals with the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, and the second (Ezek 5:1–5) which focuses on the consequences thereof. Considering that the sign-act features a clash of theological ideals and the historical reality (cf. Friebel 1999, 196.204), the polarity of transcendence and immanence is immediately apparent. However, this polar structure is not only visible on the contentual level, but also on the technical one, as can be seen by the combination of two-dimensional (Uehlinger 1987, 141–149, Block 1997, 171, Ott 1009, 96) with three-dimensional (Greenberg 1983, 103) representations of Jerusalem and its surrounding siege works. Certain materials (e.g., iron), even though of the most earthly origin possible and thus clearly immanent, bear a certain transcendent significance (cf. Maeir et al. 2012). Furthermore, especially the second part (Ezek 5:1–5), seems to imply that, despite the use of ordinary and mundane items, the acts that are carried out are not only those of a priest (Block 1997, 191) but also of a Nazirite (Allen 1994, 71, Friebel 1999, 234.236) who embodies God’s very own behavior. Consequently, everything the prophet performs in this context has to be considered a holy act.

Here, it is important to differentiate between the etymological origin of the terms “holy” and “holiness” and their actual usage in the Hebrew Bible. While the first may suggest that they have to do with separation (cf. van de Walle 2017, 8), Davies (2009, 5–6) points out that the adjective “holy” is most commonly used in combination with prepositions that indicate a

directedness towards something or someone, namely God. Consequently, Cohen (2008, 133–154) considers holiness to be a concept of relationship, whereby he attributes the holiness of God to the relationship between the creator and his chosen people (cf. Dan 2012, 74). Thus, the author essentially questions the divine sovereignty, which it why it is better to assume that the holiness of God is a consequence of his trinitarian nature. This divine quality is eventually the culmination of the polarity between transcendence and immanence as it can be encountered in the prophetic sign-act at hand (Ezek 4:1–5:5) as well as in art in general.

4. The Significance of Art Within the Book of Ezekiel

4.1 Art vs. prophecy

The comparison of art and Ezekiel's prophecy, especially his prophetic sign-acts, reveals a striking similarity between the two—that both are initiated by inspiration (cf. Markschies 2014, 100). As opposed to the etymological origin of the term “inspiration” (cf. Vöhler 2004, 207), however, the book of Ezekiel demonstrates that inspiration predominantly refers to a change of perspective, often by means of relocation (Ezek 3:14; 8:3; 11:1.24; 43:5). It is this change of perspective which allows for the recognition of God, as the recurring recognition formula indicates (cf. Strong 1995). Remarkably, the just-mentioned formula is not merely used in reference to mediately performed sign-acts but also to immediate historical events (Ezek 6:13; 12:15; 20:42), which implies that just like God reveals himself through history and nature (Rom 1:20), he also reveals himself through art. Thus, it can be concluded that art is essentially a manifestation of divine self-revelation. As such, art is to be differentiated from prophecy in that prophecy assumes art (cf. Meese 2011, 310). Consequently, art is of utmost significance for the

book of Ezekiel since the prophetic message of its protagonist would be unthinkable without it.

4.2 The divinity within

Three of the four polarities that were considered in this study have been shown to reveal certain extraordinary qualities: the polarity of beauty and ugliness culminates in presence; the polarity of illusion and reality culminates in truth; and the polarity of transcendence and immanence culminates in holiness. According to Barth (1940, 362, cf. Holmes 2008, 210), all three qualities are to be regarded as divine perfections. As such, they are neither controllable nor made, but should be located beyond that which is created. Furthermore, since these perfections are essential to art, it has to be concluded that art itself is pre-existent (Heidegger 1960, 7) and, therefore, divine. Art can thus be seen as the sum of divine perfections.

The fact that one of these four polarities, namely artwork and performance, does not culminate in an immediately apparent perfection is probably best explained by the recalcitrant nature of art which has the tendency to challenge, push, and erase boundaries and, therefore, hardly fits into preconceived theories or systems. Given that the same can be said about God (Seidl 1988, 122), this particular characteristic further confirms the divine nature of art.

Since none of the divine perfections, which are to be seen as culminations of the artistic polarities considered in this study, nor the uncontrollability or sovereignty, which has been identified as characteristics of art, can be attributed to one particular hypostasis alone, it is best to assume that art in itself is divine trans-personality, however neither in a Jungian (cf. Vich 1988) nor in a parapsychological sense (cf. Laszlo 2004), but in a trinitarian one. With this in mind, three central insights concerning the

nature of art can be summarized: art is to be seen as manifestation of divine self-revelation, as sum of divine perfections, and as divine trans-personality. Thus, it can be said that much like God is fire (Heb 12:29), light (1 John 1:5), love (1 John 4:8.16), and *Logos* (John 1:1), God is also, and especially, art.

5. Practical Consequences

5.1 Consequences for theology

The above-mentioned insights concerning the nature of art represent three different perspectives: the revelation-theological perspective (art as divine self-revelation), the theology proper perspective (art as sum of divine perfections), and the trinitarian perspective (art as divine trans-personality). While the second and third are certainly to be placed within the discipline of systematic theology, the revelation-theological perspective does have systematic as well as hermeneutical and, thus, exegetical, implications. Given that the biblical canon is to be regarded as normative revelation for the people of God, this causes the Bible to be considered a work of art. Consequently, its content must not be studied merely according to hermeneutical methods (cf. Redditt 2008, 26–50) but also according to methods of art criticism (cf. Lessing 2016) and art theory (e.g., Panofsky 1972).

Furthermore, the implied divinity of art has far-reaching consequences for systematic theology in that it renders the consideration of God as “master of arts” (Stoker 2007) obsolete since God himself is art. In addition to this, the insights of this study emphasize the need for a theology of art as an independent discipline within systematic theology while simultaneously challenging its pre-existing classification by creating cross-connections between different sub-disciplines such as epistemology

and aesthetics, the latter of which is often not even considered to belong to the realm of theology.

5.2 *Consequences for art theory*

Considering that polarity has proven to be a vital characteristic of art (cf. Iser 1999, 39–58), attempts to justify the alleged dominance of either a hermeneutical or a phenomenological approach have to be rejected. Instead, the tension created by the underlying polarity or polarities should be embraced as the driving force of art. Furthermore, the recognition of the divine nature of art causes the notion of creating art by theorizing about it to be untenable (cf. Derrida 1986, 144). This also implies that the definition and, thus, fixation of art is an ultimately hopeless task (Osborne et al. 2012, 9). Rather than being governed, art is to be experienced (Sontag 2016, 22, cf. Mersch 2002, 160–161) and, thus, God is to be recognized (e.g. Ezek 24:24).

5.3 *Consequences for the arts*

The nature of art as portrayed in Ezekiel’s prophetic sign-acts leaves no doubt about the fact that art is not to be domesticated. As a consequence, it must be the task of any artist to overcome the pragmatic approach of utilizing art, albeit it for the most honorable purposes (contra Peacock 2006, 241). In fact, the underlying utilitarian reasoning for art’s right to exist, which is shared by many Christian artists (e.g., Harbinson 2012; Fujimura 2017; cf. Schaeffer 2005; Han 2015) and often believed to save art from its alleged irrelevance, eventually proves to be the exact opposite—a degradation of art.

Therefore, two alternative approaches towards the practical engagement with art are presented: the concept of the *social sculpture* by Beuys (2002, 13) and the concept of the *dictatorship of art* by Meese (2011).

While the first does indeed overcome the notion of mastery by highlighting that art cannot be controlled inasmuch as it is an ongoing social process (Verspohl 1989), it is, nonetheless, based on an anthropological rather than a theological rationale (Stachelhaus 2010, 82). The center of Meese's concept is indeed art, whose divinity he does not question. Despite the divine nature of art, however, Meese rejects the idea of a personal God (2011, 325), even though personality is an essential requirement for trans-personality (cf. Vaai 2007, 144). Thus, it becomes obvious that both approaches need further development.

In addition, it has become apparent that since art can be seen as the sum of divine perfections, it also reveals their close interconnectedness. Considering that polarity, which has proven to be a characteristic feature of art, and is the underlying principle of any complex system (Morin 1992, 373), the development of a theology of art also necessitates the study of art beyond the phenomenon of polarity. On that note, this study at hand is merely the groundwork for a future theology of art.

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Incessancy of Religious Violence in Northern Nigeria 1980–2020: A Study on the Ministry to the Victims in ECWA Katsina District Church Council

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the frequent, intensified and never-ending religious violence that has been a major device to the backdrop of the church in northern Nigeria, and the need for the Evangelical Church Winning All in the Katsina district to design a feasible strategy on how to minister to the victims of such violence. Using a modified version of Osmer's four models as a primary tool for the study has helped in answering the questions: "What is going on?" (the descriptive-empirical task), "Why is it going on?" (the interpretive task), "What ought to be going on?" (the normative task), and "How might we respond?" (the pragmatic task). This study could serve as template for other Christian communities in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Keywords

religion, violence, northern Nigeria, ministry, victims, ECWA Katsina District Church Council.

1. Introduction

Nigeria, known as a conglomeration of nation-states (Taiye 2013, 59), is a pluralistic society that is multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multiregional with multiple religions that are deeply held to (Akanji 2011, 2; Mbachirin 2006, 1; Hassan 2016, 1; Kajom 2012, 1). It is known by many identities in the third world and as “the giant of Africa” (Falola 1998, 1). Despite its popularity it has been bedeviled and has become the “major African theatre of religious violence and aggression” (Falola 1998, 1)—with violence leading to the nation being torn apart, (Osaghae and Suberu 2005, 4).

The Katsina district is the site of much religious violence in Northern Nigeria, and Christians are the most affected because they are treated as second-class citizens, people living not in their fatherland, or intruders. Christians in northern Nigeria are not free to practice their religion as stipulated in the Nigerian constitution (1999, 39). They lack the freedom to express and propagate their religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.

As the church, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Katsina is the most affected church. The purpose of this research was to explore the problems, impact, and solutions to religious violence, and to propose a strategy for holistic ministry to victims. The field of this proposed study resides within the discipline of practical theology, and Osmer’s tasks of practical theology are used (Osmer 2007, 8–11).

2. Review of Literature for Religious Violence

2.1 The reality of religious violence in northern Nigeria

Nigeria has been fertile ground for the perpetration of various acts of violence mostly caused by ethnic, religion and politics, and leading to never-ending conflicts. The weaponry used in these conflicts ranges from traditional weapons of warfare to more sophisticated weapons. Undoubtedly, religion is responsible for various acts of violence which account for the destruction of lives and property caused by irresponsible religious, political and traditional leaders, (John and Maurice 2016, 48). Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed six major violent periods: the Maitatsine Turbulence from 1980 to 1985, the Kafanchan College of Education crisis in 1987, the Sharia Introduction Menace from 1999 to 2000, the Presidential Postelection Violence in 2011, 2015 and 2019, the Plateau Ethno-religious Violence from 2000 to 2018, and the Boko Haram Threat between 2009 and 2020. There was also other social unrest, which has left Nigeria in shambles.

2.2 The impact of religious violence

Obviously, violence has unfavorable consequences for building a flourishing nation or church. In Nigeria, experience shows that the incidence of religious violence has become a yearly ritual, often leading to the destruction of lives and property and the loss of precious time, money and energy (Donbong 2017, 1). This has many negative outcomes, some of which are outlined below.

2.2.1 Insecurity

The concept of national security goes beyond safeguarding the state from external and internal threats. It involves all walks of life; protecting the dominant values, ideology, and way of life of the state from threats; and forestalling any form of socio-economic, political, environmental assault on the state (Omodia and Monday 2013, 36). Governance failures are central to the socio-economic and political development challenges confronting Nigeria and the spate of violence that threatens national security (Omodia 2012, 90–96). Nigeria has been left insecure by uncontrolled killing of innocent citizens, unrest, lack of control of farmers and Fulani herdsmen, kidnapping for ransom, political intra- and inter-clashes, migration of population to ‘safer areas,’ isolation, and stigmatization. (Gwamna 2014, 11; Osaghae and Suberu 2005, 19; Aliyu 2009, 95; Coinco 2014, 42)

2.2.2 Economic instability

In business circles, violence becomes a contributing factor in weakening the already poor economy of the nation, and exposing the valuable assets (human and material) of the nation to destruction. This causes commissions of enquiry to unravel, reconstruction, rehabilitation, compensation to victims to fail, and a loss of investment funds because of the adverse repercussions on the investment climate (Onuegbu 2012, 43). No businessman or industrialist would want to invest where the safety of their investment is not guaranteed (Aliyu 2009, 75). Undoubtedly, economic instability affects the land, the church, and Nigeria’s future.

The unstable national economy and insecurity, coupled with too much violence, have caused a number of schools to close down and contributed to slow educational development. The inability of the Nigerian

government to solve national problems affects and damages educational policies, and schooling for children has been disrupted and interrupted, which results in both immediate and long-term impacts on children. These have crippled educational development (Coinco 2014, 59).

2.3 *Reminiscence of religious violence in Katsina*

Katsina has suffered incalculable religious violence. This has greatly affected Christians.

- There was a reprisal attack for the killing of Muslims in Kafanchan FCE in March 1987 (Falola 1998, 183; Azgaku 2015, 14).
- There has been large-scale violence over accusations of blaspheming Mohammed (*The Guardian* February 19, 2006).
- The church suffers from a lack of Christian religious knowledge (Tuduks 2015, 34).
- The church suffered a post-presidential election crisis in April 2011 (Lipdo 2015, 442–448, 488–92).
- Pastor Dike Ocha of Assemblies of God Church in Kankia was killed by the “mischief-makers” who may have raped a girl named Fatima Muhammad and caused her death (Shaba December 15, 2017).
- A new convert was assassinated by his brothers for accepting Jesus at Farar Many, in Kankara (Kabir March 28, 2017).
- Christians have suffered from religious tension leading to the forceful closure of the Federal University of Dutsinma. This crisis was unquestionably religious centric (Sahara Reporters, Monday 3, 2017).

2.4 Causal factors of religious violence

2.4.1 Religious ignorance

Ethno-religious violence in Katsina has much to do with a lack of mutual understanding of others' religions and a lack of Western education. This leads to a lack of desire for coexistence. Religious intolerance is also caused by ethnic antipathy, the press, and the attitude of religious leaders (Kajom 2012, 50; Yahaya 2011, 93; John and Maurice 2016, 51; Onuegbu 2012,20–21).

2.4.2 Proliferation of Islam and presence of churches

Islam is the official religion in Katsina, and its followers feel a sense of superiority at the local and state levels. Islamic religion is taught at all levels of learning. There are many Islamic groups that run the affairs of the state (Donbong 2017, 45; Umaru 2013, 30–35). The presence of Christians and established churches in some areas may be the reason Muslim fanatics cause violence at any opportunity.

2.5 Impact of Christianity in Katsina

Before the arrival of Islam and Christianity in Katsina, most of the inhabitants of the area were idol or traditional worshippers (pagan). Because they refused to embrace Islam they were called *Maguzawa* (pagans). This name *Maguzawa* followed them even when they embraced Christianity. *Maguzawa* preferred to live their way of life rather than joining Islam. Christianity impacted the lives of people who accepted Jesus (Dan'asabe June 12, 2018). Christianity has:

- Eradicated superstition and freed those who accepted Jesus Christ.
- Facilitated interpersonal relationships between adherents to Christianity.

- Succeeded in bringing unity to communities.
- Succeeded in the health services to communities.
- Instilled the value of Western education in communities.
- Brought Christian morals to the communities.

2.6 Impact of religious violence

Religious violence has caused:

- A lack of teaching on Christian religious knowledge at all levels in the state (CSW 2008, 3).
- Unequal rights between Muslims and Christians in business centers across the state (NOSCEF 2009, 70).
- Limited or difficult access to the benefits of democracy, equal opportunities, appointments, recruitments and enrolments in some specific political positions or public offices, and representation in politics, distribution of essential commodities and welfare services (NOSCEF 2009, 69–70).
- Underage Christian girls kidnapped, raped, impregnated, forced to follow Islam, and forced into marriage with Islamic boys for the promotion of Islam as a strategy to downgrade Christianity in Katsina (The Sun September 9, 2016).
- Detaining Christians for hiding new converts (Gambo December 25, 2017).
- Denying justice to Christians in courts (Usman October, 2017).
- Forcible snatching of inheritance when Christian children or wives do not follow their Muslim fathers, mothers, or husbands to Islam, or when they become Christians (Babangida February 1, 2017).
- Introduction of the Sharia legal system. Even though the introduction of Sharia law has not been officially declared in Katsina, it has been

implemented in practice, and once a Muslim is converted to Christianity he or she experiences a tug of war from both sides (Doka 2012, 21–22).

- Banning of public preaching and erecting new churches by Christians (Katsina District Church Council Archive, 2017):
 - o Refusal to rebuild the collapsed Anglican church in Bakori town. After 50 years there still was no church in Bakori (Nuhu June 6th 2018).
 - o The building of a Baptist church was stopped and the building destroyed in Funtua (Isah June 27, 2018).
 - o ECWA church in Kanika was relocated in from the road to a hidden place (Shaba, December 15, 2017).
 - o Construction of a Catholic church building in Kankara town was stopped and the church was relocated to a hidden, isolated area (Ibrahim June 6, 2018).

2.7 Major threats in the district

For some years, the church in the Katsina district has experienced three major threats: Sharia tensions, elections, and church closures.

2.7.1 Sharia tensions

Establishing the Sharia legal system (Islamic law) in Katsina signaled the formal entrenchment of the Sharia Commission (BBC News 2000). This was followed by the suspension or stoppage of all social vices in the state, including prostitution and public liquor consumption. Three years after Islamic law was introduced, those prohibited vices resurfaced and continue to happen publicly, to a worse degree than before. With the government's failure to stop social vices in the state by introducing Islamic law, Christians

could see and understand the real reason for its implementation: limiting Christian religious expression. Christians have continued to experience lack of freedom to exercise their religion (Lipdo 2015, 61; IPCR 2017, 256; Stefanos Foundation 2009, 139–146; CSW NG 2008, 5).

2.7.2 Election in Katsina

Elections in Nigeria, and in Katsina, have not been free from violence. This violence includes the destruction of worship and business centers, houses and means of transport by the perpetrators. Data gathered from Orji and Uzodu (2011, 109–110, Lipdo 2015, 442–443, 488–492, 571–578) shows how the church in Katsina has suffered. Affected areas of the ECWA Katsina district include Daura, Jibia, Malumfashi, Matazu, Musawa, Kafur, Kankara and Kankia, where Christianity has been long-established (Sadauki April 22, 2011):

- Both indigenous Christians and settlers lost their properties worth millions of naira, and were displaced for re-electing a Christian and member of the People’s Democratic Party.
- Over twenty-five cars and twenty-nine motorcycles were burnt.
- Four pastors were beaten, injured and narrowly escaped death.
- One lady narrowly escaped being raped by political thugs.
- Over thirty houses and domestic equipment worth millions of naira were burned down.
- Pastors’ residences and church auditoriums were set ablaze.
- ECWA Katsina District Church Council (DCC) headquarters, the center for evangelism and other Christian organizations in the state and northern Nigeria was set alight.
- All church offices, clinics, and primary and secondary schools, and their official documents, were destroyed.

2.7.3 Church closure threats

ECWA Matazu has been one of the main targets of church closures. The church leadership received a threatening letter from the Katsina State Urban and Regional Planning Board. The letter gave a three-day ultimatum for the 99-year-old ECWA Mission Compound in Matazu to be demolished to make way for a road to be constructed that would pass through the church compound (Premium Times January 8, 2015; NOSCEF 2009, 69; Gwamna 2014, 114).

2.8 ECWA Katsina DCC response to victims

The leadership in the Katsina district hold to the biblical teaching that says “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: it is mine to avenge; says the Lord” (Rom 12:17 NIV). Katsina district prefers an “active non-violence” response from believers, as suggested by the Jos Bulleting of Religion (2006, 83–103). Active non-violence is compatible with biblical teaching, because war and violence are not acceptable, because they are used to tear Nigeria and the church apart. Jesus himself supports non-violence in the following instances:

- In his ethical teachings, when his disciples sought to defend him (Matt 26:52).
- In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:38–48) asking Christians to show appropriate conduct.
- In respecting the institutional government (Rom 13:1–4).
- In asking the Father to forgive his crucifiers (Luke 23:34).
- In loving one another (Matt 5:43–48).
- In valuing life more than possessions (Matt 19:16–30).

ECWA Katsina prefers a non-violence response on the basis of three significant biblical truths:

- God alone is the judge and is sovereign. He alone knows how to deal with persecutors (Deut 32:35).
- Retaliation will never end violence; rather, it only fuels it. Christians should make room for God's wrath (Rom 12:19).
- Believers in Katsina could not raise their hands to their attackers. They obeyed their Master, who asked them to turn the other cheek when they were slapped on the cheek (Matt 5:39). They see non-violence as a way of life that leads to transformative values, and as a technique and strategy of resistance to achieve specific tasks.

Consequently, the response by the leadership of ECWA Katsina to the victims of religious violence has reshaped the church. It has led the church to reformation instead of degeneration. Oral interviews with former and recent leaders at the district's annual convention (Korau, Kube and Sadauki November 10, 2018) show how the church responded to victims in the following ways:

- **Spiritual reformation:** the leadership has embarked on spiritual activities such as prayer, fasting, food and clothes distribution, provision of shelter, visitation, and reunion. ECWA, other churches, and church-related organizations like CAN, Africa Services and Call of Hope, have provided relief materials to the victims, and continued to speak to the media on behalf of Christians, as in the time of the apostles (Acts 2:42). The leaders of all churches have, in practice, continued to preach peace and appealed for calm; this has helped the church in returning to normalcy.

- As places of worship became increasingly vulnerable to attacks, a number of security measures were adopted by church leaders, including security around church buildings being intensified.
- Church leadership asked the government to compensate all those who had suffered loss, and forwarded victim statistics to the state and federal governments. This has caused the government to set up committees of investigation that could help compensate the victimized churches and individuals.
- Structural rebuilding: the affected churches embarked on the total reconstruction of their destroyed church buildings, pastors' residences, and other buildings. Today, the destroyed church structures have been reconstructed, and have become better-looking than the former places.

3. Ministering to the Victims of Religious Violence in ECWA Katsina

Statistics indicate that from 2000 to 2014, 7,000 ECWA members were affected by different types of violence or persecution (Open Door 2016, 112). This number increased from 7,000 to 10,000 or more between 2014 and 2019, and the number might increase in the next few years. The main concern is how the church should minister to the victimized or traumatized. On caring for the victims, Young (n.d:1) suggests:

The church has a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to take seriously the pain and suffering of all people, 'especially the household of faith.' Consider the pain and anguish of crime victims when we talk from the pulpit about the great ministry of our church's 'prison team' but then neglect to describe our love and support to victims. Think of those who sit in silent suffering

wondering if Christ's love and the compassion of the church are reserved only for the 'sinner' and not the 'saint.'

Violence can materialize and turn into persecution, as is happening to Christians in Africa at present, and in Nigeria in particular. Botha (2012, 200) notes what Daniel Kyanda of Christian Solidarity International in Nairobi, Kenya said: "When I see more and more Africans being converted, I just conclude that each one is a candidate for persecution." In northern Nigeria there is no way to separate violence of every type from persecution: violence is always attached to persecution.

3.1 Appraisal of pastoral strategies for ministry to the victims

As discussed, ECWA Katsina's district leadership has responded to victims by providing food and clothes, and advocating for government compensation. These kinds of contributions have been a great help to the victims, but there is a need for more deliberate and concerted efforts towards their plight. The district leadership should set up emergency response units that will be equipped and prepared beforehand to respond quickly to victims. There is need for:

Serious prayers, preaching and teaching of the word, visiting the affected, sensitization and awareness, seminars and workshops, sharing of gifts and extending a hand of love to neighbors, building a strong and enduring bridge across the religious divides, educating the populace and creating awareness on conflict management and empowering youths through employment ... there should be a training program where counsellors for trauma cases would be coached or place where managers of conflict could be trained. (Ipole 2017, 121-122)

These insights suggest a ministry strategy for the church leadership to aid the victims of violence and persecution. Strategy could include policymaking, designing tactics, and identifying ends and means to be achieved, or simply as a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal (Nickols 2016, 11–12).

3.1.1 Engaging educational programs

Education is described as an aspect of “socialization” and a “process” that transmits knowledge by means of teaching, learning, training, and the acquisition of skills for the production of goods and services (Yoms 2019, 25). Education, formally or informally, has contributed immensely to the development of contemporary society, and remains the catalyst for growth and expansion in the world (Umaru 2013, 192). Church leaders are duty bound to educate their members whether in large or small churches (Tidwell 1982, 136).

Ministry to victims in the church should be based on biblical principles on how to counter violence. God commanded Moses to teach (Deut 31:12–13), offering the Israelites an insight into the concept of teaching. Church leaders should use the pulpit and other mediums to educate their members. Jesus excluded no one from the concepts of his teaching. Therefore, the church must maintain this tradition, so as to have total transformation that brings about profound changes in believers’ lives (Wilhoit 1993, 31). Of course, “the church that ceases to teach ceases to exist as a New Testament church,” (Gangel and Hendricks 1998, 8). This teaching should be pre- and post-violence, to prepare the hearts of the followers before and after violence, because violence is inevitable. It should be taught in discipleship classes, conferences, seminars, and workshops in counselling.

3.1.2 Engaging the theology of peace and reconciliation

According to Oyebisi (2015, 52), “peace building is a key mode of intervention,” and is the “promotion of institutional and socioeconomic measures, at the local or national level to address the underlying causes of conflict.” In the same vein, Oyebisi (2015, 84) also explains that reconciliation is a “locus that brings people together to repair and restore the relationship, to address past injustices and trauma, and to heal and bring closure.” Peace and reconciliation are needed after damage has been done in a society as a result of conflict or violence that comes from social, ethnic or political unrests. In northern Nigeria, most violence is related to religion.

Peace and reconciliation should be the goal of the church, to which it was called, and to minister and to be the ambassador of Christ (2 Cor 5:19–20). When the state fails to tackle situations relating to religion, it is expected that church leaders should be the major factors who determine the direction of peace and reconciliation. Leaders should imitate their master Jesus, who took it upon himself to be a mediator, intercessor, and reconciler for peace (Heb 8:6; 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5).

In submission to the above, Lutor (2016, 75, 77) notes that religious leaders are engineers who can work for peacebuilding and reconciliation, and that this requires perseverance and commitment. He adds that “the process of reconciliation occurs as part of our journey to peace,” but “Peace is often understood in the negative, as the absence of war or conflict.” Therefore, “as we think and work towards reconciliation, we need to reflect on how our work also builds peace.” The victims of religious violence need peace and reconciliation more than material things, although undoubtedly, when there is peace material things are easy to get. Therefore, leaders must ensure peace for the victims for their holistic development.

There should be strategic social spaces for church leaders. These strategic spaces in civil society give religion weight well beyond that carried by the number of religious adherents, which in some places is declining. Brewer, Higgins and Teeney (2010, 6–7) describe four strategic social spaces in civil society involved with advocacy of positive peace-making, and these strategies could be followed by the leadership of the church in the Katsina district as it ministers to victimized and traumatized Christians:

- Intellectual spaces, in which alternative ideas and peace are envisaged, and in which the private troubles of people are reflected upon intellectually as emerging policy questions that are relevant to them as civil society groups.
- Institutional spaces, in which these alternatives are enacted and practiced by the civil society groups themselves, on local and global stages, making the groups role models and drivers of the process of transformation.
- Market spaces, in which cultural, social, and material resources are devoted by the civil society groups, drawn from local and global civic networks, to mobilize and articulate these alternatives, rendering them as policy issues in the public sphere, nationally or internationally.
- Political spaces, in which civil society groups engage with the political process as backchannels of communication and assist in negotiation of the peace settlements, either directly by taking a seat at the negotiating table, or indirectly by articulating the policy dilemmas.

On the other hand, contributions to peace building and reconciliation require help from other organizations. Christian faith-based organizations are of great importance in this process, because such organizations contribute more than some donor-governments, and most faith-based organizations are involved in a wide range of activities, including long-term

development and advocacy for justice as well as humanitarian assistance (Ferri 2005, 311–312). In Nigeria, faith-based organizations like the Christian Association of Nigeria, Call of Hope, Africa Services (an arm of ECWA), the Stefanos Foundation and Interfaith Initiative for Peace (an organization comprising Muslims and Christians) can help to encourage inter-faith relations, manage crises, negotiate and mediate in conflict situations, serve as a communication link between opposing parties, and provide training in peacemaking schemes (Ilo 2014, 100).

Organizations need to develop their manpower, professionalize what their departments of faith and ecumenism do, and move beyond wars of words as a conflict resolution mechanism towards solid actions that seek to tackle the root causes of conflicts in Nigeria (Ilo 2014, 107). Achieving peace requires the following key elements: addressing the social and political imbalances between leaders and the people; changing behaviors, attitudes and relationships; transforming systems of inequality to power sharing and more democratic structures; dialogue, reconciliation, and training; reducing prejudice and stereotypes; and peace education as a tool to achieving peace (Oyebisi 2015, 51).

3.1.3 Involving the intellectuals

Religious organizational leaders constitute themselves as intellectuals who challenge violence and envision a new society. Some of them think about what for many others (including some other religions) is still unthinkable: non-racialism, non-sectarianism, the ending of repression, and political and socio-economic reform. Religious groups are more effective in doing this when they are part of a general coalition of civil society groups that envision the future (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney 2010, 7).

Other denominations are of great importance and can be included in the business of ministering to the victims. As the Bible says, we are one (John 17:21), not only when it is well with us, we should show our oneness even in trouble, and forget about denominational differences. Kajom (2012, 132) notes, “Just as violence does not recognize differences in nationalities, ethnicities and cultures, so also does violence not recognize differences between Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox or Pentecostal adherents. Violence is our common plague, and non-violent love, peace, justice and reconciliation is our common calling.”

3.1.4 Designing structured dialogues

Dialogue should be a means of conflict resolution. Ogbuehi (n.d., 163) asserted that, “Dialogue showcases in talking together, a talk between people or groups with the intention of exchanging ideas for better appreciation and understanding of each other amidst diverse religious viewpoints.” According to Oyebisi (2015, 84), dialogue is a very important tool in rebuilding relationships. Dialogue dispels stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to perspectives that are different from their own. Dialogue is one sure way to heal memories and wounded hearts. In dialogue, education, formation, awareness, and understanding are key (Ogbuehi n.d., 163).

3.2 *Approaches to helping the victimized*

3.2.1 The counselling models

According to Botha (2012, 201–202), severe persecution goes beyond psychological explanations. Human language fails to fully capture or express the trauma people experience. Torture has an impact on the

individual, family, and community. It has a profound immediate and long-term impact on physical and psychological health. Trauma affects a patient on the deepest, least easily controlled levels of self, and changes the way a person understands and responds to the world. Clinical studies repeatedly confirm that trauma as a result of persecution and torture is very difficult to treat.

Effective treatment involves helping the individual to systematically confront experiences, memories, and situations associated with the traumatic event. This treatment can result in intense emotional responses to memories of the trauma and requires considerable therapeutic skill. Recovering from severe physical and emotional trauma can take many years. Counsellors experience difficulties when working with the aged. Problems encountered in the elderly include rigid thought patterns and coping skills, clinical depression, cognitive and memory impairment, physical injuries, inadequate support networks, and practical difficulties. A prominent feature of trauma in this age group is the experience of profound despair and hopelessness which counsellors have found resistant to treatment (Botha 2012, 62, 67).

3.2.2 The communal models

Christians are committed to building cultures of peace in cooperation with people of other religious traditions, convictions, and worldviews (Kajom 2012, 132). This collective effort relies on the gifts of men and women, the young and the old, leaders and workers. All hands must be on deck if the church wants to holistically help victims. When we work together as a team, we can complement the victims and be a great help to them. Apart from working together as a team, the peace-building process should be

done in different dimensions. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011, n.p) suggest these dimensions should be:

- **Multilevel:** Analysis and resolution must embrace all layers of conflict: interpersonal, intra-personal, intergroup, international, regional, and global.
- **Multidisciplinary:** In order to learn how to address complex conflict systems adequately, conflict resolution must draw on many disciplines, including development studies, politics, international relations, strategic studies, and individual and social psychology.
- **Analytic and normative:** The foundation of the study of conflict must involve a systematic analysis and interpretation of the “statistics of deadly quarrels,” but this must be combined from the outset with the normative aim of learning how to better thereby transform actual or potentially violent conflict into non-violent actions of social, political, and other forms of change.
- **Theoretical and practical:** The conflict resolution field must be constituted by a constant mutual interplay between theory and practice.

3.2.3 The contextualized models

There are several unique elements of counseling. Firstly, there is the psychological difficulty that appears to come together within certain groups.

Secondly, is language and the barriers involved with its use. Even those who speak English use it in ways that are bound up with their culture. It is imperative that the counsellor be sufficiently conversant with those languages to build a bridge to the counselee (Ellison and Edward 1992, 13).

Thirdly, we must contextualize our Scripture in counselling. Both biblical and professional counsellors have written about how the

Bible addresses specific issues such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, boundaries, trauma, and marital discord when Scripture is contextualized properly (Monroe n.d., 4, 7).

3.3 Advocating for the victimized

Advocacy is an important tool to make an appeal for or influence somebody being assisted. It can eliminate or reduce hardship caused by violence or persecution. In many cases, victims cannot advocate for themselves. Preaching, teaching, and giving donations to assist the victims is not enough. Advocacy for victims is needed more than anything else. Advocacy must be done for the benefit of victims and not for ourselves. It should also be done in collaboration with other ministries. Advocacy should seek compensation for the victim (Oyebisi 2015, 166).

Theories of peacemaking and conflict resolution need to analyze the nature of the leaders in society who have the courage to advocate for peace with an enemy, even when they are subject to ridicule. Applying the same idea, church leadership in Katsina could make an attempt to restore normalcy to victims after they have been affected by religious violence or persecution. Taylor, Meer, and Reimer (2012, 434–435) link spiritual and practical issues in advocacy:

- Prayer and intercession for them. This is the highest authority that blows open the prison doors, as it did for Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16–40).
- Making national and international publicity for providing information for and engaging world opinion on the side of justice.
- Making private representation to others by making an appeal for the victims.
- Making legal intervention to empower the victims and hold authorities accountable for violence.

- **Illegal intervention.** This is an act of giving assistance to the victims more than it is advocacy.
- **Political pressure.** This is done by influential individuals to influence the religious policy of a country.

3.4 Trauma healing

While the immediate needs of religious violence victims are enormous, the church must focus its attention on their holistic needs, so that the victims do not become victimizers in the future. For instance, the need for food, water and temporary shelter are quite obvious for people displaced from their homes. Churches in ECWA in the Katsina district do not have a well-developed support system to help the healing process of their members who become victims or are traumatized.

Church leadership in the district should play a significant role in ministering to the victims to help them cope with stress or protect against stress. In many, if not most, countries or churches when people are traumatized, it is the church that is embraced as a central means to help the victims deal with the situation. For example, after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Americans turned to prayer, religion or some form of spiritual activity with loved ones in an effort to cope. After Hurricane Katrina, survivors thanked God for their lives. When a tornado struck a small southern town in Piedmont Alabama, destroying a church filled with parishioners and killing several children, including the minister's four-year-old daughter, the survivors focused their attention on the church (Meichenbaum n.d., 6).

Victims should be taught how to focus their attention on Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith (Heb 12:2). On the other hand, it is very important for the church to address and overcome unemployment amongst

victims, especially the youth, because youths are the engine-room for development in the church. If their unutilized energy is allowed to remain dormant and nothing is done, it could lead to disastrous consequences, as youths are very active, adventurous, and daring. For the church to treat trauma it must address the following:

- Training of counsellors.
- Developing a Bible-based curriculum for counsellors.
- Encouraging a holistic approach to healing, which includes emotional and spiritual healing as well as education, reparation, the rule of law, and respect for humanity.
- Teaching and practice of forgiveness.
- A truth and reconciliation commission. (APJN 2007, 20)

3.5 Empowering the victimized to overcome violence

Various outbreaks of violence have happened in the Katsina district over four decades. Not long ago, in 2011 during the post-presidential election, political and religious thugs who had been hired by political rivals and religious elites attacked churches and members, and threatened them with death if they spoke against what was done to them. Christians were silent like sheep before their slaughterers (Rom 8:36).

Today, very few church buildings are visible along the roads in Katsina. Many churches are hidden in places nobody can see them or their signboards. When an individual is converted to Christianity, the church takes responsibility for hiding that person somewhere. Some converts don't return home and some cannot endure this hardship. For a long time, Christians whom God has blessed in their businesses, workplaces or farms, have been in trouble, and always fear for their lives; they have no rest, and some have to move to new homes.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this research, it has firstly been found that violence is unavoidable and non-stop in Nigeria. Violence has been fueled for decades by perpetrators (i.e., colonial masters, religious, political, traditional leaders, adherents of two religions, as well as government officials). Violence happens because of irresponsible and imbalanced leadership and a lack of religious freedom, despite the legal provision of freedom of religion for all citizens.

Secondly, it is understood that nothing stops the church from expanding (Matt 16:18) or harms it, as the writer of Romans 8:38–39 says, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Persecution in the early church did not destroy the church, rather it strengthened it. Christians grew from strength to strength despite their persecution. Therefore, the twenty-first century church will survive religious violence, if the members cling to the faith in Christ that made the early church not falter, but rather grow strong despite opposition and death (Ekeke 2012, 188).

Finally, this study urges the leadership in ECWA Katsina to consider themselves duty bound to holistically minister to the church that God has entrusted to their hands (1 Pet 5:1–4), because when the chief Shepherd appears, they will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Therefore, this research recommends that the district leadership:

- Establish a rehabilitation center in the district for the victimized ECWA members. This center will take care of those who have suffered violence or been persecuted for their faith.
- Train personnel to take care of the victims in the district and be assigned for the task.

- Finance a rehabilitation center and personnel, this responsibility should not be left to the DCC alone. Rather, it should be seen as ECWA's international responsibility. This is because Katsina DCC is situated in the core north and predominantly Islamic enclaves, and the area will then be saturated with the Christian gospel. Therefore, concerted efforts in this DCC should be a major part of the strategy.
- Partner and engage with legal personnel who will assist in terms of legal proceedings for individuals or businesses.
- Seek and partner with national and international organizations that will advocate for and seek financial assistance for the victimized.
- Work together as a team with the churches in the district to contribute to assisting the victims of religious violence. This could be done by making a substantial budget for the program.
- Produce and distribute relief materials to the victimized and traumatized members equitably and without preference.
- Encourage and implement security measures for their church auditoriums and pastors' residences by fencing, employing security personnel, and providing security equipment, and the churches should be on their guard permanently against the enemies.
- Engage its members in dialogue with members of other faiths to create mutual understanding.
- Document every event occurring in the district at all levels. Detailing the day, the month, and the year for easy access when the need arises.

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From Biblical Coherence to Systematic Theology: A Critical Reinterpretation of Covenant Theology

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Abstract

This dissertation critically reinterprets classic covenant theology by appropriating Yong Ki Park's theology as a new paradigm of covenant theology. The structural unity of the entire Bible is understood through the Adamic Kingdom Covenant (Gen 1:28), something which has been overlooked by classic covenant theology. This dissertation examines recent approaches to systematic and biblical theology that present critical alternatives to the two-covenant scheme. By evaluating the advantages and shortcomings of these views, this dissertation proposes a covenant theology structured around the motif of the kingdom. This research argues that the covenant is a means for God's self-revelation by criticizing the classic covenant theological claim that the covenant is primarily a means of human redemption.

Keywords

kingdom covenant, kingdom, temple, unity of the Bible, God's glory

1. Introduction

Within Reformed theology, the idea of the covenant has served as the most important hermeneutical key to understanding the Bible. The origins of “covenant theology” proper can be traced back to the Protestant Reformers Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, and John Calvin. It then flourished in the middle of the seventeenth century through the efforts of theologians such as Johannes Coccejus (1609–1669), John Owen (1616–1683), and Francis Turretin (1623–1687). After the rise of classic covenant theology in the seventeenth century, covenant theologians have insisted that after Adam broke the “covenant of works,” all post-lapsarian covenants between God and humans are underpinned and held together by a “covenant of grace” (Williamson 2007, 30). This became the origin of the two-covenant scheme which was officially formulated through the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The two-covenant scheme receives theological and historical legitimacy within classic covenant theology. However, this scheme is not without its shortcomings. It has received much criticism based on some significant arguments in biblical theology presupposing a kingdom motif to demonstrate God’s glory as broader than the redemption motif. In developing the kingdom covenant scheme, this dissertation brings into question the ascendancy of the two-covenant scheme which has been accepted as a biblical doctrine in Reformed covenant theology since the seventeenth century.

I have attempted to critically review the contributions and problems of classic covenant theology and propose an alternative view of reading the whole Bible from a kingdom covenant perspective. For this purpose, Park’s (1995–2014) theology, which suggests a new paradigm of covenant theology, was critically employed. Park critically reinterpreted the covenant concept that was maintained by classic covenant theology.

This dissertation provides a critical reinterpretation of classic covenant theology but with the unity of the Bible in mind. Classic covenant theology has a systematic theological understanding of what is called a two-covenant scheme. In contrast, I appraised the two-covenant scheme as limited in its attempts at revealing the covenantal unity of the entire Bible. This made it necessary to first offer a biblical theology approach that emphasizes the unity of the Bible.

The unity of the Bible as referred to in this discussion is of great importance in biblical theology studies. Biblical theology studies each book of the Bible in pursuit of the unity of the whole Bible. That is to say, the sixty-six books of the Bible were written by different authors in different historical contexts, but together are to be considered the work of one God, essentially the Holy Spirit. Thus, the entire Bible is considered to have one story, one coherent message. To this end, I used Park's biblical theology approach, which strongly argued for the covenantal unity of the Bible.

In addition, I aimed for a systematic theological approach that offers a thematic way of reading the whole Bible. Systematic theology is known to approach themes, but keeps the message of the whole Bible in mind. I intended to conceptualize kingdom covenant theology in precisely this way. I considered a concept of the covenant that classic covenant theology emphasized as the core that covers the whole Bible. Moreover, my goal was to highlight the structural unity of the entire Bible by using the new concept of "kingdom covenant."

In short, this dissertation argues and demonstrates that the kingdom covenant already exists in Genesis 1:28 before the covenant of works in Genesis 2:16–17, against the claim of classic covenant theology. In this sense, this dissertation attempts to provide a critical reinterpretation of classic covenant theology.

2. Methodology: Canonical and Retrieval Approach

This dissertation employed a covenantal-canonical methodology called “The Bible Theology” proposed by Park (1997, 21–55). “The Bible Theology”¹ approach respects the uniqueness and context of each book of the Bible, but suggests that this uniqueness should be viewed in light of the coherence and covenantal structure of the whole Bible. Park strongly maintains that without a holistic view of the Bible there is a tendency toward a fragmented construal of its message. Therefore, the notion of the unitary meaning of the whole Bible is something never to be given up for the construction of authentic theology that is attempting to grasp not a part but the whole of the Bible (Park 1997, 97–98).

This dissertation is also an example of a theology of retrieval, that is, a work of constructive systematic theology that examines past theological contributions as a means of furnishing contemporary theology with a greater range of dogmatic options. Hence, Park’s work has been critically appraised and brought into dialogue with covenant theology in order to present a renewed and refined covenant theology for today. John Webster summarizes this retrieval approach as:

Retrieval, then, is a mode of theology, an attitude of mind and a way of approaching theological tasks which is present with greater or lesser prominence in a range of different thinkers, not all of them self-consciously ‘conservative’ or ‘orthodox’.... For such theologies, immersion in the texts and habits of thought of earlier (especially pre-modern) theology opens up a wide view

1 Park’s theology has been called “The Bible Theology.” However, in English this is grammatically awkward. So, in this dissertation, Park’s theology is characterized as “kingdom covenant theology” or “covenant-oriented biblical theology.”

of the object of Christian theological reflection, setting before its contemporary practitioners descriptions of the faith unharassed by current anxieties, and enabling a certain liberty in relation to the present. (Webster 2007, 584–85).

Oliver D. Crisp also speaks of this methodology of retrieval. This illustrates the nature of the methodology this dissertation intends to employ:

This volume attempts to follow Machiavelli's example, and engage theologians of the past in conversation in order to bring their ideas to the table of contemporary theological reflection. What is envisaged here is the retrieval of their ideas for the purposes of constructive dogmatics. (Crisp 2010, viii)

Following this retrieval approach, I have first attempted to critically analyze the literature containing various claims about the two-covenant scheme. Then I provided the rationale for the need to retrieve the theological contribution of interpretation and key arguments of Park's theology. In short, this dissertation attempted to incorporate Park's covenantal-canonical approach to seek biblical unity, through a critical-constructive retrieval in systematic theology.

3. Main Arguments of This Dissertation

In the second chapter, this study examined the common misconceptions and less than satisfying interpretations of Genesis 1:28 and proceeded to echo the central argument of Park that Genesis 1:28 should be reinterpreted from a covenant point of view. Furthermore, this study confirmed that Genesis 1–2 supports the kingdom covenant. I first argued that Genesis 1:28 has been overlooked or misunderstood in two respects.

The first point is that Genesis 1:28 has been overlooked in classic covenant theology. Classic covenant theology is characterized as a “two-covenant scheme” comprising of the so-called covenant of works (Gen 2:16–17) and a covenant of grace. Adam, who disobeyed the covenant of works as given in Genesis 2, fell into sin. To the sinful Adam, God promised salvation through the so-called original gospel that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). This is seen as the first covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is a covenant that penetrates the whole of the OT and NT and appears in the OT as the Abrahamic covenant, the Sinai covenant, the David covenant, and the new covenant. They are all regarded as future covenants of grace to be fulfilled in Christ.

According to this understanding of classic covenant theology, the covenant of works that appears in Genesis 2 is regarded as the first covenant. I have argued that it fails to notice the covenantal concept that appears in Genesis 1:28. The classic claim has the following problems. First, it is a problem of the priority of the covenant of works. After the covenant of works is given first and Adam breaks it, God gives the grace of redemption through the covenant of grace. I argued, however, that God established a kingdom covenant as a covenant of grace (Gen 1:28) before the covenant of works, and has protected humankind, even after Adam disobeyed the covenant of works, according to the covenant of grace. Second, the two-covenant scheme that prioritizes the covenant of works has a redemption-oriented concept of covenant, with a historical framework of redemptive history. According to this view, a covenant is introduced after the fall, and thus became a means of redemption. My argument, however, regarded the covenant not as a means of redemption but as a revelatory means for the existence and attributes of God. Third, in the two-covenant scheme, God’s kingdom, a more comprehensive theme than redemption, is overlooked.

Hence, this study considered the kingdom motif to be more proactive and inclusive than the redemption motif. It follows that the motif of redemption is contained in the framework of the kingdom of God.

The second is that Genesis 1:28 was misunderstood as a cultural mandate (Schilder 1977, 37–41). This is a hermeneutical error. The Bible basically serves the purpose of God's self-revelation as a covenantal concept. More so, Schilder, who first employed the term cultural mandate, interpreted Genesis 1:28 as content for cultural development. This is a kind of hermeneutical error (eisegesis) that rejects the biblical covenant context for God's revelation and injects the concept of culture into theology.

One of Park's key arguments that this study has emphasized is his interpretation of Genesis 1:28 as the threefold covenant that pertains to the kingdom covenant. As argued, Park points out that Genesis 1:28 shares structural similarity with the Abrahamic covenant. The Abraham covenant contains three elements of the kingdom of God: the covenant of descendant, the covenant of land, and the covenant of dominion. This is the same as the three contents of the blessing God has revealed to Adam, as shown in Genesis 1:28. Therefore, Genesis 1:28 can be regarded as the kingdom covenant. Second, I have shown that Genesis 1–2, the context of Genesis 1:28, can be interpreted from the perspective of the kingdom of God (hence, covenant). First, I provided a new interpretation of God's image in Genesis 1:26–27. In the traditional view, God's image has been understood as the mental and spiritual qualities that humans share with the Creator God. However, I argued that it is appropriate to interpret the image of God as "king of the kingdom of God." I also proposed a new understanding of God's rest that appears in Genesis 2:1–3. Rest is the most obvious sign of God's kingdom in which the sovereign rule of God takes place. The last is the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:18–25. The marriage of Adam

and Eve is a covenant revelation showing the reality of the kingdom of God, which subsequently shows the future unity of Christ and the church. In this way, this study can confirm that Genesis 1:28 is a kingdom covenant through the broader context of Genesis 1–2.

Chapter three critically examined the recent claims of systematic theologians of the two-covenant scheme. There are two camps consisting of those who defend classic covenant theology and those who try to critically review it. The former are Louis Berkhof (1939, 211), Robert Reymond (1998, 430), and Michael Horton (2006, 93). They advocate for the two-covenant scheme of classic covenant theology. Berkhof and Reymond firmly assert the two-covenant scheme. Horton embraces the two-covenant scheme but prefers the covenant of creation over the term covenant of works. The common point between all of them is that the covenant of grace is established after the fall. Horton, under the influence of Kline, argues that the first relationship between God and Adam is a legal one. Grace seems to be given after humans broke the covenant of works as a criminal act against God’s law. However, this dissertation suggested that God’s kingdom covenant as a covenant of grace precedes the covenant of works, which is a legal relationship with God. Therefore, the first relationship between God and the covenant people is not a legal relationship but an unconditional relationship of grace.

Within the critical camp for classic covenant theology are John Murray and Andrew G. B. McGowan. Murray (1997, 50) points out the problem of the term “covenant of works” and suggests an alternative called the Adamic administration. Murray claims that all the covenants of the Bible are covenants of grace. This is called grace covenant monism. McGowan inherited Murray’s claim and presented a new proposal. McGowan (2016, 111) calls his claim “headship theology,” in place of the two-covenant scheme.

However, McGowan's attempt to interpret the relationship between Adam and Christ as merely a headship rather than a covenantal view is also limited. I argued that if the blessing given to the first Adam is interpreted as a kingdom covenant, then the ministry of last Adam (i.e., Christ) can be legitimately understood as the accomplishment of the kingdom of God. Therefore, they have a parallel relationship. In this way, the perspective of kingdom covenant theology can reveal the true meaning of the headship of the first Adam and the last Adam, through which the unified interpretive framework encompassing the whole Bible can be identified.

In chapter four, this study reviewed the critical debate about classic covenant theology in recent biblical theology. The key issue is whether there can be a covenantal concept before the covenant of works. The discussion is again divided into two main camps. The first camp is an attempt to make new claims on the basis of accepting the two-covenant scheme of classic covenant theology. Meredith G. Kline and G. K. Beale are representative scholars. Kline (2006, 19–20) makes an innovative claim that creation itself has a covenant character because of the concept of the kingdom of God from creation. This obviously goes beyond classic covenant theology. Beale (2011, 29–38) accepts the two-covenant scheme of classic covenant theology. But Beale considers that the image of God in Genesis 1:26–27 has a royal meaning. Beale provides the important observation that Genesis 1:28 has the character of a commission with a promise, which is repeated throughout the OT. Beale's position also goes beyond classic covenant theology. Nevertheless, both have the limitation of not seeing Genesis 1:28 as a kingdom covenant.

Yet another position criticizes the covenant concept of classic covenant theology and presents the concept of the creation covenant as an alternative. The representative scholars are William J. Dumbrell, Peter

Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. They hold the position that there may be a concept of covenant before the second chapter of the book of Genesis. Dumbrell (1984, 44–46) argues for a concept of the creation covenant in Genesis 1–3 and criticizes the concept of the covenant of works in this respect.² Based on the covenant of creation, he understands the whole Bible as a frame of creation and new creation. Dumbrell claims that the theme of creation rather than sin and redemption is the leitmotif of the entire Bible. According to Dumbrell, redemption is seen in the process of creation being undermined and restored, but the primary purpose of the Bible is to reveal God’s work of creation and new creation.

Gentry and Wellum also argue for the creation covenant. Gentry and Wellum not only emphasize the primacy of the creation covenant, but also seek to reveal the unity and connection between the covenants. In other words, the Bible is made up of a system of covenants and understanding the relationship and structure of those covenants is a crucial way of understanding the true meaning of the Bible. Such an interpretive attempt does not appear in classic covenant theology. According to Gentry and Wellum, the covenant is the means of building the kingdom of God. Redemption is necessary in the process of establishing the kingdom of God. Thus, Gentry and Wellum see the kingdom of God as a larger theme than redemption. This is an important observation that opens up a new horizon of covenant theology. But the concept of the creation covenant proposed by Dumbrell, Gentry and Wellum is vague. In a covenant, there is

2 In the first edition of his book, Dumbrell begins with his treatment of the creation covenant in relation to the covenant given to Noah. However, in the revised edition (2013), the title of the chapter was changed to “The Creation Covenant.” In Chapter 1, the covenant of Noah is discussed within the category of the creation covenant. Through this, it can be seen that Dumbrell’s covenant theology gradually progresses to emphasize the importance and priority of the creation covenant.

always a subject of the covenant, the content of the covenant, and the sign of the covenant. Gentry and Wellum do not mention these in detail in their proposal.

The critical review of systematic theology and biblical theology of classic covenant theology that has been discussed so far can be narrowed down to the following key issue: the concept of the kingdom covenant exists before the covenant of works appearing in Genesis 2. This study focused on this point and utilized Park's theology to overcome the limits of classic covenant theology.

In the fifth chapter of this dissertation, Park's theology was defined as kingdom covenant theology and this study attempted a reinterpretation of Park's theology as a whole. Park's kingdom covenant theology is a very important attempt to understand the entire Bible within a covenant structure. It is especially important that Park (1997, 134–140) interprets Genesis 1:28 as the threefold covenant, that is, the kingdom covenant. Park argues that Genesis 1:28 is the most important passage in revealing the structural unity of the Bible as a whole. Genesis 1:28 as God's kingdom covenant has structural continuity with the Abrahamic covenant through the Noahic covenant. The covenant of descendants, the covenant of land, and the covenant of dominion are precisely the three elements of the kingdom of God. The history of the OT shows the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant as a kingdom covenant with three elements (Park 1997, 148–164). According to Park, in Genesis 1–36, God shows covenantal providence through the covenant made with Adam, the forefather of humankind, and with the fathers of the chosen people. The covenant of descendants is subsequently fulfilled from Genesis 37 to Numbers 30, the covenant of land in Numbers 31 to the book of Judges, and the final covenant of dominion in Ruth to Esther. According to Park (1997, 167–210),

the poetic books reveal God's great attributes in the history of fulfillment of the covenant of the OT by way of praise. The prophetic books reveal the glory of God's grace, by which the fallen kingdom of David, corrupted by sin as according to the prophecy of the Mosaic covenant, is restored by God's faithfulness to the covenant and his love (Park 1997, 213–259).

According to Park, even in the NT the kingdom covenant is fulfilled through Christ. Christ proclaims the kingdom of God as king of the kingdom of God. In other words, the whole NT is organized into a structure that fulfills the kingdom of God. The four Gospels state that Christ, the fulfiller of the kingdom covenant of the OT, witnesses to the kingdom of God. In Acts the Holy Spirit comes according to the promise of Jesus. This marks the establishment of the NT church. That is to say, from the book of Acts to the book of Revelation, the Holy Spirit shows us that the NT church has been established and will grow and finally succeed in victory. This leads to the fulfillment of the OT kingdom covenant, and ultimately reveals the glory of God. Hence, I demonstrated that Park's theology revealed the covenant structure of the entire Bible on the basis of the kingdom covenant in Genesis 1:28. Park's work holds great theological significance.

Chapter six of this study showed how the temple motif must be included in kingdom covenant theology. There have been some convincing arguments made that the Garden of Eden is the archetype of the temple, for example, Alexander (2018), Beale (2003, 617-622; 2004), Fesko (2007, 175-182), Hess and Tsumura (1994, 399–404), Kline (2006), Levenson (1985), Longman (2017), Niehaus (2014, 74–76), Walton (2006), Wenham (1987). Nevertheless, this study stressed that the temple motif in Genesis 2 should be interpreted within the framework of the kingdom covenant in Genesis 1. The temple is a visible symbol of the rule of the kingdom of God, the pinnacle of self-revelation in which God dwells and where his name is kept. Therefore, both

the kingdom of God and the temple are interrelated as means of revealing God's attributes.

In the discussion of the temple, Genesis 1–3 is very important. Genesis 1–3 shows the paradigm for interpreting the entire Bible. The motifs of God's kingdom and the temple that first appear in Genesis 1–3 make their way through the Bible all the way to Revelation, where they are fully fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth of Revelation 21–22. The relationship between the kingdom and the temple in Genesis 1–3 appears repeatedly in OT history and in Christ's ministry in the NT. The kingdom of God in OT history is typologically established through the Abrahamic covenant. And after that, the temple appears as a typological model through the Mosaic covenant. The nation of Israel, which is a typology of the kingdom of God, is a kingdom of priests that centers on the law and temple sacrifices. This is the identity of the nation of Israel, which is a holy nation through the temple system of the Mosaic covenant. This clearly shows that the motifs of the kingdom and the temple are inseparable.

In the OT, the kingdom motif and temple motif are eventually fulfilled through Christ. Jesus is the true Messiah (Christ) who came according to the OT covenant, and he not only comes as the realization of the kingdom of God, but also is resurrected as the true temple. Thus, Christ is the substantial fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom of the OT and the temple of Solomon. The motifs of the kingdom of God and the temple accomplished through Christ are spiritually fulfilled in the church by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit accomplishes in a spiritual way the kingdom covenant which was first revealed through Adam. God the Holy Spirit fulfills the new covenant by making the NT apostles understand the gospel of the kingdom of God. Through this, God the Holy Spirit builds a church, which is the kingdom and temple on earth.

Finally, in the new heavens and new earth, the kingdom of God and the temple are fulfilled through Christ the Lamb. In the new heavens and new earth there is no temple building. God the Almighty and Christ the Lamb are the temple (Rev 21:22). There, the saints will become kings and priests, and will praise and serve God forever (Rev 1:5–6). This is the final fulfillment of the OT kingdom covenant. It reveals forever the being and glory of God. The revelation of the glory of God is the ultimate goal of kingdom covenant theology.

This study then employed the recent assertion that the Bible has a dramatic character to construct a kingdom covenant theology, a covenantal metanarrative of the whole Bible with eight acts, which has been claimed in this research. The reason for employing dramatic biblical understanding is that it is seen as the model that most realistically confirms the covenantal unity and the revelatory meaning of kingdom covenant theology. Recently, scholars who support dramatic theology view the entire Bible as a “drama of redemption” (Vanhoozer 2005, 2014; Horton 2002b, 2011). They see God as working for the purpose of redeeming fallen humanity as a dramatic revelation. I, however, regarded the Bible as a “drama of revelation” that dramatically reveals the being and attributes of God through covenants and fulfillment. Redemption is the revelatory means in which the covenant is accomplished.

God uses covenant and its fulfillment to reveal his eternal being and attributes in history, but always in a situation impossible with human strength and wisdom, and in a dramatic way. Through this, the people of the covenant realize and praise God’s power and faithfulness. The highest peak of this drama is the event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The drama of the reversal of death by the resurrection occurred. Thus, the dramatic understanding of the Bible better reveals the revelatory meaning

that is intended by the Bible than any other model.³ Furthermore, understanding the Bible as a revelatory drama presents a very important point of view in reading a unified story with dramatic consistency while respecting the diverse contents of the Bible as a whole. Thus, the dramatic approach allows us to better understand the diversity and unity of the Bible than any previous model.

4. Findings and Theological Significance of This Research

This study has evaluated Park's interpretive attempt as having important theological significance. However, this study also critically evaluated Park's theology to provide a clearer understanding of the "rich and balanced theology of the kingdom covenant." Although this study appropriated Park's theological viewpoint and key claims, the following points are differentiated.

First, this study argued that the threefold covenant, the core concept of Park's theology, is inadequate as a theological concept for encompassing the entire Bible. In order to clarify God's revelatory intention centered on the rule of God's kingdom, this dissertation intended to reconceptualize the threefold covenant as "kingdom covenant."

Second, Genesis 1–3 can be interpreted from the perspective of the kingdom covenant. This study focused on Genesis 1–3 as a paradigm for interpreting the entire Bible as a covenantal text. Park does not provide enough explanation about this point. Genesis 1–3 can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the kingdom of God, especially the image of God in Genesis 1:26–27, the rest in Genesis 2:1–3, the marriage of Adam and Eve

3 See Myk Habets, "The Dogma is the Drama: Dramatic Developments in Biblical Theology," *Stimulus* 16.4 (2008): 1–2.

in Genesis 2:18–25, and the fall and redemption covenant in Genesis 3. This reinterpretation provides a means for understanding the entire Bible on the basis of kingdom covenant theology.

Third, this study emphasized that there is always a temple (redemption) motif within the framework of the kingdom covenant theology. Through this, God's revelatory attributes are revealed as a whole. This is proved not only in Genesis 1–3, but in the relation of the Abrahamic covenant to the Mosaic covenant, and in the event of Christ. Park emphasized the threefold covenant, the kingdom covenant, and focused on proving the structural unity of the Bible. However, Park has not fully noticed that the temple motif always appears in the process of fulfillment of the kingdom covenant throughout the Bible. In this dissertation, the temple motif in kingdom covenant theology is proven to have a revelatory purpose which includes the idea of redemption emphasized by classic covenant theology.

Fourth, this study emphasized the overarching unity of the Bible by utilizing dramatic biblical understanding, but emphasized the variety of literary genres, differences of historical context, and diversity and continuity of contents. This is because the Bible's dramatic understanding is that the Bible has various components, but through the continuity of the dramatic plot, they most realistically reveal the glory of God, the ultimate-unitary theme of the Bible. Furthermore, the dramatic understanding of the Bible emphasizes that the truth of the Bible reveals not only the theoretical dimension but also the practical and pastoral dimension of the church. This study emphasized the theological significance of this dramatic understanding of the Bible.

As described above, this dissertation revealed that Park's theology, which has an innovative perspective beyond classical covenant theology, also needs a critical review. Through this work, the theological significance of this dissertation is as follows.

First, this dissertation has been an attempt to identify the covenantal unity of the Bible. To hold the unity that encompasses the entire Bible has traditionally been a central task and ideal of theology which has been pursued in systematic and biblical studies. Classic covenant theology has discussed the unity of the whole Bible with the covenant of grace. However, the two-covenant scheme in which the covenant of works appears first is dualistic, which is a problem in understanding the Bible as a whole. There has been an ongoing attempt to understand the unity of the Bible in the light of Biblical theology. They are: the Bible's unity with Christ as the center, the unity of the narrative, and the covenantal unity.

Park's theology, which is emphasized in this discussion, seems to have made meaningful attempts to unify the Bible in a new dimension, that is, viewing Genesis 1:28 as the key passage that lends the whole OT a structurally united understanding. Based on this, Park clearly states that the OT and the NT are complementary covenant structures through the inner logic and evidence of the Bible itself. Through this, God's faithfulness to the covenant and the glory of God have been revealed. This study attempted to reveal the covenantal and structural unity of the Bible that Park's theology tries to assert, centering on the key claims of his important works.

The second theological significance of this study pertains to the revelation of God's glory through the concept of the revelation-centered covenant, the work of confirming the existence and the attributes of God. In other words, my proposal reaffirmed the ultimate purpose of theology, that is, the glory of God, which classic covenant theology has pursued. Classic covenant theology, which inherits the spirit of the sixteenth century Reformation, is valid in that it at least emphasizes the glory of God (*Soli Deo Gloria*) as the ultimate purpose of theology. The classic view reveals God's existence, attributes, and glory. The result has indeed been doxological.

Nevertheless, the classic view remains limited so long as it maintains the concept of the redemptive historical covenant. The theology of the redemption history based on classic covenant theology asserts that the core of the Bible is the redemption of the sinner by the covenant of grace that is given after the fall. Rightly considered as the redemption-oriented covenant, it is seen mainly as a way of redeeming fallen human beings. Hence, the theme that emerges is the glory of God through redemption.

My argument, like redemptive historical theology, makes the glory of God the ultimate goal of theology, but with a different approach. This study viewed Genesis 1:28 as the kingdom covenant. The covenant here is a revelation-oriented covenant that reveals God's existence and attributes. God reveals his eternal glory through the principles of covenant and fulfillment in history. To this end, God creates Adam as the image of God and makes a kingdom covenant with him. After that, despite Adam's sin, the kingdom covenant is typologically fulfilled through OT history, and finally through Christ, the last Adam. This line of argument confirms the end of the covenant, that is, the glory of God.⁴ In this respect, this study is clearly distinguished from the claims of classic covenant theology, that is, the concept of the redemption-oriented covenant that centers on human salvation.

4 Hebrews 1:1-3 reveals the ultimate revelatory meaning that the OT covenant is fulfilled in Christ, the Son of God: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (NIV).

This is plausible in light of the dramatic understanding of the Bible, or say, covenantal discourse as drama, which this study proposed. The revelatory drama of the Bible has a single purpose. It uses various acts, scenes, and characters to reveal the existence and great glory of God. God is a dramatist, and Jesus Christ is the leading actor of the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is the director. This study concluded that the revelatory drama of the Bible dramatically fulfills the kingdom covenant on earth for the revelation of God's glory.

Third, this dissertation has demonstrated that the kingdom covenant theology contains the motif of the temple. The main recent argument for the temple motif in Genesis 2–3 is that the Garden of Eden has archetypal features of later tabernacle or temple. Furthermore, this motif will be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth as it appears in Revelation 21–22. These temple motifs basically include the idea of atonement (or redemption) to forgive a sinful people. But I further argued that the temple motif has a revelation-oriented idea that not only includes the motif of redemption but also reveals the glory of God. In other words, the temple is the center of the kingdom of God. Not only is the character of a priestly kingdom, which atones for a sinful people by ritual sacrifice, shown, but also the presence and dwelling of God with his people. Consequently, it serves as a symbol of concrete revelation of God's eternal being.

Moreover, as argued, the recent study of Eden as a temple clearly opens a new horizon that goes beyond the redemptive understanding of Genesis 2–3, which has been argued for in classic covenant theology. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of this study, the temple motifs appearing in Genesis 2 should be discussed in relation to the kingdom covenant in Genesis 1:28 because the theme of the kingdom of God precedes the theme of the temple. Therefore, this dissertation argues that the kingdom motif and

temple motif have an inalienable theological relationship and completely reveal the attributes of God. What is important here is that the central theme of the Bible is repeated and gradually disclosed. The kingdom motif and temple motif also appear to be fulfilled archetypally in Genesis 1–3, typologically in the history of Israel, and substantially in the NT through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, it will be accomplished in the new heavens and new earth. In this sense, the temple motif in the kingdom covenant theology has a very important significance in constructing revelation-oriented theology.

5. Conclusion

This dissertation critically reinterpreted classic covenant theology by critically appropriating Yong Ki Park's theology as a new paradigm of covenant theology. To this end, this dissertation examined recent approaches to systematic and biblical theology that present critical alternatives to the two-covenant scheme. By evaluating the advantages and shortcomings of these views, this dissertation proposed a covenant theology structured around the motif of the kingdom. This research argued that the covenant is a means for God's self-revelation by criticizing the classic covenant theological claim that the covenant is primarily a means of human redemption. The whole Bible is thought of as a covenantal metanarrative containing one theme with dramatic continuity. Aside from employing and reformulating the theology of Park, the dissertation made the following original points.

First, Genesis 1-3, which has been emphasized as a paradigm for interpreting the entire Bible, can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the kingdom covenant. Second, the frame of the kingdom covenant always contains a temple motif. This ensures that God's attributes are

fully revealed. Third, not only the structural unity of the Bible but also the various literary genres, differences of historical context, and continuity of the whole biblical narrative are emphasized. Through this, my dissertation revealed that the dramatic model of biblical understanding may best clarify the ultimate goal of Scripture to be God's glory, that is, the existence and attributes of God.

In short, this dissertation clarified the theological significance of Park's theology, which is seen as an alternative to classic covenant theology, and offered a more balanced understanding of it by redefining Park's work as kingdom covenant theology. Hence, the intention of this dissertation has been to present a new direction for Reformed covenant theology that is centered on the kingdom and God's existence and work towards that which is taught throughout Scripture and should work its way into all areas of theological thought.

Ultimately, the Reformation tenets of sola Scriptura and tota Scriptura are illuminated through the framework of kingdom covenant theology, and, as such, both bring to the fore the ultimate purpose of theology which is, as emphasized, Soli Deo gloria.

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From *Ars Moriendi* to *Ars Transitus*: Christian Perspectives on Advance Care Planning in the United States

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Abstract

This exploratory study aimed to analyze Christian perspectives on advance care planning and to present a conceptual model of collaborative care in the United States, one which better integrates healthcare with spiritual care for the purposes of educating, equipping and assisting individuals to transition from life spiritually, emotionally, physically free of distress, thereby creating a new *Ars Transitus* (The Way of Transition). Technological advances of the past century have tended to change the focus of medicine from a caring, service-oriented model to a technological, cure-oriented model. Today, death and dying are a healthcare “problem” managed by healthcare institutions, insurance companies and government policy. Utilizing Osmer’s (2008, 4) practical theological approach as a primary tool for the study, the research reveals how medical advances have influenced how our society and the church approach the end of life. This research attempts to present fundamental truths from the Scriptures and marries them with current structures and best practices found within the United

States healthcare systems. In doing so, the study hopes to provide a cohesive approach to end-of-life care that will enable caregivers to assist individuals to better do the “work of dying” and, in their preparation, finish well.

Keywords

spirituality, death and dying, advance care planning, end of life

1. Introduction

This practical theological research sought to study and engage the current practices of healthcare and the church in the United States in order to understand the present context in which spiritual care is provided. Osmer’s (2008, 4) empirical methodology is employed because his four questions, “What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?” harmonize well with the style used in medical research. He categorizes these as the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task.

For centuries, the church has guided individuals in all matters of life and death. Death was familiar and the church provided leadership and practical guidance for the dying and those attending them through a body of literature known as the *Ars Moriendi* (The Art of Dying). These manuals, written in the fifteenth century, informed those dying about what to expect and prescribed prayers, actions, and attitudes that would lead to a “good death” (which was viewed as “peace with God and man”). Relief from pain or symptom management was limited because medicine, as we know it today, was non-existent.

Sadly, the church no longer holds such a vital place of leadership in our society in the context of death and dying. The journey to one’s death

has long since moved from a spiritual, communal experience to a highly medicalized process (Ariés 1974). In the twenty-first century, advances in medical science and technology have rendered the traditional definition of death obsolete (Zander 2000, 617). The new ways of prolonging life have led people to become fearful of dying alone or suffering “dehumanized deaths.” It appears that ethics and theology have been left behind during fast-paced advances in the field of medicine, which has created a quandary for people of faith who lack both medical and theological literacy. Families throughout America find little advice and guidance regarding the difficult moral decisions that emerge at the end of life (Kayne n.d.). The growing availability of sophisticated life-support technology only increases the likelihood of anguished decision-making if not planned for in advance (Rogne and McCune 2014).

2. Research Objectives

A combination of empirical research, literary review and both quantitative and qualitative research was used to answer the question: How can we best prepare and support Christians in the United States to finish life physically, emotionally, and spiritually distress-free? In addition, the research sought to answer the following subsidiary questions:

- Has the medicalization of dying impacted the role of the church in preparing Christians to transition well from this life?
- What can the church do to re-establish its influence in end-of-life care?
- Would Advance Care Planning from a spiritual perspective better prepare religious patients and their advocates for future medical decisions?
- How can spiritual caregivers provide continuous, integrated spiritual

care that supports individuals throughout their temporal life until their transition to immortal life?

The objective of this research was twofold. Firstly, to stimulate change and action within the church to restore it to its mission of educating, preparing, and supporting those who are seriously ill. Secondly, to offer new models of care and collaboration between institutional chaplains and local clergy in providing continuous spiritual care to people of faith in their last phase of life. The research focused on the medical and spiritual praxis found within the medical and church communities in the United States. There are likely to be many parallels to others from similar Western cultural perspectives. Therefore, any conclusions and recommendations for any new praxis could possibly be applicable or adaptable in whole or in part.

3. Research Results

This corresponds to Osmer's (2008, 31–78) descriptive-empirical task. The research examined the impact of pastors' attitudes towards individuals within the church and in the healthcare system to determine the spiritual needs and the readiness of those who are, or might become, seriously ill. It became apparent that those who are charged to give both healthcare and spiritual care are very well intentioned in their desires to meet the needs of those for whom they care. It is equally evident that there is a lack of congruency between processes/theory and practice. In both settings, the practice of caregivers did not match up with the views they expressed.

These results are elaborated upon below as concerns the current state of healthcare, physicians' attitudes to faith, patients' attitudes to faith, the pastoral preparation of chaplains, and religiosity and Advance Care Planning.

3.1 The state of healthcare for the dying

Although there is much to be celebrated with regards to the advancement in curative treatment, the quality of end-of-life care has not seen significant improvement since the end of the twentieth century. Statistics have uncovered that the overall quality of communication between clinicians and patients with advanced illness was identified as weak, particularly concerning discussing prognosis, dealing with emotional and spiritual concerns, and finding the right balance between hoping for the best and preparing for the worst (Institute of Medicine 2015, 12).

The transference from home-centered death to hospital-centered death creates a very complex relationship between individuals with chronic or progressive illness, health professionals, and the bureaucratic institutions they represent. There is mounting evidence to show that spirituality and religion play a critical role in this complex relationship and affect how patients cope with illness. In a meta-analysis of over 1,200 published studies on religion, spirituality, and health, substantial evidence was found to support the notion that spiritual and religious beliefs are used to cope with illness and result in positive outcomes (Koenig 2007, 10, 45).

An extensive study conducted by the Joint Commission, with help from the Press Ganey Associates' national databases, determined that care for patients' emotional and spiritual needs constitutes a significant opportunity for quality improvement for the majority of hospitals (Clark et al. 2003). Research shows that an alarming 72 percent of the patients reported that the medical system met their spiritual needs to a small extent or not at all (Balboni et al. 2007, 555).

3.2 Physicians are reluctant to address spiritual distress

There is significant data to indicate that a vast majority of physicians support or at least believe that a patient's spiritual well-being is an appreciated factor in health (Balboni et al. 2014; Curlin et al. 2006). When asked, 99 percent of the physicians associated with the American Academy of Family Physicians believed that religious beliefs can help in healing, and 75 percent believed that other's prayers can promote healing (Larimore 2001, 36). Given that such a high percentage of physicians acknowledge the benefit of supporting their patients' spirituality, it would be safe to assume that they would be eager to do so. Yet it seems that although healthcare providers may address patients' spiritual concerns themselves, they are mostly ambivalent about doing so (Kristeller 1999). Generally speaking, physicians have been reluctant to address patients' spiritual concerns in practice. The importance of addressing patients' spiritual distress is thought to be a low priority when compared to other clinical concerns (Silvestri 2003, 1379).

3.3 Patients' spiritual needs are mostly not being addressed

Puchalski (2009, 804) finds that spirituality has become an increasingly prevalent topic in current models of healthcare. A study of family practice patients was conducted to determine when patients feel that a physician's inquiry about spirituality or religious beliefs is appropriate. Of 1,413 adults who were asked to respond, 921 completed questionnaires, and 492 refused (response rate = 65 percent). Of the respondents, 83 percent wanted physicians to ask about spiritual beliefs in at least some circumstances. The most acceptable scenarios for spiritual discussion were life-threatening illnesses (77 percent), serious medical conditions (74 percent), and loss of loved ones (70 percent). Among those who wanted to discuss spirituality,

the most critical reason for discussion was a desire for physician-patient understanding (87 percent). Patients believed that information concerning their spiritual beliefs would affect the physician's ability to encourage realistic hope (67 percent), give medical advice (66 percent), and change medical treatment (62 percent) (McCord 2004, 356). For many patients, it is a matter of trust. When a physician solicited information about their faith, they felt more confident to trust that the physician understood them and would make recommendations for treatment based on their beliefs and values.

Unfortunately, a large number of people report that when hospitalized their spiritual needs are not being met by either the medical system (including chaplains) or their spiritual community. Patients report that their spiritual needs are supported by religious communities, to a large extent or entirely, only 38 percent of the time, with 40 percent reporting that their needs are met to a small extent or not at all. Among religious individuals, their faith communities wholly supported African Americans more frequently than Whites (52 percent vs 19 percent) and Hispanics (52 percent vs 26 percent) (Ballboni et al. 2007, 555). It would seem there is opportunity for local clergy to strengthen their support to hospitalized patients.

This research confirms that for those people who self-identify as being Christian or part of a Christian denomination, God and the teachings of their faith are a regular, natural part of everyday life. It is clear that the individual and who she or he is as a spiritual being cannot be separated. Patients representing the African American community and those coming from evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic paradigms attached even greater importance to religion and desired healthcare providers to understand their faith backgrounds.

3.4 Spiritual leaders are not preparing their people to face death

One hundred and fifty healthy individuals (n=150) were asked a series of questions to describe their perceptions and preparation to face death. This survey aimed to gain insight into individual attitudes towards death and dying, spiritual preparation to face death, and practical needs to “get one’s house in order.” On issues of faith, 83 percent indicated that their faith would be most important to them when facing the end of life. Just over half (58 percent) felt that they had a great deal of biblical understanding about death; however, 61 percent thought that their spiritual community should teach them more about death and dying. When asked how well they felt their spiritual leaders prepared them to face the practical (not theological) issues surrounding death, almost 70 percent felt that they were not at all or hardly prepared.

This may well be because studies indicate that clergy have low comfort levels with the medical aspects of the dying process. This may be the reason for their reluctance to engage with those with a terminal illness. Only 44 percent mentioned that they were comfortable with their understanding of medical terminology and had only a slightly higher comfort level (56 percent) with the physical symptoms of illness (Norris 2004, 34, 58).

3.5 Many religious people are unprepared for the healthcare issues surrounding dying

Respondents to surveys (93 percent) overwhelmingly indicated a significant experience of the divine, with 94 percent indicating that their religious beliefs were behind their whole approach to life. It is therefore to be expected that this would also include their approach to death. While this might be

true, practically speaking, people of faith show no more preparation by way of discussion about future healthcare needs with either their families or physicians than those who claim no faith at all. Indeed, those who self-identify as Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian are likely to have spoken to their family and doctors and to have completed an advance directive. Yet, surprisingly, people who may appear to claim a greater sense of religiosity (such as those coming from evangelical, Pentecostal, or Charismatic traditions) demonstrated the lowest preparation regarding discussion or completion of an advance directive for healthcare.

Finally, even more surprisingly, highly religious copers from all Christian traditions (those at peace with God and well supported by their church) were more inclined to pursue aggressive treatment, regardless of the benefit or efficacy. As a result, they were more likely to experience spiritual distress as a result of health-related suffering and were more likely to perceive less quality of life and satisfaction in care at life's end (Balboni 2007, 555).

4. Suggested Reasons for Healthcare Deficiencies Concerning the Dying

This corresponds to Osmer's (2008, 79–1284) interpretive task. It is suggested that the above deficiencies in the healthcare system are due to some of the reasons outlined below.

4.1 The medicalization of dying

The destiny of all living creatures is the inevitable conclusion of life. Although experienced by every one of us, it is responded to in different ways. Shaped through the ages by religious, intellectual, and philosophical

beliefs, attitudes towards death and dying are continually changing. Never as much as in the twenty-first century did advances in medical science and technology continue to influence our thoughts on death and dying (Alters 2006, 1).

We experience death on a personal level; however, we do not experience our illness in a vacuum. Instead, many times we journey with our illness in community. These communities influence our understanding and approach to illness via their teaching, traditions, rituals, and practices (DeSpelder and Strickland 1983, 85). One such community is the community of faith. For centuries the role of faith in God and the influence of the church reflected these aspects of dying. However, through time, individuals became more humanistic and secular in their thinking. As a result, death morphed from a communal, spiritual experience to a private, primarily biological, phenomenon.

“The Golden Age of Medicine” (1860–1960) played a major role in this shift by introducing significant technological advancement that increased medicine’s capacity to save and sustain biological life (Brandt and Gardner 2000, 21–37). The technological advancement of hospitals and the resulting increased life expectancy of patients shifted the focus of healthcare from care to cure (Fontana and Keene 2009, 35). As a result, the medical field began to distance itself from death and dying. Now hidden and mysterious, death became something to be feared and avoided.

4.2 The redefinition of death

Over the past thirty-five years, technological advances have rendered the traditional definition of death obsolete. Such advances have included methods to resuscitate victims from cardiac arrest, mechanical respirators, and artificial heart pacemakers (Zander 2000). Faced with the challenge

of finding a more fitting definition of death, philosophers and physicians sought an alternative. Machines can replace practically all the functions of the body's organs except those of the brain. Therefore, after many heated debates on the issue of brain function, the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1981) confirmed the following redefinition of death: The irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem.

This new definition of death based on whole-brain death is not person-oriented (Basta 1996). As such, this definition relies on the death of an organ rather than the death of an individual, a person. Instead of technology helping to clarify when death occurs, it has served to primarily frame the death event as a medical process while disregarding the entire personhood of the individual who is dying. This paradigm of death creates a considerable theological and practical challenge, because it has shifted the focus away from what constitutes personhood to what constitutes a state of physiology. Thus, the full nature of man and what God considers life is not properly addressed when death is organ-centered and not person-centered.

4.3 The church's loss of influence concerning palliative healthcare

The medical and technological advances and the consequent redefinition of death have caused confusion between 'the prolonging of life' and 'the dying process.' In the broadest sense of the term, 'dying' can refer to that state in which one is medically incurable and one's condition will eventually lead to death, or a state in which one's physical condition cannot be restored back to health, and the consequences of such condition will result in death. As a result, death and dying today primarily fall under the

auspices of science and medicine, with the church's role being minimized. In its place, the responsibility for spiritual support in large part has been yielded to institutional chaplains when many of the dying would also like their own spiritual leaders to be involved with them at this time.

4.4 An emergence of a religiously pluralistic hospital chaplaincy

Since the early twentieth century, the practice of healthcare chaplaincy has evolved from ordained, faith-based chaplains to specially trained, interfaith spiritual care providers employed by healthcare organizations. Early healthcare ministry was deeply rooted in a sound practical theological approach to call attention back to the central task of the church, that of saving souls, and to the central problem of theology, that of sin and salvation (Health Care Ministry Association 2013). Today, however, clinical pastoral education is a professional education for ministry that brings students and ministers of all faiths (pastors, priests, rabbis, imams, and others) into supervised encounters with persons in crisis. Yet this new paradigm in ministry does not guarantee that someone who represents their faith tradition will minister to those who are in spiritual crisis.

5. A Biblical Theology of Healthcare

This section corresponds to Osmer's (2008, 129–174) normative task. The pragmatic intervention I suggest in chapter six is based upon what I consider should be the normative theology informing palliative healthcare.

A theology of healthcare is of paramount importance because as Kraft says, "It is my experience as a hospital chaplain for over twenty-five years that it is nearly impossible for many, when facing death, to avoid grappling with spiritual issues such as the nature of life and death, the

meaning of suffering, the place of hope, and the actions of God in miracles and medicine.” This means that caregivers must honor and pay attention to a patient’s non-physical side (spirit, beliefs, and values) for they are the foundation that will most likely drive much of the decision-making processes. As Evans (2011, Introduction) comments, this contending with issues of death and dying immediately confronts us with our worldview and, hence, our theology.

The theology set out below is based upon a biblical hermeneutic that is in conformity with the generally accepted catholic traditional creeds and doctrines of the Christian church. It is thus applicable to many of the patients and healthcare workers in the United States today, even if they do not consciously adhere to this worldview. I suggest that the palliative care decisions of healthcare workers best reflect this tradition when they are informed by the biblical teachings concerning the image of God in human beings, the meaning of life, personhood, and God’s purpose for man. Yet it must always be applied with sensitivity and never forced upon vulnerable people. Although my worldview is that of an evangelical Christian, I realize that in counselling one must always seek to sensitively discover the worldview of those being given palliative care in order to counsel them appropriately and in a manner that they will find helpful.

Christian anthropologies affirm that a biblical concept of personhood may be developed from the special resemblance of the human creature to its Creator, contained in the *imago Dei* mentioned in Genesis 1:27 (Vanhoozer 1997, 163). Whatever else this resemblance signifies it may be inferred that being made in God’s image means that human beings are transcendental creatures with dignity and worth, a unique sense of selfhood, the freedom to reason and make decisions, teleological purpose, and a need for relationality. These are factors that must all be considered as the end of life approaches.

5.1 Human beings have a unique dignity and worth

The *imago Dei* indicates that human beings have a special relationship with God that somehow reflects his being and nature and are psychophysical creatures with an ensouled body or an embodied soul with a unique capacity to relate to God. They are also ‘vice-regents’ who care for creation on God’s behalf. A human being then, is not just a physical, material being but also a transcendent, spiritual being who shares God’s dignity (Vanhoozer 1997, 163–170). This means that they should always be treated with dignity and as holistic beings and must never be treated as just physical machines in need of fixing by healthcare workers.

5.2 Each human being is a unique person

From a commonsense perspective it may seem obvious that each human being is a unique person, although in the light of the postmodern deconstructionist critique, such as Foucault’s (1974) *The Order of Things*, it must be openly stated as a Christian premise. The premise of uniqueness is fully in accord with a theological anthropology, which starts from the presupposition that the selfness of all human beings is determined by the concept of man created in the *imago Dei*.

In the context of a dialogue with postmodernity, Genesis 1:27 may be interpreted as indicating that every human self is genetically determined according to God’s purpose to be a structured, distinct, determinate, unique entity with an identity of selfness, influenced as it develops by existing place, culture, and gender, continuously contingent upon God, and molded by the God-giveness of life. Each unique person’s choices cannot be predicted and must be respected, provided they do not implicate other humans in an illegal activity such as euthanasia. From the palliative

healthcare perspective this suggests that they cannot all be treated in the same way or as determined by what medical professionals consider to be their physical needs. Everyone should and must be given the freedom to decide and express how they would prefer to be treated, whether by, say, a hospice care approach or by aggressive medical intervention, and this decision must be respected.

5.3 Human existence has a teleological purpose

“The image of God concerns not only human origins but human destiny” (Vanhoozer 1997, 165). Human beings were created in God’s image so that they would be able enjoy him and glorify him forever. Despite the sin and death that resulted from their rebellion, the potential for this was enabled once more by their redemption through the one who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) and “bears the very stamp of his [God’s] nature” (Heb 1:3). This is the one whose image they are destined to bear, upon their death when the recreation of his image in them would be completed (Bonhoeffer 1959, 269, 270). Thus, death has a completely different meaning for the follower of Jesus than for one whose worldview does not permit him or her to believe. For the follower it is something to be looked forward to as the consummation of their teleological purpose.

5.4 Dying and suffering

Yet even for the Christian, dying can be an extremely painful, fearful and lonely experience of impending loss and grieving as the physical body decays, previous aptitudes and abilities disappear, and physical functions fail. Suffering is an inescapable part of our human existence. Jesus, who was the image of the invisible God incarnate, lived in the temporal,

decaying, and transitory time/space reality in which we human beings live and die (Moltmann 1993, 88). As a result, he suffered. As Ware comments on Hebrews 4:15:

[Jesus] lived out his life on earth under the conditions of the fall ... in his solidarity with fallen man he accepts to the full the consequences of Adam's sin. He accepts in full not only the physical consequences, such as weariness, bodily pain, and eventually the separation of the body and soul in death. He accepts also the moral consequences, the loneliness, the alienation, the inward conflict. (1995, 75)

This description depicts the ugly features of illness: physical, emotional, and spiritual (Luzarraga 2019, 85), which all may accompany the dying process.

On the other hand, he who was the image of the invisible God did not seek to suffer when it was not necessary. When he was hungry, he naturally sought to satiate that need by eating (Mark 11:12). When he was tired, he naturally rested (John 4:6). When facing the pain of an agonizing death, he asked the Father that if it was possible it might be avoided (Matt 26:39). The Bible also records that Jesus sought at times to relieve pain and suffering (see for instance Matt 4:24; 8:26; 11: 28–30; Mark 5:1–15). The suffering that must be borne without alleviation is that which comes from being persecuted (John 15:20, 21). This is the suffering that Paul mentions in Philippians 3:10 as “sharing in his [Christ’s] sufferings” and none other.

5.5 Relational creatures in need of accompaniment

Because humans are made in the image of a triune God, relationality is an essential prerequisite of their being. This is reflected in the theological

model of care called “accompaniment.” This is a widely accepted model within the evangelical Lutheran Church in America and, because of the writings of Pope Francis (2013, 169 ff.), also among Latin American and United States-based Hispanic theologians. Accompaniment is the process of walking alongside someone and joining with him or her in solidarity. It is essentially the idea that those who suffer are unable to endure the burden of suffering their illness and suffering by themselves (White 2011, n.p.; Luzarraga 2019, 78).

It is theologically based upon the trinitarian concept that in Jesus Christ, who was anointed by the Spirit to accomplish this mission (Luke 4:18), God engaged with our brokenness and sin and accompanied groaning humanity in order that it might regain the image of God through the salvation of the cross (Younan 2005, 23). Likewise, Jesus, through the indwelling Spirit, promises to continue to accompany believers through suffering and death to a new and resurrected life. Then if we are to follow Christ and respond to his call to “come and die” as Bonhoeffer (1959, 37, 79) explains, this would mean that we as individuals and as his body are to accompany others through illness, suffering, and death so that we may transform a situation of despair into hope. Accompanying one in suffering makes it, “more bearable for the person who is ill because more are carrying that burden ... (and) reasserts life in the face of illness” (Luzarraga 2019, 86). This includes those who are suffering chronic illness and those who face death.

6. The Pragmatic Task

This corresponds to Osmer’s (2008, 175–218) pragmatic task. The research suggests there is an urgent need for the church to re-establish its influence in the United States medical healthcare system. This has been reinforced

by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on this system. The research suggests that this requires the following.

6.1 A new paradigm for ministry to the dying

The changes and interventions that this research suggests need to be made are based upon acceptance of a new paradigm for ministry to the dying. This paradigm is that, coupled with support from family, a well-coordinated cadre of spiritual care providers will provide the most effective support for those who are sick or seriously ill. The cadre would consist of pastors, faith community nurses, institutional chaplains, community or outreach chaplains, and support teams that would create a continuum of care linking both the local church and healthcare systems.

6.2 The training and mobilizing of pastors in the local church context

Spiritual care begins and ends in the local context. Individuals are disciplined and cared for by the body of Christ within their local church. Pastors/churches need to be encouraged to re-establish their role of assisting the seriously ill in their many transitions toward eternal life by offering biblical teaching regarding suffering, hope, and healing in the context of illness. This may be by seeking a holistic approach to discipleship by developing healthcare ministries within their congregations to ensure holistic health—body, mind, and spirit. In addition to contextualizing the Scriptures to issues that emerge during illness, one area of discipleship would be to assist parishioners in shifting from a temporal to eternal paradigm.

Support groups and support teams may then be established to help congregants explore the various approaches to end-of-life issues so they might harmonize their faith and values with their goals of care. This

will require the researcher cooperating with other healthcare ministers to establish seminars within denominations and national church networks.

6.3 Advance Care Planning and spiritual assessment by faith community nurses

As part of the health ministry, faith community nurses would perform a spiritual assessment with the parishioner and counsel them in Advance Care Planning. By assisting individuals to consider future medical treatments according to their faith and values, a written advance directive for medical care can then be created. Should the congregant enter into the hospital system, this document would be relayed with the parishioner to the medical staff, and the hospital chaplain then notified that a congregant is in the hospital and in need of spiritual support.

Once hospitalized, the hospital chaplain (and visiting pastor) would now provide support to the congregant and seek to address any spiritual distress created by the hospital admission. In addition, they can identify any issues that might need to be addressed by the pastor and/or faith community nurse post-discharge. This suggestion will need to be presented and justified to hospital administrations before it can be actioned.

6.4 The actioning of a spiritual care discharge plan

While in hospital, a patient would also be assessed by the outpatient/ community chaplain for potential needs (if the patient desires and qualifies for a support team post-discharge). Upon discharge, the patient can be given a spiritual care discharge plan which summarizes concerns discussed during hospitalization and identifies any additional spiritual care needs.

The outpatient chaplain notifies the pastor and/or faith community nurse of the patient's discharge and the spiritual care discharge plan.

If the patient does not attend a local congregation and desires ongoing spiritual support, the community chaplain seeks to coordinate care from a local church that matches with the patient's preferences. With permission, the community chaplain arranges to meet with the patient in the community to make sure they are adjusting to the outpatient setting until support from the local church or support team is established.

6.5 Transformational leadership

Not all professional healthcare personnel may welcome this because they may perceive it as unnecessarily complicating their jobs and as Osmer (2008, 178) comments, also as a loss of, "power and control." Local congregational leaders may also resist this since they are content with the existing arrangements, feel overawed by the medicalization of dying and feelings of inadequacy and would see it as being an unnecessary complexification of their congregational responsibilities. It is therefore anticipated that its implementation will require a transformational leadership approach involving deep change and thus may well be a lengthy process arousing significant opposition (Osmer 2008, 177–178).

7. Addendum

7.1 Research update concerning the COVID-19 pandemic

As may be expected the author, being a hospital chaplain, was and is very much involved in the pastoral care of medical staff and the dying as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the heroic sacrificial care of medical health personnel at this time, it would be remiss not to comment

on how the healthcare system functioned in this crisis and if it confirmed the results of this research.

The researcher audited 3,419 charts of patients who had been discharged with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis over a 120-day period. Results were consistent with this research and found that the percentage of patients who had a medical advance directive in their electronic medical record at the time of discharge was 21 percent (considerably under the national average). Of those who were discharged due to death (17 percent), 22 percent had an advance directive in their medical record. Again, consistent with research findings, Black patients had the lowest level of advance directives compared to White patients (15 percent vs 26 percent). Data according to faith tradition (or denomination) also proved reliable with 14 percent of evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions having an advance directive compared to the greater Protestant group (20 percent) and Catholics (27 percent).

Thus, results from the COVID-19 audits did not show a significant divergence from non-pandemic patient characteristics. However, the ramifications of not having a formal indication of patient preferences for treatment, as seen in an advance directive, now had detrimental effects on patients/families and indescribable moral distress for those charged with providing medical care. Pre-pandemic, medical providers could rely on spouses or family members to provide insight and guidance as to a patient's possible desire for treatment given a life-threatening event. However, the pandemic altered all hospital policies regarding patient visitors. Due to the great risk of infection, family members who would otherwise act as surrogate decision makers were now not present. Given the volatile nature of the disease, there were many times medical providers could not interact with surrogate decision makers in real time and were therefore left to

make decisions for care that may or may not have been consistent with the patient's values and goals of care. The COVID-19 pandemic has only emphasized the importance of Advance Care Planning and the need to greatly increase education and engagement with all adults.

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A Strategy for Engaging Youth In Cross-Cultural, Tentmaking Ministry In The Evangelical Church Winning All, Nigeria

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Abstract

This article proposes cross-cultural tentmaking as a missiological strategy that can help engage lay professional youth in modern missions. In its introduction, the article articulates the need for an effective mission strategy that can help the Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria to more fully realize its goal of reaching the nations of the world with the gospel through evangelism and church planting. The cross-cultural tentmaking ministry approach of the apostle Paul serves as the biblical model. Ephesians 4:11–12 establishes the biblical basis and theological task of preparing all believers, including lay professionals, for works of service. Church history is also reviewed, exploring examples of professionals in various fields who have served as tentmakers and student movements which have contributed to the mission task of the church at various times. The important necessity of contextualization of the gospel is explored biblically and practically. Ephesians 4:11–12 builds a base for the biblical and theological task of

preparing people for works of service from the perspective of the social sciences. The article draws its conclusions and prescribes a cross-cultural tentmaking ministry strategy for the twenty-first century church and specifically for the Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria.

Keywords

cross-cultural, tentmaking, church planting, contextualization, missions, strategy

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural tentmaking is not a new concept in the arena of the global mission of the church. Through this means, ex-patriots carry out mission work in a cross-cultural setting, gaining access to their target country or context and earning their livelihood through the labor of their hands as a mission strategy. It has become useful and necessary in a world where the number of career missionaries continues to ebb, as many are denied entry into an increasing number of creative access countries (countries closed to traditional missionaries or gospel outreach). Added to this challenge is the disproportionate and limited access to global resources and weak economies, particularly in developing countries.

2. Apostle Paul: The Biblical Model of a Cross-cultural Tentmaker

2.1 Paul's call to ministry

At the onset, Paul knew that he was called to be a servant of the gospel to the Gentiles. His Roman citizenship and vast learning helped contribute to

his preparation for this God-ordained ministry calling. No reason is given in the NT to suggest that the apostle had any doubt as to what he had been called and commissioned to do. His life after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) is a testimony to his sincere and total lifelong commitment to fulfil this calling. The NT is a witness to Paul's impact as a cross-cultural tentmaking church planter.

2.2 What Paul received as financial gifts

As we examine his life, it is apparent that in most cases, Paul provided for his own needs through tentmaking (Acts 18:3). But when he was on his journeys and in prison, Paul received "aid again and again" (Phil 4:15-19; 2 Cor 8:1-5).

Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 appears to undermine the fact that he did ministry while working to make his living. Very puzzling is the statement, "I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you" (v. 8). What is the idea here? Is Paul contradicting himself? The word "robbed" is to be understood as hyperbole, which Paul employs to challenge the Corinthians to accept the validity of his love and ministry to them in contrast to the false apostles that were attacking his credibility as a minister.

2.3 Paul's strategy

Paul's early ministry strategy was that he worked to support himself in ministry as depending on supporters during that initial period would have given the impression that he was after making money for himself. From his work environment, Paul presented his message to people and identified with them in their local contexts. He visited the Jewish synagogue in every

city he went and reasoned with the Jews. He met with Gentiles in his workplace and other places like the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus (Acts 19:9). In effect, Paul's ministry strategy was that he became all things to all men that by all means he might save some (1 Cor 9:22).

2.4 The value of Paul's strategy today

First, Paul's strategy is potent, adaptable and implementable. It gives an example through which lay professionals can be mobilized without negating or changing their profession and identity or turning them into clergy as some traditional missionary agencies seem bent on doing with their candidates. Second, Paul's strategy provides a biblical and theological basis for a tentmaking ministry. When tentmakers can see from Scripture the example of a tentmaker like Paul, they know that their ministry strategy has biblical support. Third, Paul's strategy helps define the nomenclature, 'tentmaker.' 'Tentmaker' is a term with varying definitions. The lack of a consensus definition presents a big challenge. Fourth, Paul's strategy of tentmaking significantly mitigates the challenge of raising funding and support personnel.

3. Cross-cultural Tentmaking Beyond Paul

Church history teaches that a wide range of professionals, such as artisans, businesspeople, cobblers, explorers, medical workers, and members of the military assigned to other countries, ventured into tentmaking ministry from the eleventh century to the present. By the privilege of their professions, these people served in foreign cross-cultural contexts that afforded them the opportunity to share the gospel. They did not require sending churches, financial supporters or missionary visas. Their professions negated the

need for all of these, though the need for a sending church is a recognized biblical necessity for any person headed into cross-cultural ministry (as was Antioch for the apostle Paul). In Paul's fashion, these 'professionals' in the history of the church made 'tents' that supported their cross-cultural ministry endeavors.

The Moravians used this strategy effectively in the eighteenth century. For example, in 1754, two Moravian tentmakers went to Surinam in Latin America and worked as tailors to support their ministry. Soon, others joined them, and a bakery and watchmaking industry were added to the business. The locals who came in search of jobs were not just hired but were also introduced to Jesus Christ. The industry was named, Christoph Kersten and Co.—meaning, “Christ-bearer Christian and Company.” The Moravians made a success of this business outfit that eventually established branches in other countries and cities such as New York, Hamburg, and Amsterdam. It continued to support the church both in carrying out the Great Commission and financially (Wilson 1980, 30).

The Moravians believed that donor support was inadequate for the carrying out of the Great Commission and therefore encouraged missionaries to be involved in business to augment their ministry funding and reach people through such initiatives. They were sturdy in their ministry approach and philosophy, believing that God has called every single Christian as a missionary and they should be seen to be doing this daily through their various vocations.

4. A Survey of Student Movements and their Impact on the Spread of the Gospel

4.1 Students' role in the pre-Reformation era

Before the advent of universities in any form, Pierre (also known as Peter) Abelard (1079–1142) was willing to be denied his inheritance rather than abandon the life of a student. While searching for knowledge, he wandered from one cathedral school to another in France, sharpening his reasoning and analyzing the presuppositions of his professors. In this quest, Abelard became what could be termed the originator of the method of inquiry that later birthed the university system (Hunt 1991, 22).

About 150 years later, notable students like Wycliffe, Huss, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, and others from various campuses led student movements in missions that prepared the ground for the Protestant Reformation.

4.2 Students' role in the Protestant Reformation

The events that culminated in the Protestant Reformation were more than philosophical and religious as power structures were challenged and political alignments changed. Persecution came from all sides according to religious convictions. Violation of perceived orthodoxy was both a civil as well as a religious offense. Thousands died (Hunt 1991, 28). Nevertheless, this persecution yielded something positive for the Church—a revival. This is because Protestant students responded to missions and world evangelization.

A case in point was the work of Jacob Spener (1635–1705) in Germany who founded a university in Halle, which became the base for Christian outreach where, under the leadership of A. H. Francke (1663–1727), the first

Protestant students responded to missions and world evangelization. It has been said that the first Reformation rescued believers within the church; the second Reformation gave believers a missionary vision.

5. Preparing Tentmakers Following the Mandate of Ephesians 4:11–12

The challenge of preparing the saints for their ministry, in this case cross-cultural tentmaking church planters, must include Paul's injunction in Ephesians 4:11–12, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

An effective tentmaker comes about through deliberate and systematic coaching by gifted teachers and church leaders. For the purpose of this work, which specifically focuses on the youth, coaching is to be carried out on a three-phase approach: identifying, equipping, and engaging lay youth. The youth in question are those who have been or are being trained in a variety of professional disciplines. The goal is to train them as tentmakers to carry out cross-cultural ministry in consonance with Ephesians 4:11–12.

6. Contextualization as a Missiological Strategy

The effectiveness of any cross-cultural worker seeking to communicate a message, in this case the gospel of Jesus Christ, demands the ability to frame the message so it is understood by the receptors. This process is identified with the word contextualization in current mission parlance.

The word "contextualization" is derived from the Latin word *contextus*, conveying the idea of "weaving together" (Sanchez 1998, 318).

Various writers give their take on its meaning. Stetzer (2014, 1) defines contextualization as an attempt to present the gospel in a culturally relevant way. Bevans (2005, 5) sees it as an attempt to understand how the process, interpretation, and experience of religion interplay through the overarching influence of culture. Ott and Strauss (2010, 266) opine contextualization as relating the never-changing truths of Scripture to ever-changing human contexts so that those truths are clear and compelling. Contextualization, then, is a platform for engagement between the gospel and culture, intended to create acceptable inroads to a target community of faith.

The enterprise and challenge of contextualization considers faith and context as indispensable and inseparable missiological allies. Bevans (2005, 3) opines that religion (faith) cannot exist in a vacuum of time and space. It cannot, therefore, effectively function outside any type of social (context) attachment. Concurring, Bergman (2003, 3) asserts that contextualization is an interface between the gospel and the reality of where the people are.

It is obvious how necessary and important contextualization is as a missiological strategy. It defines the broad spectrum of context, which includes the social, historical, cultural, religious, political, economic, and scientific identity of the host culture. These ingredients define people's ethos and identity. Successful evangelism, discipling, and church planting are not achieved until these areas are touched. So, training of cross-cultural tentmakers must include these elements and practice in the skill of contextualized communication of the gospel.

7. Biblical Basis for Contextualization

7.1 Contextualization in the OT

The OT is a product of contextualization, considering the way and manner God revealed himself and interacted with mankind, with his people, and with the nations.

- The fall—Engle (1983, 91) submits that the consequences of the fall came in the form of radical changes as they occur in the content, means, and forms of divine communication, due to the change in the receptors.
- The Tower of Babel—This encounter presents another contextualization dilemma in the Bible (Gen 11:1–9). The consequence of divine judgment leads invariably to the need for contextualization.
- Cultural and cultic engagements—The OT narrates the interface between the Hebrew culture and those that surrounded it in biblical antiquity. Yahweh modified and reinterpreted these cultural forms and religious rituals, which, as Davies (1997, 198) argues, were already in existence. Some of the key tenets that defined Israel’s peoplehood and their relationship to Yahweh were part of this reinterpreted corpus.

7.2 Contextualization in the NT

There can be no meaningful dialogue on the subject of biblical contextualization that does not begin with the divine purpose and mandate given by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20. This mandate is specifically that the gospel be preached to all nations. Contextualization is assumed as a strategy for communicating “all that Christ commanded” and “discipling the nations.”

In another example, Acts 17 narrates Paul's cross-cultural ministry in three different cities representing three different kinds of people and contexts. He contextualized his message based on the audience. Effective contextualization takes into account the uniqueness of the cultures and peoples being engaged and is demanded when doing cross-cultural tentmaking as modelled by the apostle Paul and the early church.

8. Conclusion

This article has attempted to show how the apostle Paul effectively modeled cross-cultural tentmaking ministry by working to meet his needs while in ministry. This is done with the aim of money not becoming a barrier to his ministry to people he is trying to reach with the gospel. Church history demonstrates that professionals in diverse fields have followed a strategy of cross-cultural tentmaking while working to make Christ known to the nations. Contextualization, which is essential in cross-cultural ministry, is seen to have been evident in the OT and NT. In conclusion, it is reasoned that cross-cultural tentmaking ministry is a call for today's church, which has been empowered through diverse spiritual gifts to mobilize its members for ministry. The Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria, with its large numbers of young people can effectively use this ministry strategy and realize its goal of reaching other nations of the world with the gospel. Churches that have similar passion can make this endeavor as well. Available lay professional young people need to be identified, equipped, and engaged.

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Philemon: A Transformation of Social Orders

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Abstract

The central claim of this research is that the gospel has the capacity to transform the relationships between powerbrokers and the disenfranchised. It engages *Philemon*'s history of interpretation from the early church to the present day, underlining how a society's understanding of slavery is inextricably linked to the ever-shifting events in front of the text. To interrogate the main thesis claim, an exegetical and theological inquiry of *Philemon* is undertaken through a combined analytic of social identity complexity and social-scientific criticism. After critically correlating the Graeco-Roman milieu with the Southern African context, via the auspices of a derived ethic, the exegetical and theological findings are appropriated in the relationships between Christian employers and Christian domestic workers, heralding a transformation of social orders in Southern African households and society.

1. Introduction

Paul's letter to *Philemon* moves the intended reader, or hearer, from implied conflict to possible resolution (Achtmeier 1990, 16–17). This it does

by applying deliberative rhetoric to a fractured master-slave relationship (de Silva 2012, 106; Jordaan and Nolte, 2010). Deliberative rhetoric is a type of literature that compels the recipient, or reader, to decisive action (Arist. *Rhet* 1358a36 ff). In Philemon, this type of rhetoric explicates the salvific brokerage of grace to humanity (Brookins 2015; Dunn 1996, 299). In a world where the privileged were a minority that wielded much power, influence, and resources, social hierarchy and disparity were inevitable norms (Malina 1993, 28–60). Paul’s rhetorical masterpiece (Witherington 2007, 6) speaks into this reality, advocating for a new symbolic universe where masters and slaves are potentially transformed into social equals through this eschatological therapeutic epistolary narrative (Jordaan and Nolte 2010; Lyons Sr 2006, 125; Lohse 1971, 188).

1.1 *Early Christianity and the Haustafeln*

The first-century growth of Christianity affected both the cultic and social tapestry of Asia Minor. As churches were established in households (cf. Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 1:16; 11:34, 14:35; 1 Tim 3:4–5; 2 Tim 1:16, 4:19; Tit 1:11) they came into contact with the *Haustafeln*, social orders with ancient roots in the Graeco-Roman world (Towner 1993, 417). A cursory reading of Paul demonstrates that the church in Philemon’s household (Phlm 2b), was most probably governed within the parameters of such social orders. In this unit of social interaction, *Philemon* illuminates the social dynamics between a household head (*paterfamilias*) and one of his many slaves (δοῦλοι) in vivid vogue underscoring the nexuses between the orders of the state and those in the home.

*Philemon*¹ informs one of a particular instance, where social convention within a house church, and the institution of slavery in

1 I differentiate the person of Philemon from the letter by italicizing the latter.

the Graeco-Roman world collide dramatically, heralding the potential transformation of social orders through the reconciliatory force of the gospel (Wright 1986, 170)—and quite possibly the manumission of the enslaved (Barth and Blanke 2000, 1; Hamm 2013, 29–30).

1.2 The complexity of slavery in the Graeco-Roman world

Graeco-Roman slavery was widespread, multifaceted, and complex (Moo 2008, 371–372; Ferguson 2003, 59–61; Bartchy 1992, 66). The complexity of this order is seen in Harrill (2000, 1124) who says, “Slavery is remarkably the only case in the extant corpus of the Roman law in which the law of nations and the law of nature are in conflict.” To understand slavery in *Philemon*, it is imperative that the tension between widespread slavery and the uniqueness of domestic slavery be appreciated (Barth and Blanke 2000, 9). Furthermore, slavery was not a function of racial prejudice (Barth and Blanke 2000, 4), but one of war, pirate kidnappings, birth, the giving of oneself into the institution, and debt bondage (Bartchy 1992, 66–67; Melick Jr 1991, 341).

It is, therefore, acknowledged that for the most part, a modern understanding of slavery departs mainly from the transatlantic slave trade of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and not the classical slavery of the ancient world (Callahan 2012, 143). Admittedly, this has led to a measure of anachronistic interpretations when dealing with texts such as *Philemon* (Moo 2008, 371). It is, therefore, imperative that a bifurcation between the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century slave trade, and slavery in the Graeco-Roman society be established to aid a sincere exegetical enterprise. Chief among the reasons motivating such distinction is the legality of slavery in the ancient world (Saarinen 2008, 200).

2. Interpreting Philemon Across the Ages

Since the Patristic Age, interpretations of *Philemon* have traversed several watershed moments inclusive of canonization, the Reformation, *Aufklärung*, the history of religions, abolitionist inquiries, social-based readings, and ideological criticism.

In the Patristic Age, matters of canonization dominated discussions in which this Pauline letter was considered. Added to these debates was the polarizing acrimony between the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools; even though one may argue for less of a sharp dichotomy. During this time, *Philemon* did little to champion the cause of the disenfranchised. On this, Decock (2010, 3155–3156) provides context by saying, “the ultimate aim of reading the biblical text was not to obtain factual information, but to ensure that the readers would be moved and guided in their commitment to God.” While matters of the letter’s brevity, its perceived lack of doctrinal exposition, and its literary form, received due attention in the Patristic Age, an anti-enthusiastic attitude prevailed and was preserved by prominent figures such as Chrysostom and Jerome. During this period, *Philemon* did not serve as a clarion call to the transformation of social orders but was itself the subject of scrutiny up until the advent of the canon.

In the Middle Ages there was a multiplication of Bible reading methods together with Bible reading locations. Regarding the former, *Quadriga*, *postilla*, and *glossa ordinaria* came into the hermeneutical fray influencing the rise of scholasticism and the development of civic society. Regarding the latter, the Bible became the main literary feature in cathedral schools, medieval universities and in monasteries. Concerning the interpretation of *Philemon* during this period, two figures emerge: Lanfranc of Bec and Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas’s redefinition of slavery within a feudal context is a feat demonstrating the aptitude of the man.

Nevertheless, concerning this project's first subsidiary question, Aquinas appears ambivalent as he propagates an interpretation of slavery anchored in patristic tendencies to moralize. This he does from the premise that ascribes the cause of slavery to the fall (following Augustine). While Aquinas recognizes the humanity of the servus, he is not motivated to read *Philemon* with an emancipatory leaning or in light of the transformation of social orders. In fact, he sees the usefulness of the institution and does not view it as opposing the natural order of creation. From both Lanfranc and Aquinas, one detects a nuanced interpretation of *Philemon*, typical of the age, arguably demonstrating how theological emphases are a product of one's socio-cultural conditioning.

During the Reformation, seeds that were planted during the Renaissance mushroomed into giant baobabs as the worlds of art, technology, the humanities, and science converged driven by the fall of Constantinople and the spirit of 'ad fontes!' In the world of theology, Luther and Calvin were arguably the most prominent figures to deal with the biblical text conditioned by a historical-grammatical interpretive system. Regarding *Philemon*, one detects dichotomy in how both reformers dealt with the thorny issue of faith. On one hand, they both used the master-slave relationship as a paradigmatic metaphor for the relationship between God and the Christian, thereby inadvertently (or otherwise) legitimizing the institution of slavery. On the other hand, they employed the "two-kingdoms" approach that effectively gave credence to the moral and other worldly, and not society's orders per se. Thus, the Reformation serves as a monument to biting irony, where reformers fought to free people of faith from the excesses of Rome, yet the methodology employed fell shy of relegating slavery to the immoral—and rather embraced its ontological description of God and the Christian.

In the Classical and Modern Ages, *Philemon* was read in varying ways. For instance, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw source material, juristic attention, and the continuation of the Reformation tenet of *sola Scriptura* all influencing the epistle's interpretation. With the rise of historical critical approaches in the centuries that followed, *Philemon* was read through lenses of suspicion, giving rise to new questions of authorship and occasion. However, on the matter of slavery, the spirit of the age was very much on display as imperial and industrialization forces drove the demand for cheap labor that led to a dehumanizing slave trade. Here, thousands of Africans were transported across the Atlantic to serve as laborers on plantations of sugar cane and cotton. *Philemon's* role in this industry was double-edged, to affirm and to abolish slavery, depending on the interpreter's location and relationship to the broader narrative. These types of readings brought about texts such as the *Negro Bible* where the canon was doctored to suit the economic and power intentions of the slave owners. Beyond the nineteenth century, this Pauline epistle was subject to various twentieth-century approaches ranging from the apocalyptic to the anthropological and social. Through these approaches the twentieth century experienced volatile upheaval affecting the way in which the epistle was appreciated. Arguably, this underscores that one's social location is a major factor in *how* one interprets the biblical text.

3. Investigating Philemon's Context and Occasion

Drawing from the letter's multiple addressees (Phlm 1–2, 23–24), Philemon was identified as the principal recipient, while Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Philemon's home were treated as secondary addressees. Secondly, the letter's historical context was investigated under three foci, namely: the ancient household, Graeco-Roman slavery, and first-century

social stratification. The section on the ancient household sought to locate *Philemon* in its *Sitz im Leben*, the rationale being that kinship vocabulary weighs heavily on interpretive agendas linked to the letter (Phlm 1, 2, 7, 10, 16, 20). Furthermore, with the ancient household being a microcosm of the empire, investigating household structures and relationships under a treatment of the *Haustafeln* was a major focus area (Towner 1993, 417; Westfall 2016, 13). The discussion on slavery underscored the complexity and diversity of the institution. Routes into slavery, statistics on slavery, and the relationships between masters and slaves were expounded to provide social background to the letter. What was demonstrated is that, although *Philemon* does not give clear voice to first-century societal realities, it is incumbent for an interpreter to grasp that which is not spelled out since such realities do influence the reading of the letter. Thirdly, launching from the premise that economics is not limited to the monetary, elements of social stratification were highlighted. The social mapping of the first-century Graeco-Roman world was discussed, leading to identification of Philemon's possible location on the poverty scale. Fourthly, a discussion on the letter's occasion covering the four dominant hypotheses was developed. The ADT,² EH,³ and SH,⁴ were found to be wanting in contrast to the traditional RSH.⁵

2 *Amicus Domini* Theory. This theory was first proposed by Peter Lampe in his 1985 article "Sklavenflucht" des Onesimus. *ZNW*. 76:135–137. According to this theory, Onesimus was not a social delinquent but a slave who had misunderstanding with his master. Knowing of Paul's relationship with Philemon, he approached the apostle for mediation. A secondary theory which categorizes Onesimus as an *erro* (a roaming slave) was motivated by Peter Arzt-Grabner in his 2001 work *The Case of Onesimos: An Interpretation of Paul's Letter to Philemon Based on Documentary Papyri and Ostraca*. *ASE*. 18(2):589–614.

Although Paul and his contemporaries did not consider slavery a moral issue, but simply the way things got done (Wright 2013, 32), this disposition did not condone the objectification and abuse of slaves. While Graeco-Roman distinctives, vis-à-vis slavery, are key to understanding Paul's world and worldview, the realities of brutality and debilitating dehumanization should not evade an interpreter's grasp. Yes, first-century Graeco-Roman slavery was not premised on racial prejudice. Yet, the spirit of this mode of slavery did grant impetus and justification to contemporaneous and later forms of dehumanization, and these conditioned various populations across the centuries. Thus, the reasoning that completely dissociates the morality of slavery from a later ethic can only hold when *Philemon*, and contemporary literature, is treated in callous historical isolation. With that said, it remains paramount to apply

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- 3 Emissary Hypothesis. Proposed by John Knox in his 1935 [1959] monograph *Philemon among the Letters of Paul: A New View of Its Place and Importance*. revised ed. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. It was later championed by Sara C. Winter in her 1987 article titled 'Paul's Letter to Philemon'. *New Testament Studies*. 33(1):1–15. The hypothesis posits that Onesimus was sent to the imprisoned apostle by the house church in the Lycus valley. The slave then overstayed his visit and this created tension between Paul and Philemon.
 - 4 Sibling Hypothesis. Made popular by the work of Allen Dwight Callahan who in 1993 published Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an alternative argumentum. *Harvard Theological Review*. 86(4):357–376, in 1997 published *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon*. Trinity Press International: Valley Forge, and in 1998 published *Slave Resistance in Classical Antiquity*. *Semeia*. 83/84:133–152. The central cog of this hypothesis is that Onesimus and Philemon were biological brothers who had fallen-out due to something unspecified. The hypothesis assumes that Onesimus's mother was a slave and Philemon's mother was the previous *materfamilias* of the household. According to the hypothesis, Paul writes to Philemon to mediate between the (step-)brothers.
 - 5 Runaway Slave Hypothesis. This is the traditional hypothesis. It posits that Onesimus was a runaway (*fugitivus*) who, prior to escaping, had stolen from his master, Philemon, or sabotaged some of his enterprises.

appropriate sequencing and weighting to any background related to first-century slavery since a responsible handling of the subject is less about dichotomies and binaries and more about nuance, hybrids, and hints.

4. Inductive Analyses of Philemon

This chapter demonstrated that the twenty-five verses known as *Philemon* are laden with relational complexity, cues to social transformation, and a fair share of ambiguity. Having identified this letter as a piece of deliberative rhetoric, the conventions that govern this type of literature were explicated. Paul's use of *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos* was also identified and elucidated to inform the intention and occasion of the letter (cf. Arist. Rhet 1356a1–5). After demonstrating Paul's dependence on this rhetorical form, the methodologies of social-scientific criticism (SSC) and social identity complexity (SIC) were given fuller explanation. A translation of the text accompanied by textual notes was proffered before an exegetical and theological analysis of *Philemon* was undertaken. We found that while Paul did mimic deliberative rhetoric in the writing of his letter, this was not the only approach used to persuade Philemon to receive Onesimus back as if he were Paul himself (Phlm 17). Paronomasia, anaphora, chiasmus, and simple repetition were additional tools employed to successfully deliver the apostle's appeal.

Through the analytics of SSC and SIC, Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus's nested social identities were investigated. SSC was used to lay bare the cultural influences upon the text and its intersection with the central theoretical claim of the project which is: an exegetical and theological examination of *Philemon* indicates that the gospel transforms the relationship between power brokers and the disenfranchised. Social identity complexity was also used to show the interaction of identities

within the development of the narrative—in Philemon’s home, and in the gospel-transformed society. Just like the discussions involving SSC, SIC attended to the central theoretical argument by evaluating and mapping the manifold identities in interaction within the letter. Finally, a triangulated map showing the relationships between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus was drawn. Central to this representation were the figures of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phlm 3), demonstrating that transformed identities in the new society are anchored in the divine persons.

Following the exegetical analysis, four theological themes were collated for synthesis. These were redemption, reconciliation, brotherhood, and God and human dignity. All four were treated against the backdrop of the anthropological, cosmic, and eschatological elements of the gospel. A holistic appreciation of the gospel’s influence was motivated showing that the transformation of Onesimus’s identity was a catalyst to the transformation of social orders both in the *paterfamilias’s* home and in the ἐκκλησία (church).

As a Bible interpreter reading *Philemon* from the Global South, specifically Southern Africa, I found that the implications of the exegesis and theological analysis are far reaching. I synthesized these implications under four headings relative to the project’s discussion trajectories.

4.1 Implications for community

The first implication relates to community, in Philemon’s home, in Christian groups across the ages, and in contemporary Southern Africa. Here, the role of the gospel-centric community as an accountability structure—one of the many public courts of reputation that police behavior in the letter—is discernible and translatable. Since all the actors in *Philemon* belong to the new society, there exists a shared ethos that defines and regulates

behavior among them. Strikingly, Paul invokes the community's witness to settle a relational dispute, demonstrating that in the church, disputes can negatively affect communities if handled unwisely. Furthermore, the democratic nature of the appeal where a slave and a *paterfamilias* are put on public 'trial' through the public reading of the letter demonstrates that in the church there should be no hierarchy that absolves the privileged and powerful from ethical scrutiny, as defined by the gospel. Both the slave and the *paterfamilias* are 'judged' by the same gospel, the same apostle, and the very same public courts of reputation underscoring the latent equity in the church of Jesus Christ.

From a Global South perspective, such implications are counter-cultural to the dominant ethos where social privilege and ethical absolution are indiscriminately awarded to persons who occupy positions of power and influence. Arguably, this has led to a spike in poor governance and maladministration in Southern Africa, evidenced in questionable church practices that champion unethical and bizarre forms of worship (See Banda 2019, 1–11). Associated with this is the rise in non-biblical and toxic prophetic claims that enslave the undiscerning, the desperate, and vulnerable (See Banda 2018, 55–69). Arguably, one could correlate this sad reality to impotent public courts of reputation that have done little to curtail gospel-deviant behavior while awarding honor to personality-based forms of leadership.

The community, as presented in *Philemon*, is neither static nor powerless. It is an arbiter, sentinel, and gatekeeper of gospel ethos. It follows, therefore, that for the church in Southern Africa to embody what Paul delineates as community functions, a decentralization of honor from the few who are enfranchised by gender and power will have to ensue to accommodate the participation of community members akin to Onesimus.

4.2 *Implications of metanarrative*

The second implication relates to the identity forming metanarrative of the gospel. Although unspoken and superficially referenced in *Philemon* (cf. Phlm 13), the metanarrative of God's redemption through the gracious self-sacrifice of his Son forms a central pillar that holds the super structure of the ἐκκλησία in *Philemon*. One may even argue that reading the letter without a deliberate and deep familiarity with this phenomenon is to enter the interpretive process with an irreversible handicap that relegates one to the bunkers of secondary strands of meaning, to the detriment of Paul's central appeal. Read through the triad of Paul–Philemon–Onesimus, the metanarrative of the gospel exudes different tones, all of which conglomerate into a mosaic of inestimable and irresistible diversity. Observable in this mosaic is the fact that both Philemon and Onesimus are grafted into the community of God's people in the Lycus valley, in the first-century Mediterranean world, and across all time and cultures. This phenomenal positioning of the slave in continuity with Israel, the church in history, and the church in the present and the future, is not just a measure of the slave's transformation on an identity level, but also a pointer to the universality and impact of the gospel's metanarrative on his person and milieu—even stretching beyond his epoch, culture, and status. Effectively, the gospel's metanarrative fundamentally affects the slave's origins narrative. Whether Onesimus was kidnapped into slavery, born into slavery, conquered into slavery, or sold into slavery, his 'origins narrative' is rendered near-obsolete through the gospel's impact on his station and person. Onesimus is transformed. No longer is the slave's identity regulated by the dehumanizing routes into slavery. Rather, like Paul's entry into Christ followership, which was marked by a post-natal encounter with the Christ (Acts 9:1–19), Onesimus's encounter with an imprisoned Paul marks his

naissance and entry into an irreversible reality where the slave is regarded as ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν (beloved brother).

While *Philemon* speaks to an occasion in the first-century Mediterranean world, the application of its claims directly affects the Global South in varying measure. Arguably, the interface between the African metanarrative defined by *ubuntu*, finds both continuity and discontinuity when it encounters the gospel. Such complementarity calls for an appreciation of nuance in applying *Philemon* to the Majority world while underscoring the radical nature of the Christ event. It is this tension that Christians in the Majority world encounter when reading the epistle. Instead of rushing to resolve it, this project claims that appreciating the antinomy underscores the uniqueness of the gospel while critiquing Global South metanarratives that deviate from or try to augment the story of God's redemption.

4.3 Implications for power and privilege

The third implication relates to power and privilege. Evident in the exegetical and theological project was the deep influence of both phenomena. Both factors were seen in the social disparity between the three actors, a reality that was further complicated by the hybridity of their individual identities. Nevertheless, the gospel's reinterpretation of power, whereby weakness and servanthood stand as counter-cultural hallmarks in the new society, was embodied by Paul through his self-categorization as a prisoner and an old man (Phlm 9–10). By avoiding the moniker “apostle”, Paul deliberately shows how power functions as a tool for service and not a chain of subjugation in the new society. Furthermore, the apostle's willingness to pay for Onesimus's debt demonstrates how power serves and reconciles estranged parties in the church (Phlm 17–19). Here, one notices a strong

correlation between the person of Paul and the person Christ as described in Philemon 2:5–11. Like Christ who adds humanity to his divinity—to serve humanity by dying on a cross—Paul adds imprisonment to his apostolic identity, becoming like a slave to reconcile a *paterfamilias* with a slave. Such a modelling of power shows how Christianity is defined by a radically distinct ethos, one whose ramifications challenge the hierarchical and minority-concentrated understanding of power and privilege, and which dominates the civic world and the church in the Global South.

4.4 Implications for mediation and reconciliation

The fourth implication has to do with mediation and reconciliation. Considered from the vantage point of the letter's occasion, these two factors frame part of the 'why' and the 'how' to *Philemon*. Though not elaborated on, Onesimus's separation from Philemon constitutes a divine and human impetus whose end is seen in mediation and probable reconciliation (Phlm 15–16). Paul's role as a mediator stands in continuity with that of Christ post-crucifixion ministry as High Priest (John 17; Heb 4:14–5:10, 7–8). The reconciliation that Paul garners for Onesimus and Philemon is at the apostle's expense (Phlm 18). Without Paul, Onesimus and Philemon would remain alienated; a very loud echo of Christ's reconciling work at the Cross where God and the deviant are brought back into relationship (Eph 2:11–22). From *Philemon*, mediation is underscored as a Christian ministry that mimics Christ's achievement. Like Matthew 5:9 (ESV) that predicts, "Blessed are peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God," mediating reconciliation is a gospel embedded identity that showcases belonging to the new society while transforming the social fabric between warring parties. Arguably, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, in South Africa, modelled the effectiveness of this principle. If the fruit of that

endeavor brought a deeply fractured nation to some semblance of healing,⁶ it follows that a perpetual application of this principle in ecclesial and social settings, within the Global South, would accelerate the realization of the gospel as encapsulated in 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 and Galatians 3:28–29.

Since this researcher reads *Philemon* from the Global South—more specifically, Southern Africa—bridging the first-century world with twenty-first century Southern Africa is necessary. Here, the implications of the exegetical findings are considered within postcolonial milieu, with specific focus on the relationships between Christian employers and Christian domestic workers.

5. Incorporating Philemon in Southern Africa

5.1 Domestic work in postcolonial Southern Africa

Seldom has the suffix ‘domestic worker’ been attached to the line: “When I grow up, I want to be a ...” While this may be the case, many enter domestic

6 The effectiveness of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) is debated by some who view the present calls for decolonization as one of the inevitable consequences of the commission’s limitations. This is captured by Shore (2009,141) who underlines the polarized views related to the commission’s effectiveness by stating: “On the one hand, the commission stands as a monumental national success because it fostered a relatively peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. On the other hand, the commission stands as a missed opportunity to mete out long-awaited justice in South Africa. For instance, the ‘truth’ component of the TRC has not yet yielded the promised socio-economic reparations. Moreover, some critics have charged that the authorisation of a Christian discourse of truth-telling actually impeded justice.” While such claims are substantiated, absent from the critics’ consideration is a clear elucidation of the radical nature of the gospel and its embodiment in Christ-followers (cf. 2 Cor 5:11–21). Therefore, while inherent weaknesses in the commission’s methodology are notable, the fact that South Africa did not descend into full blown civil war after 1994 should partly be credited to the moral vision of the gospel and its embodiment in Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the TRC.

employment out of necessity and/or due to limited options and limited skills. In Southern Africa, there are a host of entry points into this industry, yet most remain connected to the imperial enterprise and/or situations related to it on a macro level. Quantitative evidence linking colonialism to domestic work in Southern Africa is superfluous because the pervasiveness of the industry within the Black African community renders it self-evident that the imperial project forms the foundation of the present-day sector (see Internationale Arbeitsorganisation 2013, 33). Furthermore, the evolution of the industry, vis-à-vis the rise of a Black Southern African middle class, betrays a continuity dependent on different actors who, while living in present day political freedom, now uphold historical social disparities by being passive beneficiaries of a business still shaped by colonial and apartheid paradigms.

From a high level of abstraction, the domestic worker industry is directly connected to regional geopolitical instability. With countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho, and eSwatini performing badly on a plethora of international economic indices, the movement of their respective citizenry in search of better opportunities provides South Africa with cheap labor, even in the domestic space (African Development Bank 2019, 3). In this postcolonial/post-apartheid reality, struggling economies, poor governance, war, and institutional corruption can be equated with push factors displacing citizens from their respective countries to South Africa. Contrastingly, the relative strength of the South African economy, the ambiguity and ambivalence associated with the enforcement of immigration laws vis-à-vis low-skilled workers in South Africa (cf. Internationale Arbeitsorganisation 2013, 46–47), and the dependence of South African households on domestic labor could be regarded as pull factors. Here, the immigration status of domestic workers hailing from the

countries mentioned provides a point of contention, social dissonance, and social control which can be compared to Philemon's and Onesimus's experience in the first-century CE Mediterranean world.

The Southern African domestic industry is replete with tensions inclusive of xenophobia and competition (due to limited work). Facing limited work opportunities, low-skilled South Africans generally view foreigners with disdain, promulgating the narrative that these foreigners displace them from work opportunities.⁷ It is this view that has led to several violent xenophobic attacks on foreigners living in high density areas in South Africa, over the last decade (Gordon 2018).⁸ When viewed through the lens of 'illegal immigration,' the local low-skilled contingent (and those who share its ideology) weaponizes the status of undocumented foreign domestic workers by denying them access to legal recourse, union representation, health and police protection. This reality is alluded to by the ILO (2013, 46) which states:

Domestic workers remain one of the least protected groups of workers under national labor legislation ... [because] the labor legislation of a significant number of countries wholly or partly excludes domestic workers from its coverage, or that national laws

7 According to the African Development Bank (2019, 24–26), South Africa's unemployment stands at 26 percent. When this figure is juxtaposed with South Africa's measure on the Gini coefficient (65 to 70 percent) and the Palma ratio (6–6.5), South Africa records the highest measure of social inequality in the region. This disparity fuels a volatile situation characterised by intergroup tensions for people groups indigenous to South Africa and those who come from other countries within the region.

8 It is important to note that these xenophobic attacks were not limited to domestic workers but extended indiscriminately to all low skilled foreign workers in South Africa.

regulating domestic work provide for lower levels of protections than those available to other workers.

5.2 *On deference and names*

Associated with the factors mentioned, the behavioral disposition and the names given to domestic workers are areas worthy of discussion. Concerning deference, it is worthwhile drawing a distinction between a “performed submission” and genuine expressions of conviction. Griffin (2011, 92) captures this succinctly in stating, “The ... domestic is most concerned with building and maintaining an image of herself as the diligent and subservient worker. This helps her to avoid confrontation and conflict, which could otherwise lead to dismissal.” Based on this description, one notes how domestic workers (both foreign and local) inhabit multiple personalities while exuding deference to their employers. This deference expresses itself in excessive submission that works in tandem with an infantilized strategy. Typical of the latter, is the age insensitive use of names such as “boy” or “girl” for adults employed as domestic workers. Such monikers accomplish a couple of things. First, the domestic worker is removed from her place of honor and is controlled by ‘anti-ubuntu’ shaming that robs her of the dignity associated with her name and/or marital status. In calling a domestic worker “boy” or “girl” the employer effectively elevates utility as a point of transaction while subtly demanding submission from the domestic worker. Essentially, the one who names the other “boy” or “girl” holds all the power over the one who is named. Similar strategies aimed at inducing submission include calling the domestic worker by his/her first name, something that is taboo in *ubuntu*-shaped culture as it assumes a familiarity that is nowhere found in the family/communal structure. Customarily, a younger person refers to an older person as “Auntie,” “Uncle,” “Brother,” or “Sister”

(followed by their name or surname).⁹ Arguably, the deference used by domestic workers in Southern Africa is an embodiment of the intersection of historical and contemporary dehumanizing power paradigms, and through them the employee is rendered a perpetual dependent and infant (King 2007, 13–16).

Although age, kinship, and names function as powerful rhetorical motifs in *Philemon* (vv. 1–2, 7, 9–10, 16, 20), the comparison between the epistle’s deference and that of the Southern African domestic worker does not easily equate. The key difference between the two is that, in *Philemon*, deference is not laced with a dehumanizing exploitative agenda characterized by the retention of a power hierarchy as is usually the case in Southern African domestic labor. While Paul does show some measure of deference towards Philemon (vv. 4–7; 17–18), he neither empties himself of apostolic authority, nor does he perpetuate a socio-religious subjugation of Onesimus. Instead, Paul’s deference towards Philemon serves to challenge the *paterfamilias*’s convictions without offending him. It is a deference with

9 Some employers prefer being called by their first names. If the employer and domestic worker are addressing each other on first name bases, then that could be regarded as a retrieval of human dignity on the domestic worker’s part—one in which employers abase themselves by ridding themselves of honorific titles such “Madam,” “Sir,” and “Boss/Baas.” While titles and names play a function, it would be naïve to adopt a reductionistic stance where names and titles are treated as the only matter needing address. Rather, a holistic approach in which the use of names is treated in tandem with a host of other strategies of subjugation that perpetuate the imposed hierarchy in the transactional relationship between employers and domestic workers, is necessary. Nevertheless, it is worth underlining that in Southern Africa, different cultures use different symbols and language to express respect. Thus, I propose that for the employer, part of retrieving the domestic worker’s dignity may involve a deliberate, humble, and sincere journey into the culture of the employee, to learn the symbols of respect in that culture for the purpose of humanising the domestic worker in and beyond transactional experience.

a purpose, one enacted by a mediator and not a slave, a sharp difference from the abuses latent in parts of the Southern African domestic worker industry.

When compared to Paul’s infantilizing of the slave Onesimus in Phlm 10a, παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου (I appeal to you on behalf of my child), the Southern African domestic worker does not stand in linear continuity with the slave because Paul’s use of ἐμοῦ τέκνου (my child) is not informed by a subjugating strategy but by a newfound kinship. Thus, while Onesimus remains a child of Paul, he is not relegated to subjugation as is the case with many Southern African domestic workers who serve abusive employers. While some may contest this view based on Paul’s use of τέκνον (child) in v. 10—arguing that υἱός (son) is more fitting to the argument based on the ambiguity of the legal status of a τέκνον—McKnight (2017, 86) refutes this ambiguity:

More recent study of the papyri has conclusively shown that *teknon* [τέκνον] is not the term used for a slave as a “boy” or a slave as having non-legal manhood. Rather, when the non-legal standing of a male slave was in view the term *pais* [παῖς] was used. Hence, the term *teknon* [τέκνον] here describes Onesimus as a “spiritual son” or the “spiritual offspring” of Paul.

Based on the above, it becomes apparent that Paul does not infantilize Onesimus in a controlling way, even though the slave is neither heard from directly nor mentioned by name until v. 10 (see Tolmie 2019, 101–117). Instead, the apostle intercedes for the runaway slave while shielding him from the assault of the *paterfamilias*, as any responsible father would do for a vulnerable son. In mentioning Onesimus once, Paul limits focus on the wrongdoer while placating the offended party through a gospel-informed deliberative appeal. Thus, the infantilization of Onesimus and

that of abused Southern African domestic workers are not similar. They depart from different stations and are bound by divergent objectives. The former protects a slave from the wrath of a *paterfamilias* whereas the latter compounds a domestic worker's subservience to an abusive employer. Having noted the difference between the two, there remains discursive convergence between Onesimus and the Southern African domestic worker. Paul's treatment of Onesimus as a "child" could be regarded as a prompt, cajoling Southern African employers to treat their domestic workers with dignity; dignity that is on par with the way they treat their own family members. Like Paul who does not make the slave's status the regulating social principle between Onesimus and Philemon, employers can retrieve and celebrate the dignity of their domestic workers by considering them fellow human beings as opposed to mere tools of utility. This may express itself in the names and titles chosen to address them. This project contends that monikers like "boy," "girl," and first names rob domestic workers of human dignity as they cut across the grain of *ubuntu* in a regressive way. I contend that this compounds the injustice faced by the domestic worker, by placing them at the intersection of two paradigms of power which are the historical colonial megastructure and the stratified socio-economic hierarchy that has emanated from the colonial project. The latter is acutely dependent on historical and contemporary racialized agendas that are entrenched in the very soul of the society, granting economic privilege and opportunities for upward social mobility to only a few (King 2007, 20).

Since the conditioning of names to fit a mold crafted by the colonial project is not unique to Southern Africa, the bridging point with the first-century CE world is made clear. Onesimus, like many domestic workers in our context, was named in the mold of the dual forces of power and profitability, as was shown in previous chapters. His name divorced

him from a social memory and a geographical location, and his ancestry rendered him nothing more than an animated tool. Likewise, a Southern African domestic worker who is named in the conventions of utility suffers a form of social death (Patterson 1982, sec. 1040 ff).

5.3 On clothing, family, and invisibility

Common across the Southern African domestic industry are uniforms worn by domestic workers when on duty. Although this garb is, to a degree, influenced by pragmatism, one cannot deny the colonial origins of the dress. It is, therefore, no surprise that the negative connotations associated with such dress inform social interactions in the typical Southern African home and in broader society. The uniforms in question comprise of a head covering and a dress with an apron, usually in the same bright color (Crous 2018). Ironically, the visual loudness of the domestic worker's uniform does not correlate with her social visibility in the typical Southern African home. Rather, an inverse reality in which the domestic worker is infantilized and muted pervades the context. Although physically removed, and relatively muted in conversation and social interaction, she remains visible as her uniform functions as a 'tracking device' alerting the employer of her whereabouts should greater output be required of her.

Most domestic workers, those who 'live-in,' those who migrate from elsewhere in the region, and those who migrate from rural to urban settings in the same country, have families of their own residing apart from them. While these women attend to other people's children, their own offspring receive limited attention from them, perpetuating a social ill whose effects is seen in the weakening of family solidarity for the disenfranchised. Often, the children of domestic workers are cared for by extended family. In such situations, the assurance of monetary support creates another layer of

transaction between the domestic worker and their family, in addition to the one that exists between the employer and the domestic worker. This triangulates the domestic worker's experience as follows: the domestic worker and her employer, the domestic worker and her child, and the domestic worker and her extended family. The psychological and social tensions that arise out of such triangulation, while not the primary focus of this project, have great impact on the domestic worker's utility and person, often leaving them with very little room to maneuver socially, as they are forced to go beyond the limits of what is humane for the sake of their children. Arguably, it is the domestic worker's child that suffers the negative forces of this triangulation, growing up without a parent (given that a considerable number of domestic workers are single parents and/or together with their partners leave their home countries to find work elsewhere). Thus, when invisibility is considered as a factor regulating a domestic worker's outputs and person, it is apparent that it is the unseen world of a domestic worker's dependents that directly contributes to her demeanor and utility in a context far removed.

5.4 On social inequality and remuneration

Based on both the Palma ratio and the Gini coefficient, South Africa—the strongest economy in the region—also boasts the highest levels of inequality. The entrenchment of this reality is underlined by the fact that Botswana and Namibia—the other stronger economies in the region—record coefficients of at least 60 per cent on the Gini index (cf. Oxfam International 2014, 38).

In November 2018, a national minimum wage of R3,500 per month (\$230) was signed into law by the South African president (Reuters 2018) following an extensive consultation process with the National Minimum

Wage Panel (2016, 61–62). Although this move went through a lengthy discussion process, what was ratified falls short of the living wage of R5,000 per month (\$330) set by the same panel (National Minimum Wage Panel 2016, 64–65). Alarming, domestic workers in South Africa are paid R2,500 per month on average, a figure that falls below the minimum wage and the proposed living wage. It follows, therefore, that to be a domestic worker in Southern Africa is to be poor and to be stationed at the disenfranchised pole of inequality.

When Onesimus and the Southern African domestic worker's earnings are correlated, there appears to be a similarity in the amounts both servants are awarded by their masters/employers. In Onesimus's context, this amount was so little and was often used to control a slave by drip feeding hope into an abyss of subjugation. Like the *peculium*, the Southern African domestic worker's income does not provide escape routes from poverty because the average income is considerably below both the minimum wage and the proposed living wage. Furthermore, each domestic worker has dependents and extended family that rely on her earnings for their basic survival. Thus, what is an extraordinarily small wage is rendered infinitesimal as it is divided up to meet the needs of immediate and extended family.

5.5 Domestic workers' social identity complexity

The infantilizing of the domestic worker in an abusive employer's home, when juxtaposed with the domestic worker's sacrifice, which involves leaving her children in the care of extended family, presents a complex distribution of power. Here, the domestic worker "becomes a child," accepts the taxonomy of "girl" (or "boy"), and endures outbursts of rage from their abusive employer, all for the sake of raising their children. Ally (2011, 2)

notes how these relationships are fused with contradiction, as violence and care cohabit in the interactions between employer and domestic worker. In such a context, the subservience of the domestic worker is tantamount to a relinquishing of matriarchal power, trading it for her children's survival. Ironically, this relinquishing of power for the sake of the children also involves a submission to another woman (employer) who often renders the domestic worker powerless through enforced behavior and controlled remuneration (Archer 2011, 67).

There is also the resocialization of the domestic worker to fit the conventions and expectations of the employer. Here, the domestic worker conforms and aligns her personality and convictions in a way that does not confront the proclivities of the employer, for fear of being reprimanded or dismissed. Added to this, the domestic worker sometimes adopts the political, social, and, at times, religious convictions of her employer, sacrificing previously held ideologies to ease her socialization into the employer's household. This strategy is often noticed by abusive White employers who treat Black African and/or Coloured domestic workers as a paragon of White enculturation, hailing any positive influence they have on the domestic worker as an antidote to Southern African social ills—communicated with an unhealthy dose of unabashed hubris. This is the White Savior Industrial Complex,¹⁰ an offshoot of racism that promotes

¹⁰ The *White Saviour Industrial Complex*, also appearing as *White Saviour Complex*, was coined by the Nigerian-American author Teju Cole a novelist who won the 2012 PEN/Hemingway Award. The phrase appeared in its original form in a series of tweets that Cole (@tejucole) wrote in response to the uninformed activism and charity endeavours that followed Joseph Kony's and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) 2012 terrorisation of the Ugandan populace in 2012. The LRA was responsible for abducting children and training them as child soldiers and exploiting them as sex slaves (see Lamb 2015).

the patronizing idea that people of color (POC) are perpetually in need of saving—a salvation that can only be enacted by a White person—as they (POC) do not have the necessary skill set and agency to save themselves (Schneider 2015, 8–9). Cole (2012) describes the White Savior Industrial Complex as “a valve for releasing the unbearable pressures that build in a system built on pillage,” a fact that plays out in the enculturation of a domestic worker into Southern African White culture, ridding her of the fundamentals of her own cultural identity as she strives to function in the household of a White employer. Ironically, the notion of the domestic worker being regarded as paradigmatic of her ethnicity the more she enculturates into the employer’s cultural matrix, is put into discursive dialogue with her active dissociation with individuals from her own people group. This creates an intra-group hierarchy where she occupies the top rung and functions as an arbiter against those who are not socially conditioned as she is. This vicious, toxic cycle dehumanizes and draws sharp new lines of injustice in already disenfranchised people groups. Sadly, many domestic workers draw a sense of comfort from this reality, appropriating the behavior of abusive employers in their own social circles and families.

The children of employers also influence the formation of the domestic worker’s hybridized social identity. Unlike the previous factors that may remain static over time, the relationship between a Southern African domestic worker and their employer’s children undergoes a dynamic transformation with the passage of time. Typically, in the children’s infancy, the domestic worker often functions as a caregiver in some homes. When this is juxtaposed with the fact that many employers are middle-class mothers with full-time jobs, the role of the domestic worker is rendered invaluable in the nurturing of many middle-class infants and toddlers.

In their infancy through to their pre-pubescent years, the employer's children typically forge strong emotional bonds with the domestic worker, one that goes as far as the children learning words, values, and symbols from the domestic worker's own culture. The level of respect and trust awarded the domestic worker during this phase of the child's development is usually very high, regardless of the pressures and abuses she may face in other areas of her function in an exploitative employer's household. This reality is attested to by many White Southern Africans who recall the positive influence their domestic workers had on their pre-pubescent years. However, for many domestic workers, this bond suffers a disturbance that introduces a change in the relationship, as the children grow. In the case of exploitative homes, many children begin adopting the behavior of their parents, shedding the skin of innocence as they realize their place in the household. In some cases, the abusive employer even encourages her children to denigrate the domestic worker, following her example. Sadly, this severs pre-installed bonds of trust and respect, passing on the torch of injustice from one generation to another.

5.6 Christian domestic workers in the household and in the church

The nexus between the household and the church is underscored in *Philemon*, as proven by interchangeable nomenclature related to members belonging to both groups. From this overlap, it becomes difficult to discern where the ἐκκλησία and *domus* begin and end, respectively, as was shown in sections 3 and 4. These blended realities can also be seen in a typical Southern African home and church, where both employers and domestic workers assent to the lordship of Christ. It is for this reason that a shared faith between a domestic worker and an employer is not merely a matter of personal experience but a communal one, loaded with transformative

potential, as seen in the analogous reality in *Philemon*. While this claim is undergirded by Paul's argument in *Philemon*, the Southern African reality is rife with dissonance, as many employers compartmentalize their faith vis-à-vis their domestic workers, either remaining uninformed about the macro challenges faced by their workers, or perpetuating the injustices of old while claiming to be members of the new covenant community.

5.6.1 A gospel of salvation

When verse 10 of *Philemon* is read from a Southern African context, one may posit that Christian employers have a gospel-informed responsibility to be effective proclaimers and demonstrators of the gospel to their domestic workers. I suggest that this may entail explaining the metanarrative of God's redemptive plan in Christ and modelling it in daily living. It seems Paul's interaction with Onesimus was not just as an arbiter but also as a minister of the gospel that saves, which led to the transformation of Onesimus's identity. Christian employers may, therefore, make it a priority to expand their transactional relationships with their domestic workers to include clear, concerted, and sincere proclamations of the gospel and discipleship to those domestic workers outside of the Christian family.¹¹

¹¹ While this point flows from the contours of Paul's argument in *Philemon*, the activity proposed should not be heavy handed, neither should it be used as a performance indicator that may jeopardise a domestic worker's job security. Perhaps, creativity on the part of the Christian employer may help dispel a perception of a power axis. An employer could visit the domestic worker's home, or take the employee for a meal where such an activity could happen in a non-threatening environment. While these are just suggestions, the point aims to show the nuance necessary to serve the disenfranchised with the gospel.

5.6.2 A gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation

In *Philemon* 17 and 18, Paul asks Philemon to charge Onesimus's outstanding debt to his account, after asking the *paterfamilias* to receive the slave as Paul himself. This Pauline injunction flows from the apostle's understanding of redemption, specifically the forgiveness of sin. Just as the criminalization of the slave served to maintain a hierarchy in the Graeco-Roman world, there is an analogous reality in which the Southern African domestic worker is criminalized in the psyche of an abusive employer, maintaining a social hierarchy of sorts. This often expresses itself in an excessive withholding of trust by the employer, a culture of blame where the domestic worker is lambasted for all that goes wrong within the home, and a culture of perfectionism where the domestic worker can never satisfy the employer's ever-shifting standards. While domestic workers are neither morally absolute nor perfect, the trajectory of Paul's argument in *Philemon* makes forgiveness and reconciliation hallmarks of social interaction within the new society. Straying from these standards, some Christian employers live a bifurcated life in which they hold a separate standard for the domestic worker (and those like her), and another for everyone else.

Since anthropological and ecclesiological dualism are not promoted by this project, church leaders may have a role to play in their preaching, where the plight of the Southern African domestic worker is mentioned in their teaching and preaching on the family. Like Apphia, Archippus, and the ἐκκλησία who function as part of a broader public court of reputation, church leaders and fellow community members may create a culture of mutual accountability where they provoke one another towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Christian domestic workers, like Onesimus, are full members of the Christian community and they deserve representation, advocacy, and agency, as demonstrated by Paul in *Philemon*.

Paul does not draw a line separating the affairs of the household from those of the church. Rather, he underlines a continuum between the two which allows him to reconcile the *paterfamilias* to the slave. The church in Southern Africa may benefit from doing likewise, and in doing so a new dimension of orthopraxy may result.

5.6.3 A gospel that elevates

In *Philemon* 16, Onesimus is named and introduced as a fully-fledged member of the new society. In one stroke of the pen, Paul recovers the slave's dignity and worth by calling him "a beloved brother." This elevation of status, although limited to the new society, creates a unique space in the Graeco-Roman milieu, where ontology is not primarily a function of utility but of union in the Messiah. It is important to note that in the letter, Onesimus is elevated to a place where he and Philemon stand on equal ground as brothers. While Philemon's journey in this realization may have been short, for Onesimus this was a voyage of great ontological transformation by the gospel. It is the implications of this epic journey, on the slave's part, that an underscoring of the Christian domestic worker's elevation should be based since she and Onesimus are both impacted by a multi-faceted gospel.

First, in recognizing the Christian domestic worker as kin, the Christian employer is faced with ethical and practical demands that traverse both the household and the church. Like Onesimus, the Christian domestic worker's primary social identity is with the community of faith, and other identities orbit around this marker. In this constellation, the home and the ἐκκλησία are placed on an elastic continuum in a manner consistent with the injunctions in passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5–16. Thus, inherent in the elevation of the Christian domestic worker is

the potential for her to function as a full member of the household and, most importantly, as an agent of gospel ministration.

Second, elevation is both a function of ingroup status and the opportunities at one's disposal. Onesimus's welcome into the new society is layered since he functions as Paul's envoy and as a guest in Philemon's home (Phlm 12, 17). Here, the slave receives agency and authority to accompany his nested social identities. This multi-dimensional elevation is a potential cue for the Southern African domestic worker. Contextually, this may look like the Christian employer remunerating the Christian domestic worker at more than the living wage of R5, 000 per month. It may also entail an improvement of the Christian domestic worker's skill set. An example could be helping the Christian domestic worker with education. This is particularly important in South Africa where, historically, the education system was segregated along racial lines, a reality that was written into law through the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This act favored White South Africans, and compounded hierarchy and privilege based on a racist agenda. The effects of this act were not just localized to a single generation. Rather, it contributed to and maintained a system of privilege that Southern African domestic workers do not get easy access to, even in the post-apartheid era.

Another area that the Christian employer can be active in is in the impartation of financial skills ranging from basic budgets and savings, to opening retirement options and investment portfolios for the Christian domestic worker. However, instead of these being optional extras in their transactional relationship, I contend that these should be formalized by documentation inclusive of employment contracts, payslips, and skill improvement plans. Again, I contend, if the Christian employer expects and receives such in their work, the same expectation can be levied against them

for the sake of elevating the domestic worker. Additionally, if the access to good healthcare is a basic human right, I posit that part of the domestic worker's remuneration should serve as a premium to health insurance. It is therefore difficult to implement these proposals when one's starting point and frame of reference is an income below the minimum wage (R2,500). Although some may argue that the above is not important because they are already providing work to domestic workers, I would counter that the quality of work is also of great importance.

5.6.4 A gospel about the future

In *Philemon 22*, Paul signals his intention to visit Philemon upon his release from prison. This could be considered a quasi-apostolic parousia rich with imagery of Christ's second coming and final judgment. First, the ξενία (guest room) in v. 22 is not just a pragmatic piece of information transmitted to Philemon. Rather, its mention functions as a rhetorical goad, provoking Philemon to respond positively to Paul's letter, in the full awareness of the apostle's future visit. Secondly, the ξενία would have served as an ever-present sentinel, which may have tempered the *paterfamilias's* treatment of Onesimus in the interim period between the letter reading and Paul's arrival. When combined with the other public courts of reputation mentioned in the letter—the different persons in the house church and in the wider community—Paul seems to project a strong vision of the future in which Onesimus's transformation and participation in the new society is fully realized.

Read from a Southern African context, the reality of a domestic worker directly receiving representation from a broader organization can be seen in the auspices of the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union and South African Domestic Workers Union. However,

since the Christian dynamic is this project's application focus, the role of the church in preserving a vision of the future—for both the Christian employer and the Christian domestic worker—is not a peripheral matter but a gospel injunction. Arguably, like Onesimus, the Christian domestic worker is both a worker and a guest in the employer's home. This opens avenues of inquiry around present rituals that have an eschatological fulfilment. For instance, domestic workers often prepare food for their employers, but seldom do they eat the same meal at the same table as the employer and their family. The inverse reality where the employer prepares the food also applies here. In such a case, the domestic worker is either given leftovers and eats alone, far removed from the table she cleans and sets up. Like 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, which underlines the Christocentric and eschatological nature of the Eucharist, one may argue that when a Christian domestic worker does not share a meal with their Christian employer based on the employer's elitist proclivities, then that stands analogous to the situation in 1 Corinthians 11:17ff. For Christians, hospitality and eating a meal together are fundamentally community-forming activities infused with a shared oneness in Christ, one that projects and anticipates the eschatological meal and relational warmth of the new heavens and new earth (Rev 7:9–17, 19:6–10, 21–22). It is, therefore, a claim of this project that Christian communities in Southern Africa, and beyond, should preach and model a gospel that anticipates this eschatological reality by actively sharing meals across class divides. This activity finds firm basis in *Philemon* and communicates the deeper and more central identity of a shared brotherhood in Christ.

6. Conclusion

The four elements of the gospel (salvation, forgiveness and reconciliation, elevation, and the future) show how *Philemon's* message has relevance in the relationship between Christian employers and Christian domestic workers in Southern Africa. While these injunctions were appropriated in the worker-employee relationship, one may posit that their realization depends on the active involvement of the church community. *Philemon* is written to a community; therefore, it requires a church community to apply its meaning in context. Like Onesimus whose identity morphed to that of kin, the Christian domestic worker is kin needing advocacy from a Paul-like figure and the public courts of reputation that give him relational and apostolic authority. As it was for Onesimus and Philemon, may it be between our sister/brother the domestic worker and the Christian employer. From this, may the church in Southern Africa be useful in healing an ailing society through the transformation of the household; the basic unit of society.

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A Narrative-Rhetorical Analysis of John the Baptist's Christological Contribution to the Christology of the Gospel According to John

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Abstract

This article is the summary of the author's doctoral thesis completed under the supervision of Dr Annang Asumang. The extraordinary space and prominence given to John the Baptist's ministry in the Fourth Gospel have been chiefly elucidated as due to the Gospel writer's polemics against the Baptist's followers. It is postulated that the Baptist's followers claimed that he was the Messiah and the Light, and the author sought to correct and redirect them to Jesus. However, using a combination of narrative-theological and rhetorical methods, this thesis established that a more plausible explanation is that this phenomenon is a natural outflow of the close relationship between the Baptist, the apostle John, and Jesus. The apostle John, as the Baptist's former disciple, was markedly shaped by the Baptist's Christology in his christological beliefs and formulations of the

Fourth Gospel's Christology. Moreover, as a model witness, the Baptist's Christology was pivotal for the apostle John's rhetorical strategy and agenda.

Keywords

apostle John, Christology, Fourth Gospel, historical plausibility, the Baptist

1. Introduction

The study examined the nature and extent of the contribution of John the Baptist's Christology to the overall Christology of the Fourth Gospel. This was required since the author has allocated a remarkable amount of space and eminence to the Baptist in this Gospel. Accounts about the Baptist appear at the beginning and end of Jesus's public ministry. In John 1:6–9, he is a witness divinely commissioned to testify about the true Light, who was coming into the world. This witness was necessary for all people to believe the true Light. In John 1:15, the author links (οὗτος, this) with what he has narrated about the enfleshed divine λόγος (Word, vv. 1–14) with the Baptist's prophetic witness. Significantly, the purpose of publishing the Fourth Gospel (John 20:31) conceptually parallels the purpose of the Baptist's prophetic witness (John 1:6–9). Fittingly, in John 1:35–40, after the Baptist pointed two of his disciples (Andrew and John, son of Zebedee) to Jesus, they followed and remained with Jesus. This account (John 1:35–40) takes place after the Baptist has prophetically witnessed about Jesus's identity and mission (John 1:19–34). Therefore, it is significant that the two disciples changed their allegiance from the Baptist to Jesus based on the Baptist's witness.

Moreover, in the summary statement of Jesus's earthly ministry (John 10:40–42), the evangelist records that Jesus went back across the

Jordan, where the Baptist was earlier baptizing, and stayed there for an undisclosed number of days (v. 40). Also, many people followed him there (v. 41a). John 1:41b records that these people professed that everything that the Baptist had said about Jesus was true. Consequently, they believed in Jesus (v. 42). While they acknowledged his limitations, as he did not perform any sign, it is significant that everything he had said about Jesus was true. The current scholarly solution to this phenomenon proposes that it was due to the author's polemical intentions against the Baptist's followers (Aplin 2011; Brown 2008; 1979; Macleod 2003; Marcus 2018; McGrath 2001; van den Heever 2009; Wink 1968). It is opined that the Baptist's followers elevated him above Jesus. Specifically, the Baptist's followers claimed that the Baptist was the Messiah and the Light, and not Jesus. Therefore, the apostle John was correcting and redirecting them to Jesus, the divine Messiah and the true Light.

Against the predominant scholarly solution, this study examined the influence and contribution of the Baptist's Christology to the overall Christology of the Gospel. It also investigated the narrative-rhetorical contribution of the Baptist's Christology to the Fourth Gospel's rhetorical strategy and agenda. In terms of research methodology, given the complexity of this problem, three methods of exegesis,—historical-narrative, theological, and rhetorical—were employed. Three underlying assumptions were also made, namely, that the Fourth Gospel's genre is mainly Jesus's historical biography, that its background is the OT and the wider Second Temple Judaism (STJ), and that the Fourth Gospel is a unified text.

It is hypothesized that the phenomenon is a natural outflow of the close relationship between the Baptist, the apostle John, the Gospel's author or redactor, and Jesus. After a careful analysis of the primary evidence, it

was established that there were no secure grounds to reject the traditional view that the fourth evangelist was the apostle John who features in the Gospel's narrative.¹ The apostle John, as a former disciple of the Baptist, was substantially shaped by the Baptist's Christology in his christological beliefs and formulations of the Fourth Gospel's christological framework. Differently put, the apostle John had insider information about the Baptist's Christology. Therefore, he recorded it to show the Baptist's reliability as a prophetic witness about Jesus's identity and mission. Furthermore, he utilized the Baptist's Christology to achieve the Fourth Gospel's rhetorical strategy and agenda. This was fitting since the Fourth Gospel portrays the Baptist as a model witness (cf. Asumang 2010, 135–137; Bennema 2014, §3). The next sections summarize the findings of the study.

2. The Baptist's Christological Confessions and Their Contribution to the Christology of the Fourth Gospel

2.1 A narrative-theological analysis of the Baptist's Christology

The Baptist makes several prophetic confessions about Jesus's identity and mission in the Fourth Gospel.² Based on a narrative-theological analysis of these christological confessions, several conclusions regarding their backgrounds and meanings were made. First, Jesus is the God of Israel.³ This is based on Jesus being the Lord of Isaiah 40:3,⁴ the Baptizer with the divine Spirit,⁵ and the Bridegroom,⁶ However, Jesus is distinct from the

1 John 1:35–40; 13:23–26; 18:15–16; 19:26–27, 35; 20:2–9; 21:7, 20–25.

2 John 1:15, 19–27, 29–37; 3:26–30.

3 John 1:23, 33; 3:29.

4 Cf. John 1:23.

5 John 1:33; cf. Isa 32:15–20; 44:1–5; Ezek 37:1–14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10.

6 John 3:29; cf. Hos 1–3; Isa 54:4–5; 62:4–5; Jer 2:2; 3:20; Ezek 16:8–14.

One who sent the Baptist;⁷ he is the Son of God.⁸ Also, based on Jesus's eternal pre-existence and divine supremacy,⁹ he is the Son of Man (Keener 2012, 457; Kraeling 1951, 56–57; Lange and Schaff 2008, 75). In other words, Jesus is the Danielic figure.¹⁰ The Son of Man title is associated with the Son of God title in the Fourth Gospel (Asumang 2010, 328; Michaels 2010, 219; Lincoln 2005, 204; Kanagaraj 2013, 58).

Moreover, emanating from these confessions, Jesus is from God/above/heaven and is the divine agent. Jesus, as the divine agent, is a representative of the divine council among humanity in the world. While Jesus is fully God, he is also fully man.¹¹ In fact, Jesus, as the divine agent, is the long-awaited Davidic Messiah.¹² In terms of the socio-religious function, he is the Royal-Priest.¹³ Furthermore, from his identification as the Lamb of God, he is the suffering Servant of Isaiah,¹⁴ the sacrificial Paschal Lamb,¹⁵ and the eschatological Triumphant Lamb.¹⁶

Ultimately, Jesus came into the world to create the new spiritual family of God (John 1:29–36). Jesus would achieve this through his atonement work as the sacrificial Paschal Lamb (John 1:29, 36) and his baptism of the people with the divine Spirit (v. 33). The pouring of the Spirit

7 John 1:33.

8 John 1:34.

9 John 1:15, 27, 30.

10 Dan 7:13–14.

11 John 1:15, 27, 30, 33; 3:27–28.

12 John 1:19–27, 29–37; 3:28; cf. Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–16; 16:5; Jer 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15–17; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–28; Hos 1:11; 3:5; Mic 5:2; Zech 12:8–13:1.

13 Ps 110:4; Ezek 45:22; Zech 6:9–13.

14 Isa 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12.

15 Exod 12:22, 46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20; John 2:13–24; 6:4; 11:55; 13:1; 19:14; cf. 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 1:5; 5:6, 9; 7:14; 12:11.

16 Rev 5:5, 12; 7:17; 17:14; 1 Enoch 90:9–12; T. Benj 3:8; T. Jos 19:8–9; cf., Brown (2008, 63).

upon the people, both in the OT¹⁷ and the broader STJ, specifically, the Qumran community¹⁸ was associated with the new creation. Therefore, the OT and the wider STJ traditions are the theological contexts of the Baptist's christological confessions. Based on Jesus's work of new creation, on the one hand, those who believe in him would be forgiven of their sins and would become the new spiritual family of God. On the other hand, Satan and those who love the world would be judged.¹⁹ While Satan will be completely dethroned and eternally judged at the eschaton, those who belong in the new spiritual family of God are delivered from his rule.

2.2 A comparison of the Baptist's Christology, Jesus's self-disclosure, and the apostle John's Christology

A comparative evaluation of the Baptist's Christology with Jesus's self-disclosure and the apostle John's Christology underlines coherence between the three figures' christologies. The coherence supports this study's hypothesis of the close relationship between the Baptist, the apostle John, the author or redactor, and Jesus. Jesus is the embodied divine council, namely, he is fully God,²⁰ and he is fully man.²¹

The three figures are also in agreement that Jesus is the long-awaited Davidic Messiah.²² Lastly, the three figures are in harmony that

17 Isa 32:15–20; 44:1–5; Ezek 37:1–14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10.

18 IQHa 5:18–26; 6:11–13; 8:10–20; 10:11–13; 20:11–12; 21:12–14; 11Q13, Col. 2, 1–25; CD–A Col. 2, 11–13; IQ34, Frag. 3, col. II; IQS4:20–25.

19 John 1:29; 12:31.

20 The Baptist, John 1:15, 23, 27, 33; 3:29; Jesus, John 2:1–11; 4:4–42; 6:62; 8:24, 28, 58; 10:30, 38; 14:9–11, 20; 12:45; 13:18–19; 14:7, 9; 16:15, 19, 32; 17:1–2, 5, 10, 11, 21–24; 18:5–6; 21:6, 18–19, 22; apostle John, John 1:1–3, 18; 4:1; 6:23; 9:38; 11:2; 12:21.

21 The Baptist, John 1:15, 27, 30, 33; 3:27–28; Jesus, John 2:4; 11:33, 35, 38; 12:27; 13:3; 18:37; 19:26–27; apostle John, John 2:3–5; 4:6; 7:3–5; 19:25–26.

22 The Baptist, John 1:20–27, 29–36; 3:28; Jesus, John 2:1–11; 4:4–42; 7:27–29; 8:24; 10:1–18, 25; 13:19; 18:34, 36, 37; apostle John, John 1:17; 20:31.

Jesus is the embodied divine council's agent. The christological titles and concepts supporting this last christological aspect are that Jesus is from above/heaven/God,²³ sent²⁴ the Son/Son of Man/Son of God,²⁵ going/ascending to God/the Father,²⁶ and creator of the new spiritual family of God²⁷ underline his divine agency role in the Fourth Gospel.

Significantly, Jesus's self-disclosure is in-depth compared with the Baptist and the apostle John. However, the coherence of their Christologies shows that the Baptist is a reliable prophetic witness.²⁸ Furthermore, it points to the Baptist's influence and contribution to the apostle John's beliefs and formulations of his Christology in the Fourth Gospel. Though some might argue that this coherence is due to the author's literary and rhetorical designs, I found by comparison with the Synoptic Gospels that it is not unique to the Fourth Gospel, thus essentially underlying the essentially historical nature of the coherence. This historical plausibility will be addressed shortly.

2.3 A comparison of the Baptist's Christology and Jesus's interlocutors' christological confessions

A comparative evaluation of the Baptist's Christology and Jesus's interlocutors' christological confessions also shows coherence. However,

23 The Baptist, John 1:15, 27, 30–33; 3:28; Jesus, John 8:42; 16:27; apostle John, John 1:1–18; 3:31.

24 Jesus, John 5:24; 7:16, 33; 11:42; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21

25 The Baptist, John 1:15, 27, 30, 34; Jesus, John 5:24; 7:16, 33; 11:42; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21; apostle John, John 1:14, 18; 20:31.

26 Jesus, John 7:33; 13:3; 16:5, 7, 28; 20:17.

27 The Baptist, John 1:29, 33; Jesus, John 3:5–15; 4:10–26; 7:38; 8:12; 10:28; 12:36, 46–47; 19:30, 34; 20:21; apostle John, John 1:4, 9–13; 20:31.

28 John 5:31–35; 10:40–42.

during Jesus's earthly ministry, his disciples miscomprehended the significance and implication of their confessions, and they were not at the level of the Baptist's faith. Jesus's disciples only reached the level of the Baptist's post-glorification, after receiving the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Therefore, this firmly underlines the influence and contribution of the Baptist's Christology to the Gospel's christological project.

Overall, it is apparent from the comparative evaluations that the apostle John was heavily influenced by the Baptist's Christology in the formations and formulations of his christological framework in the Fourth Gospel. This is fitting since the apostle John was a former disciple of the Baptist. The influence of the Baptist is further evident in the early church.³⁰ On the one hand, one of the criteria to select a new apostle was that the person must have been part of the group starting from the Baptist's ministry.³¹ On the other hand, the former disciples of the Baptist who only received the Baptist's baptism were identified as believers.³² Apollos, although he only knew the Baptist's baptism, was highly regarded by early Christians.³³ Consequently, the current scholarly solution of the author's polemical intentions against the Baptist's followers is weak, and hence it can be discarded.

3. The Historical Plausibility of the Baptist's Christology in the Fourth Gospel

It can be counter-argued that the Christology attributed to the Baptist is that of the apostle John since the Baptist never wrote his theological treatise.

29 John 2:22; 12:16; 14:26; 20:21–28.

30 Acts 1:21–22; 18:24–19:7.

31 Acts 1:21–22.

32 Acts 18:24–19:7.

33 Acts 18:24–28.

Therefore, in order to respond to this counter-thesis, it was necessary to investigate the historical plausibility of the Baptist's Christology in the Fourth Gospel. A concise procedure entailing five key issues, namely, authorship, date and provenance, literary genre, source theory, and an approach to establishing the historical plausibility of the Gospel's materials was utilized.

The study adopts the traditional view that the apostle John is an eyewitness, evangelist and author of the whole Gospel (Asumang 2010, 383–390; Bennema 2014, §22; Burge 2000, 26–28; Carson 1991, 68–81; Keener 2012, 81–115; Köstenberger 2013, 3–7; Morris 1995, 4–25; Westcott and Westcott 1908, v–xxxii). The beloved disciple³⁴ is the apostle John. He was the last remaining apostle towards the end of the first century AD (Carson 1991, 682; Köstenberger 2004, 602; Jackson 1999, 21–22, 24; Keener 2012, 1240; Morris 1995, 775). Furthermore, the anonymous disciple in John 1:35–40 is the beloved disciple (Asumang 2010, 147–148, 383–384; Bennema 2014, §22; Bernard 1929, 53; Brown 2008, 73; 1979:32–34; Burge 2000, 75; Carson 1991, 154; Resseguie 2016, 547–549; Tenney 1976, 299; Titus 1950, 324–325; Tovey 2016, 135–136; Wright 2004, 15–16). Therefore, the apostle John is the former disciple of the Baptist (John 1:35–40), and he is an eyewitness of the Baptist's ministry (John 1:19–34).

The external evidence further supports the association of the beloved disciple with the apostle John (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.4–20; cf. Borchert 1996, 88–89; Carson 1991, 68–70; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.4; Keener 2012, 96–98). Therefore, the apostle John, as a former disciple of the Baptist and Jesus's disciple, had insider information about the ministries of his two teachers. Regarding the date and provenance,

34 John 13:23–26; 18:15–16; 19:26–27, 35; 20:2–9; 21:7, 20–25.

the Fourth Gospel was written towards the end of the first century AD by the apostle John before his death, and he wrote it while in Ephesus (cf., Blomberg 2001, 41–42). He wrote it for both pastoral and evangelistic purposes, targeting all readers of the Fourth Gospel (Bauckham 1998; Burridge 1998).

In literary genre, the Fourth Gospel, like the Synoptics, is primarily a historical biography (*bios*) of the historical Jesus (Asumang 2010; Burridge 2004; Horsley and Thatcher 2013; Keener 2012; 2019). In terms of the source theory, three issues—hypothetical documents, John-Synoptics relationship, and developmental theory—are postulated. It is avowed based on the hypothetical documents that the Fourth Gospel was written from three primary sources: a miracles/signs source, a saying/discourse source, and a passion source (Bultmann 1971; Fortna 1970; 1988; von Wahlde 2010). Advocates of this view claim that these sources assist in explaining John's *aporiai*. However, a plausible alternative explanation is that John's *aporiai* are due to orally-preached materials (Blomberg 2001, 45; Carson 1991; Thatcher 2000; 2001, 2) by the apostle John that were woven together to form the Fourth Gospel.

The relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics has various explanations. This is due to both similarities and differences between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics (Anderson 2007, 128; Bird 2014, 192; Hurtado 2003, §6). Therefore, dating back to the patristic period, scholars have tried to explain their relationship. While there are diverse proposals, this study adopted a complementation theory. Some scholars (e.g., Asumang 2010, 374–376; Bauckham 1998; Gilliam 2006, 1–8) avow that the Fourth Gospel complements the Synoptics. In other words, the Fourth Gospel was written with the readers of the Synoptics (especially, Mark) in mind. While John knew the Synoptics (cf., John 21:25), he wrote this

Gospel independently with its readers in mind. The Fourth Gospel mainly supplements, augments, and clarifies the Synoptics on essential areas of Christian origins (Asumang 2010, 374).

Regarding the developmental theory, there are four approaches used to explain John's *aporiai*: the history of religions (Brown 1979), the sociological approach (Hurtado 2003, §6; McGrath 1998, 2001), the individual Johannine innovation (Anderson 2010; 2014), and the organic approach (Brown 1994; Dunn 1989; Hengel 2004). It is asserted that these approaches help explicate the high/developed Christology of the Fourth Gospel. Based on these approaches (especially, the first three), it is opined that the author used the Baptist's accounts for polemical purposes against the Baptist's followers. However, accepting this polemical interpretation undermines the apostle John's explicit claim of his reliable eyewitness testimony.³⁵ The apostle John, as one of the Twelve, his eyewitness testimony played an influential role in Jesus's tradition (Keener 2019, 369, 392).

I agree with scholars such as Keener (2019, 392), who claim that "memory is more reliable than unreliable." Especially a memory of extraordinarily rare and life-transforming experiences like those the disciples had. Fittingly, the christological confessions attributed to the Baptist are *ipsissima verba* (that is, are precisely uttered by him). This historical plausibility of the Baptist's Christology is further strengthened by the coherence between Baptist's Christology in the Fourth Gospel³⁶ and the Synoptics.³⁷ Differently put, the Baptist's accounts in the Fourth Gospel, although distinct, conceptually parallel the Synoptics's references to Jesus as the Messiah, God and creator of the new spiritual family of God.

35 John 19:35; 21:24.

36 John 1:15, 19–36; 3:26–30.

37 Matt 3:11–12; Mark 1:7–8; Luke 3:15–17.

Moreover, the Fourth Gospel supplements, augments, and clarifies the Synoptics on crucial areas of Christian origins. This is supported by the fact that a number christological titles and concepts (e.g., Lord, Bridegroom, eternal pre-existence, Messiah, “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (NIV), Son of God) are only explicitly recorded in the Fourth Gospel. Profoundly, these christological confessions were confirmed by Jesus and shaped the apostle John’s christological beliefs and formulations of his Christology in the Fourth Gospel (§2). Fittingly, the Baptist is portrayed as a reliable principal witness in the Fourth Gospel.

4. A Narrative-Rhetorical Contribution of the Baptist’s Christology in the Fourth Gospel

4.1 The rhetorical analysis of the Baptist’s christological confessions

The issue that needs to be addressed before an examination of a narrative-rhetorical contribution of the Baptist’s Christology in the Fourth Gospel is the argumentative value of his prophetic witness to his narrative interlocutors. This rhetorical analysis is foundational to the examination of his narrative-rhetorical contribution to the Fourth Gospel’s rhetorical strategy and agenda. The theory of new rhetoric based on the works of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) and Perelman (1982) was utilized. Five key aspects of this theory were considered, namely, the speaker and audience, the premises of argumentation, the techniques of presentation, signification and interpretation of data (that is, the Baptist’s confessions), and the techniques of argumentation.

The Baptist is the speaker,³⁸ and his audience is the whole of Israel.³⁹ The members of the audience that he directly interacts with are the religious authorities,⁴⁰ his two disciples, Andrew and John, the sons of Zebedee,⁴¹ his other disciples⁴² and the many people.⁴³ The purpose of his discourse with the members of the audience is to persuade them to believe in Jesus's identity and mission.⁴⁴ The Baptist's discourse falls under the rhetorical subcategory of an epideictic genre as it requires action from the audience (cf., Perelman 1982, 12, 20). His water baptism enabled him to meet with the members of the audience. In other words, the Baptist's water baptism attracted the audience to come to where he was baptizing. The audience wanted to establish whether he was a messianic/prophetic figure based on his water baptismal activity (John 1:19–27).

According to Perelman (1982, 11), "Argumentation is intended to act upon an audience, to modify an audience's convictions or dispositions through discourse, and it tries to gain a meeting of minds instead of imposing its will through constraint or conditioning." The Baptist's discourse achieved this purpose of argumentation, as he commenced from the premise/thesis (Jewish messianism) that the audience accepted and transferred this adherence to the conclusion, the new reality (Jesus is the long-long awaited Davidic Messiah, the Son of God, and the creator of the new spiritual family of God). Notably, water baptism within Jewish tradition was associated with the messianic/prophetic figures. Therefore,

38 John 1:15, 19–37; 3:26–30.

39 John 1:31.

40 John 1:19–27.

41 John 1:35–37.

42 John 3:26–30; cf. John 1:19–34.

43 John 10:40–42; cf. John 1:19–34.

44 John 1:6–9, 31.

his baptismal activity was an accepted premise by the members of the audience. Aptly, they associated him with the messianic/prophetic figure (John 1:19–25).

In John 1:20, the Baptist's denial of being the Messiah was his departure point. Importantly, this denial and his subsequent denials of being either Elijah or the Prophet (John 1:21–22) resulted in the audience asking why he was baptizing (vv. 24–25). In response, the Baptist testified about the "Coming One," whom they did not know, who was the Messiah, the Son of God and the creator of the new spiritual family of God.⁴⁵ Overall, this argument bears upon reality (truth), as there was Jewish expectation of the coming of the divinely promised Messiah. Furthermore, it bears upon the preference of Jesus based on value (infinite value, his identity and mission), hierarchy (superiority, his identity and mission), and general loci (his salvific work, both in quantity and quality).

The Baptist's discourse employed different rhetorical figures, such as allusion⁴⁶ prolepsis,⁴⁷ metaphor,⁴⁸ imagery direct speech,⁴⁹ and amplification,⁵⁰ which ensured that the members of the audience were attentive to his discourse (cf. Perelman 1982, 37). Also, based on signification and interpretation of data, the Baptist's argumentation was understood by the audience as many believed in Jesus.⁵¹ Significantly, the Baptist, in order to persuade the members of the audience, sets the different christological titles and concepts on equal footing. Concisely, the Baptist's

45 John 1:15, 20, 23, 26–27, 29–36; 3:28–30.

46 John 1:19–27.

47 John 1:24–27, 30–31.

48 John 1:29, 36; 3:29.

49 John 1:23.

50 John 1:19–36.

51 John 1:35–40; 10:40–42; 12:42.

argumentation claims that the different titles and concepts are equally fulfilled in the person of Jesus. There was communion about the different titles and concepts as their roots were in Jewish tradition; however, their convergence into the person of Jesus was a new reality. This new reality was the crux of the Baptist's discourse that the members of the audience had to accept. While many from the members of the audience accepted the new reality and then believed in Jesus's identity and mission, they did not fully comprehend the significance and implication of their confessions during Jesus's earthly mission. However, this was not due to the Baptist.

The Baptist's argumentation technique is association processes, which are "schemes which bring separate elements together and allow us to establish a unity among them, which aims either at organizing them or at evaluating them, positively or negatively, by means of one another" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 190). The Baptist's discourse is based on three categories of association schemes: quasi-logical argument (transitivity and comparison), arguments based on the structure of reality (pragmatic argument and argument by authority), and the relations establishing the structure of reality (particular case and analogy). Overall, based on these different aspects of the new rhetoric, the Baptist persuasively argued that Jesus is the long-awaited Davidic Messiah, the Son of God, and the creator of the new spiritual family of God. Fittingly, many of his members of the audience believed in Jesus's identity and mission.⁵² Therefore, his discourse had an argumentative value.

52 John 1:35-40; 10:40-42; 12:42.

4.2 *A narrative-rhetorical analysis of the Baptist's christological contribution to the Fourth Gospel's rhetorical strategy and agenda*

The remaining important issue is the examination of a narrative-rhetorical contribution of the Baptist's Christology to the Fourth Gospel's rhetorical strategy and agenda. Two issues, namely, the audience of the Gospel and an argument by model and anti-model, were considered. Regarding the audience, the Fourth Gospel was targeted to all readers, both believers and unbelievers. Mainly, it targeted the universal audience, which is "the whole of mankind or at least, of normal, adult persons" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 30). The aim was to convince them that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, in order for them to become the new spiritual family of God when they believe in Jesus (§2).

The theory of argument by model and anti-model is particularly relevant to establish the narrative-rhetorical contribution of the Baptist's Christology. On the one hand, argument by model "encourages imitation" (Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 350). In other words, if the speaker/writer wants the audience to imitate certain behaviors, they would use behaviors of persons with authority and/or social prestige (cf. Perelman 1982, 110). On the other hand, argument by anti-model discourages imitation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 366). The many people who believed in Jesus after concluding that everything that the Baptist had said about Jesus was true (John 10:40–42) is an example to be imitated. Therefore, all the Fourth Gospel's readers are encouraged to follow their example. Furthermore, the apostle John is a model based on his authority and social prestige in the first century AD as one of the Twelve and a leader in the early church, as well his substantial dependence on his former teacher's Christology. Jesus's disciples' growth in their faith post-Easter further encourages all believers

to grow in their faith. Importantly, these disciples, especially the Twelve, were prominent figures in the early church.

The characterization (conflict, hatred, and unbelief) of the authorities dissuades all readers of the Fourth Gospel from following their example. Significantly, based on the Baptist's characterization as a reliable principal witness,⁵³ he sets an example for all the readers of the Fourth Gospel. Remarkably, his accurate Christology, comprehension of the significance and implication of his confessions, and unwavering faith in Jesus's identity and mission are examples that all the Fourth Gospel's readers must imitate. This is further supplemented by the Baptist's authority and social prestige in the first century AD.⁵⁴ Therefore, the Baptist's characterization was crucial for the author to achieve his rhetorical strategy and agenda (John 1:6–9; 20:30–31). Fittingly, the predominant scholarly view of the author's polemical intentions against the Baptist's followers is severely undermined.

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the nature and extent of the Baptist's christological contribution in the Fourth Gospel's christological project. This was necessitated by the remarkable space and prominence apportioned to the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel. In contrast to the predominant scholarly view of the author's polemics against the Baptist's followers, it was theorized that the phenomenon is a natural outflow of the close relationship between the Baptist, the apostle John, and Jesus. Three methods of exegesis, namely, historical-narrative, theological, and rhetorical, were utilized to achieve the study's objectives. The study made three underlying assumptions as

53 John 1:1–18, 19–39; 3:26–30; 5:31–35; 10:40–42.

54 Matt 3:1–17; 11:14; Mark 1:1–8; 9:11–13; Luke 1:14–17, 76–79; 3:1–20; 7:24–28; 16:16; 20:6; 17:10–13; Acts 1:1:5, 21–22, 10:37; 11:16; 13:24–25; 18:24–19:7; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.116–119.

a starting point: that the Fourth Gospel's genre is mainly Jesus's historical biography, that its background is the OT and the wider STJ, and that the Fourth Gospel is a unified text. Overall, the outcome of the investigation confirms the study's hypothesis. The apostle John, as the Baptist's former disciple, was markedly shaped by the Baptist's Christology in his christological beliefs and formulations of the Fourth Gospel's Christology. Furthermore, as a prototype witness, the Baptist's Christology was pivotal for the apostle John's rhetorical strategy and agenda.

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Traditional Christian and Mormon views of God and Their Compatibility with the moral Theistic Argument: An Exercise in Ramified Natural Theology

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Abstract

In 2002, Francis Beckwith authored a chapter in *The New Mormon Challenge* in which he argued that the Mormon (LDS) worldview does not adequately ground moral laws. LDS philosopher Blake Ostler offered a response to Beckwith's argument and attempted to demonstrate LDS's theism's compatibility with objective moral values and duties. A substantial portion of Ostler's work argues for a reinterpretation of Joseph Smith's teaching about God that he dubs "kingship monotheism." Christian scholars have yet to respond to Ostler's critique of Beckwith's argument or his grounding of objective moral values and duties within an LDS worldview. This paper represents a beginning of such a response. It argues that the moral argument for God's existence provides good evidence for Christian theism and serves as a critique of LDS theism.

Keywords

objective morality, ramified natural theology, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, LDS, the moral argument for God's existence, monarchotheism

1. Introduction

The twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of metaphysical thinking and a renaissance in Christian philosophy (Craig and Moreland 2012, ix). This renewed interest in Christian philosophy “served to reinvigorate natural theology, that branch of theology that seeks to provide warrant for belief in God’s existence apart from the resources of authoritative, propositional revelation.” The moral argument is regularly featured as one of the important natural theological arguments for God’s existence (see further Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland 2004; Craig 2002; Craig and Moreland 2012; Moreland, Meister, and Sweis 2013).

Theistic religions may differ regarding what they hold to be true and real about God. Philosophers and theologians may employ natural theology to discriminate between religious outlooks. This way of using natural theology has been called ramified natural theology (Swinburne 2004, 533). Thus employed, natural theology becomes useful in arguing for not merely theism, but for a particular brand of theism.

The metaphysics of the divine that has developed in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) differs considerably from the metaphysics of the divine in traditional Christian theism. This project is an application of ramified natural theology, attempting to answer the question, “Which religion, LDS or traditional Christian theism, is more likely to be true based on the results of natural theology?” Specifically, this paper will

look closely at the evidence for God produced by the moral argument for God's existence.

The first part of this paper will offer a popular form of the moral argument for God's existence. While this paper will not offer an exhaustive explication and defense of the moral argument, a brief examination will highlight two features of the moral argument: (1) It will show the argument to be a broadly defensible argument for the existence of God, and (2) it will highlight the metaphysical commitments entailed by the argument.

The second part of this paper will address the question, "Can biblical Christianity make use of the moral argument for God's existence?" This section will evaluate biblical data and pay special attention to the Euthyphro dilemma.

The third part of this paper will address the question, "Can LDS theology make use of the moral argument for God's existence?" This section will highlight the argument advanced by Francis Beckwith against traditional Mormon theology from the moral argument, along with LDS philosopher Blake Ostler's response to Beckwith. Ostler defends traditional Mormon theology from Beckwith's argument and advances a new theology, kingship monotheism, as a basis for an LDS appropriation of the moral argument for God's existence. This section will evaluate Ostler's defense of traditional LDS theism and his use of kingship monotheism.

Finally, this paper will offer its verdict concerning the compatibility of the use of the moral argument for God's existence in traditional Christian theology and in LDS theology.

2. The Moral Argument

2.1 *The moral argument presented*

One form of the moral argument has been popularized by the prolific debating of philosopher William Lane Craig. In *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (2003), Craig argues:

- If God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
- Objective moral values and duties do exist.
- Therefore, God exists.

This argument takes the form of *modus tollens*:

Modus Tollens

$P \rightarrow Q$

$\neg Q$

$\neg P$

Craig's Argument

If atheism (A) \rightarrow there are no objective moral values or duties ($\neg O$)

$\neg(\neg O)$

$\neg A$

2.2 *The moral argument defended*

An attack on the moral argument will take one of two primary forms. The philosopher either takes an anti-realist position regarding moral values and duties, which denies the reality of moral facts (Copp 2005, 41–42), or affirms objective moral values and duties while claiming some other grounding.

One popular version of the anti-realist position explains our felt experience of morality as owing to the evolutionary process and not to actually existing objective moral obligations. On this view, ethics are “psychological beliefs put in place by natural selection to maintain and

improve our reproductive fitness. There is nothing more to them than that” (Ruse 2012, 65). Though some philosophers embrace this anti-realist position, the consensus seems to be that moral realism fits most naturally with what we seem to be doing in making moral claims and is the default position (Copp 2005, 42). The ubiquity of belief in objective morality is evidenced in our strong insistence on being able to accuse others of wrongdoing, being able to see instances of injustice in the world, being able to improve our morals (rather than simply change them), and being able to point out moral exemplars (Beckwith and Koukl 1998, 61–72). Human moral experience imposes duties on us that we understand to lay claim to us in powerful ways; we infer from this experience a realm of objective moral values and duties (Craig and Gorra 2013, 89–90). This paper proceeds on the basis that this reasoning is persuasive and that objective moral values and duties exist.

Atheist philosopher Sam Harris takes the other approach. He believes morality to be objective but does not believe moral values and duties need to be grounded in a divine being to be objective (Harris 2007, 8–24). Harris sees facts about what enables a person to flourish as grounded in biology and psychology. He believes that flourishing provides humans with objectively better or worse ways to seek happiness, and thus, provides an enduring basis for objective morality.

Biology and psychology may account for certain behaviors that support human flourishing, but it is hard to extrapolate from there to a necessary link between fitness and objective morality. Biology can tell us what is advantageous to life, but not that we have an obligation to pursue life or the advantage a behavior confers. As atheist philosopher Alex Rosenberg (2011, 330) opines, “Science has no way to bridge the gap between is and ought.” While it may be clear that act *x* supports another person’s well-being

and that act y is detrimental to that person's well-being, it is not clear, on atheistic naturalism, that one is obligated to pursue x rather than y .

Harris's theory seems unable to move from descriptive facts about human nature to value judgments about those facts. Pleasure and pain may be real, and evolutionary naturalism may account for these, but what evolutionary naturalism cannot do is link objective value to one of these experiences over another. This flaw is fatal to naturalistic grounding of objective moral values and duties because, in the end, it reduces moral action to actions that promote reproductive fitness, but it can provide no duty to pursue that goal. While naturalistic moral theories abound, they all share this flaw: they can work robustly on a descriptive level, but they fall apart at the substantive level, bearing witness to a lack of objective grounding.

2.3 The moral argument: some conclusions

The above has been brief, but it has served to highlight an important metaphysical commitment of the moral argument for God's existence. It appears that to be a moral realist regarding objective moral values and duties, one must have a solid grounding for those objective values and duties. Those values and duties must be grounded in something beyond descriptions of prudence or mere truths about what makes a thing flourish. The moral argument concludes by pointing to God as the only possible grounding of objective moral values and duties. God can endow his creatures with value and is capable of grounding moral truths objectively.

3. Biblical Christianity and the Moral Argument

3.1 *Biblical data*

In the Bible, God creates the heavens and the earth and then places Adam and Eve, whom he created in his image, in a garden. God creates, and in that creation, we see incredible order, design, and purposefulness. In the early parts of Genesis, God also sets out a moral vision for Adam and Eve.

The book of Genesis declares God to be more than creator; he is legislator as well. God's commands give humans the fundamental choice to obey or disobey (Hare 2010, 70). God establishes both a physical world as well as a moral landscape in which Adam and Eve are to dwell. Adam and Eve sin by eating the prohibited fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They assert their own will over and against God's. This is the introduction of sin into the world.

God warned of impending death if they ate the prohibited fruit, and though Adam and Eve did not die immediately, God does hold them accountable. God confronts Adam and Eve in their rebellion in Genesis 3. God announces punishment (Gen 3:14–19) and executes his judgment for their sin (Gen 3:20–24). A death does occur—a substitute that covers their shame and which points to Jesus as the sacrificial death that would pay the penalty of even this sin—and Adam and Eve are cut off from the tree of life, thus relegating them to return eventually to the dust from which they came.

Genesis 1–3 establishes God as the lawgiver who holds his creatures accountable. His commands form the basis for the moral situations that occur. God gives Adam and Eve a short list of commandments, and these describe the objective values and duties Adam and Eve were meant to embrace. They are objective because they issue from a source beyond

human subjective experience. This source is not an abstract and causally disconnected entity, but God himself.

Later in the biblical narrative God reveals himself to Israel at Mount Sinai. There, God's presence is manifested to God's people with smoke, fire, thunder, lightning, and trumpet blasts (Exod 19:16–20). Interestingly, this instance is the only place where God speaks to the whole of God's people corporately (Deut 5:22–27). Even more remarkable, with the Ten Commandments, God gives Israel laws written by his own hand (Exod 31:18, 32:16). While other legislation was kept beside the ark (Deut 31:24–26), these tablets were placed *in* the ark (Exod 25:16). These details underscore the commandments' transcendent source and endurance (Miller 2009, 3). The Ten Commandments form a foundational starting point for moral law from which all the other OT laws flow (p. 13). God is the source of these laws and thus for all the moral laws that flow from this foundation. Just as God told Moses how to be holy in his presence (Exod 3:13–14), this law provides the basis for Israel to live in the presence of their holy God (Lev 19). God did not learn these laws from some other source. He is the final moral grounding for the laws he commands. Isaiah 40:13–14 asks,

Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?¹

Of course, these questions all expect and demand the negative, “No one.” God does not learn about justice or gain understanding from anybody else. He is from everlasting to everlasting (Ps 90:2) and has always been the source of moral truth.

1 All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the ESV.

In the NT, Jesus does not teach the same way as other teachers of the law. Teachers of the law appeal to revealed laws and case law to establish right action. Jesus taught differently. This is clear in many places, but Matthew 7:29 recalls how amazed those who heard Jesus teaching were, “for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” Jesus did not appeal to an outside authority. Instead, he claimed his teachings to be authoritative (Morris 1992, 184). The moral argument requires God to be the source of objective moral values and duties. The God revealed in the OT appears as just that source. Jesus’s teachings do not usurp God’s authority; rather, he teaches with that same authority. Thus, Jesus’s teachings affirm God as the unique source of objective moral values and duties.

Other authors in the NT echo the understanding of God as the moral lawgiver. The apostle Paul teaches that humans are accountable to God’s law (Rom 3:19; 1 Cor 6:10). That is, there is a law higher than any human court. God is not mocked (Gal 6:7); all lawbreakers are accountable for their departure from God’s objective standard of right and wrong.

James 2:8–13 argues that God is the lawgiver and that the person who breaks one of God’s laws is a lawbreaker and thus accountable for judgment. He also understands that faith in Jesus is the basis on which a person is saved from such judgment and that a person with faith will obey God’s commands (Jas 2:14–26).

The apostle Peter reminds us that God is the impartial judge who judges each according to their deeds (1 Pet 1:17). Of course, Peter knows we are delivered from that judgment by the “precious blood of Jesus” (1 Pet 1:19), but he expects that truth to purify those who receive Christ’s redemption so that they can be “obedient to the truth” (1 Pet 1:22). Peter recognizes God’s authority to issue commands and our responsibility to obey. He sees a day of judgment and destruction for those who have not lived up to God’s

objective moral values and duties and who have not been redeemed by the blood of Jesus (2 Pet 3:1–7).

The apostle John reveals that “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). This statement forms the basis for all of the ethical implications John makes in the verses that follow (Kruse 2000, 61). God’s character provides the basis for ethical action. It is essentially an ontological claim about God’s “moral perfection, truthfulness and impeccability” (Baggett and Campbell 2013, 350). In another of the apostle John’s works, the book of Revelation, John showcases God’s ultimate justice. God fully and finally judges all of humanity. Revelation 21:11–15 speaks of that judgment day where every person is fully accountable to God for every action.² The biblical data posits a God capable of grounding objective moral values and duties—a God whom the moral argument concludes exists.

3.2 The Euthyphro dilemma

A perennial difficulty for the moral argument generally stems from Plato’s argument known as the Euthyphro dilemma (Dombrowski 2008, 205; Levin 1989, 25). In the dilemma, Euthyphro claims that what all the gods love is holy and that what all the gods hate is unholy, to which Socrates asks his famous question, “Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?” (Plato 1966, 1:10a). This question presents Euthyphro with a vexing dilemma. The first horn of the dilemma is untenable for Euthyphro because it makes holiness independent from the gods. Holiness becomes a property the gods recognize and that does not originate in their will. Yet assenting to the second horn of the dilemma is tantamount to claiming that holy things are just those things that the

² See also 1 Pet 4:7.

gods happen to love. This too seems untenable because it appears to make holiness arbitrary. Had the gods loved rape or murder, then those obviously heinous acts would have been holy. If one adopts the first horn and holds that God commands something because it is good, then that person has abandoned God as the source of objective moral values and duties and has instead supposed there to be moral goodness independent of God. If, on the other hand, one adopts the second horn, moral values and duties appear to be arbitrary.

Some defenders of the moral theistic argument have sought a solution to this by suggesting that the Euthyphro dilemma is not a true dilemma and that there is, in fact, a third option (Copan 2013, 93). This strategy disassociates the good from God's commands and sees the good as identical with God's nature. In this case, what is morally good is rooted in God's nature, and God's will or commands flow necessarily from that good nature. God's commands are necessarily good, and they are not arbitrary, for they are constrained by God's nature.

Some philosophers have been unsatisfied with this response. Sinnott-Armstrong asks us to consider a possible world in which God's nature was different. If it was in God's nature to enjoy torturing people's babies for fun, then his commands would flow from his nature and would still command such evil things (Sinnott-Armstrong 2009, 106). Baggett and Walls offer a rejoinder to this sort of argument. They argue that what made Euthyphro so vulnerable to Socrates's criticism was that Euthyphro's gods were morally deficient (Baggett and Walls 2011, 50). However, they argue that the Christian concept of God is one of maximal excellence. The God of Christian theism is not fickle and capricious like the Greek gods. God just is the ultimate transcendent good. The Christian God is also thought to be necessary, that is, existing as himself in every possible world. Thus,

the God of Christian theism is not open to Sinnott-Armstrong's extended arbitrariness objection.

Sinnott-Armstrong would like to keep the pressure on the theist by arguing that even if God could not (due to his nature) ever command us to rape, still if he did, then we would have a moral obligation to rape. This may be trivially true in the same way that saying if it were the case that $2 + 2 = 5$ then $2 + 2 \neq 4$. That is trivially true, but nonsensical, just as saying that if God's necessary nature had been other than it is, then the morals that flow from that nature could have been different (Baggett and Walls 2011, 133).

3.3 Conclusion of biblical Christian theism and the moral argument

We can conclude that the Bible provides clear teaching that grounds objective moral values and duties in God himself. Traditional Christian theism has, at its core, the metaphysical requirements of the moral argument for God's existence. While devastating to the moral argument regarding the pagan gods in Socrates's day, the Euthyphro dilemma does not threaten the moral argument for God's existence for the traditional Christian theist.

4. LDS Theism and the Moral Argument

4.1 God in the LDS tradition

Traditional conceptions of God in the LDS tradition, based on Joseph Smith's mature teaching on the nature of God in the King Follett sermon (April 7, 1844) and the Sermon in the Grove (June 16, 1844), hold that the God worshiped by humans is but one being in an infinite chain of gods. While God in LDS thought is often conceived of as perfectly moral, this perfection was acquired by means of a developmental process in which God learned pre-existing laws (Givens 2015, 63). Eternal laws exist independently of God,

and therefore God, to progress, must recognize and embrace those eternal laws (Givens 2015, 60; cf. Pratt 1877, 37; Widtsoe 1932, 175). These laws are not only independent of God, but also out of his control (Robson 1983, 21). Kim McCall articulated several problems with the concept of moral obligation within LDS theology. He notes that within LDS theology, humans do not owe their ultimate existence to God, and both God and humans are subject to eternal laws (McCall 1981, 27).

McCall pushes LDS philosophers to look beyond God for the source of moral obligation since God is a part of nature rather than causally underlying it as in Christian theism (Sears 2000, 78). It is likely due to this problem that LDS philosopher Rex Sears (2000, 73) has opined that moral arguments for God's existence "are virtually absent from the Mormon tradition." In traditional Mormon thinking, God is not the ultimate source of moral values and duties or of power, since, like us, he derives his exalted status from another source based on his obedience to moral laws that exist outside himself. This conceptual difference between LDS and traditional Christian theism may stand behind the minimal usage of this argument by LDS philosophers, but it has not caused philosophers to remain unreflective concerning Mormon theism and the moral argument.

4.2 Beckwith's criticism

In his 2002 chapter in *The New Mormon Challenge*, Francis Beckwith claims that the God of LDS theology cannot be the ultimate grounding for objective moral values and duties. He points out that in LDS thought, God was elevated to his divine status in virtue of his obedience to moral laws he was obligated to obey. As Mormon general authority Milton Hunter has remarked, "He became God—an exalted being—through obedience to the same eternal gospel truths that we are given opportunity today to obey"

(Hunter 1945, 104). How did God “become glorified”? Hunter answers, “God undoubtedly took advantage of every opportunity to learn the laws of truth and as He became acquainted with each new verity, He righteously obeyed it” (p. 114). LDS philosopher Truman Madsen concurs: “God himself became God by the mastery of the same ultimate and unchanging conditions to which you and I are subject” (Madsen 1970, 57). It seems that on Mormonism, moral truth is external to and learned by God, and that God cannot thusly be the ultimate source or ground of moral values and duties. Beckwith sees that on LDS theology, if God’s decrees or deeds are good, “they are only good because they are consistent with an unchanging moral law that exists apart from him” (Beckwith 2002, 226).

It seems that the traditional LDS view of God is vulnerable to Socrates’s criticism discussed in his dialogue with Euthyphro. In LDS thought, morality is not ultimately grounded in God’s nature, but God commands what is good after aligning his will to the good. God’s commands may be good, but not just because he commands it, but rather because he learned eternal laws and has become a proficient commander of good things, much the same way a human might learn the good and become a proficient commander of good things. Thus, the moral argument for God’s existence does not offer proof for the God of traditional LDS theism any more than it offers proof for Euthyphro’s gods.

4.3 Ostler’s defense

LDS philosopher Blake Ostler has argued against Beckwith’s conclusion by saying that Beckwith’s analysis of God in the LDS tradition is mistaken. Rather than seeing LDS theology as committed to an infinite chain of gods, Ostler sees the God of LDS theology to be the head God over a plurality of lesser gods. This view can be called kingship monotheism, or

monarchotheism. Ostler's interpretation of Joseph Smith's mature teaching rests on two principal arguments. First, he claims that Smith's teaching in the King Follett discourse implies only that the Father was divine prior to becoming mortal and not that God the Father has a father as it is often assumed in LDS theology. Secondly, he claimed that in Smith's Sermon in the Grove, Smith's use of Revelation 1:6 was not used by Smith to teach that God the Father had a father, but that that "when the Father condescended from a fullness of his divine state to become mortal, he was born into a world and had a father *as a mortal*" (Ostler 2006, 444).

Ostler (2008, 17) admits that "until recently almost all Mormons believed that Joseph Smith taught that God progressed to become fully divine from a lower state of non-divinity." Though Smith's use of John 5:19 is traditionally interpreted by LDS theologians to imply that Jesus followed the Father's example of progressing to exaltation, Ostler instead takes the passage to imply only that Jesus, like the Father, was fully divine prior to mortality (Ostler 2006, 438).

This does not appear to be the best interpretation of Smith's words in the King Follett discourse. Smith is claiming that there is something Jesus has in common with the Father, not something the Father has in common with the Son. He is pointing out specifically that just as the Father had the power to lay down his body and take it up again, so the Son has the power to lay down his body and take it up again. This comparison says nothing of the ontological status of the person who precedes the mortal life.

Even if Ostler's interpretation of this passage from the King Follett discourse based on John 5:19 is correct, it would disprove his main point. While it may have been taught by Joseph Smith that Christ was a fully divine person prior to mortality, it is also taught that there was a time when Jesus was exalted. That is, Jesus was the firstborn spirit child of God in the

pre-existence and progressed to divinity. Speaking of Jesus Christ, LDS apostle Bruce McConkie (1966, 129) reminds us that “by obedience and devotion to the truth he attained that pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God, as the Lord Omnipotent, while yet in his pre-existent state.” In “Lecture Fifth” of the Lectures on Faith, Joseph Smith teaches that Jesus, having overcome, “received a fullness of the glory of the Father” (Smith 1985, 60). Later, in “Lecture Seventh” in the Lectures on Faith, Smith points out that in his theology, Jesus Christ is the prototype of a saved and glorified person. He is the example for us to follow, a person who, through faith, “has become perfect enough to lay hold upon eternal life” (1985, 75). There was a time, call it time T, when Jesus was not fully divine. Then at T₁ he was exalted, then at T₂ he was mortal, and then at T₃ he was full of glory once more. If Ostler is correct in his interpretation of Smith’s use of John 5:19, and Jesus follows the Father’s example, that would imply that God the Father was once a mere organized being, who was later exalted due to his faith and obedience, after which he became mortal and then, finally, was glorified. Thus, if Ostler is correct, God the Father still has not been God from all eternity.

The great lesson Smith is stressing is that humans may follow in the example of an eternal chain of exalted beings. God the Father followed his father’s example to divinity, Jesus followed God the Father’s example, and humans may follow Jesus’ example. Humans today simply follow the pattern of the gods before us, as they have done before them, etc., etc., *ad infinitum*. Beckwith’s critique stands, and the moral argument for God’s existence stands as a solid argument against LDS theism.

Ostler also argues that a passage from the King Follett discourse that is often seen as proof of Joseph Smith’s vision of a plurality of Gods is actually better situated in his interpretive frame in which God was eternally

fully divine prior to his mortal sojourn. In the official LDS version of the King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith states:

... it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. (Smith 1980, 6:305; see also Ostler 2006, 441)

In this passage Smith apparently refutes the idea that God the Father “has always been God or always had divine status” (Ostler 2006, 441).

Ostler’s strategy with this text is to argue for a revision of the text that will allow for a different interpretation. Ostler argues that the above statement, while supported by Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff’s recollection of the sermon, is not in harmony with Thomas Bullock’s report of the discourse (Ostler 2006, 441). Ostler also points out that William Clayton omits the statement “about a refutation altogether.” However, one should accept the text as the LDS church publishes it for four reasons.

First, for some inexplicable reason, Ostler neglects to convey that William Clayton’s report, while not recording the exact phrase as the others, does tell us that Smith claimed to “tell you how God came to be God.” While he does not reproduce the exact same phrase as Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff, he does produce the same doctrine.

Secondly, Ostler fails to mention other reports of the sermon. Samuel W. Richards’s record is brief, but remarkably records the sentence in question. It states, “to have eternal life, God: a man like one of us, even like Adam. Not God from all eternity” (Ehat and Cook 1980, 361).

Thirdly, Bullock’s account is not as out of harmony with Richard’s and Woodruff’s account as Ostler would like us to believe. Bullock’s report records, “I am going to tell you what sort of a being of God. for he was God

from the begin of all eternity and if I do not refute it” (Ehat and Cook 1980, 350).³ Ostler claims Bullock’s report states that Smith does not intend to refute the idea that God has been God from all eternity. However, at best, Bullock’s report is ambiguous, as Smith is reported in that account to have said only, “if I do not refute it.” He does not say “I do not refute it.” Rather, it could easily be understood as shorthand for something like, “see if I do not refute it.” In fact, Bullock notes that just after this statement, Smith went on to argue that “God himself the father of us all dwelt on a Earth same as Js. himself did” (p. 350). This seems to refute the idea that God has been God from all eternity in that there is at least that time God dwelt on an earth, and during that time God was not fully exalted.

Bullock’s notes go on to argue from this point that humans have this capacity to dwell on an Earth and be exalted to divine status as well, claiming “you have got to learn how to be a God yourself & be K. & Priest to God same as all have done by going from a small capy to anr. from grace to grace until the resn. & sit in everlasting power as they who have gone before & God” (Ehat and Cook 1980, 350).⁴ The theology Bullock records is entirely in line with that which was reported by Richards, Woodruff, and Clayton. Ostler’s interpretation of Bullock’s report is out of line with not only other reports of the same sermon from others who were there, but with Bullock’s own report.

As further evidence for Bullock’s substantial harmony with the official LDS report, it is worth noting that Bullock was responsible

3 In this section the reader may note many formatting, spelling, and grammar errors in the journal and diary entries supplied from LDS members of the past. I have attempted to reproduce the text of the journal or diary entry as it appears in Ehat and Cook’s *The words of Joseph Smith* (1980), and will not be marking each error.

4 Ibid.

for preparing the minutes of the conference based on his and William Clayton's notes (Barney 1997, 107). These minutes were then published by the LDS church in *Times and Seasons*. It seems odd that Ostler relies on Bullock's report, but not the official minutes he produced. Bullock's minutes bear witness that Smith claimed, "We have imagined that God was God from all eternity," but that it is necessary to "understand the character and being of God, for I am going to tell you how God came to be God." The preponderance of the reporting seems to point in one direction, namely, the traditional interpretation. It is also telling that Stan Larson's newly amalgamated text of the King Follett discourse is in harmony with the traditional LDS published version of the discourse. It reads, "For we have imagined that God was God from the beginning of all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil so you may see" (Larson 1978, 201; cf. Roberts 1903, 227).

In his second major argument for a kingship monotheism interpretation of LDS theology, Ostler argues against the traditional LDS interpretation of Smith's use of Revelation 1:6 in his Sermon in the Grove, in which Smith proclaimed, "that the Father had a father and that there is another 'Father above the Father of Christ'" (Ostler 2006, 444). Rather than understanding Smith to be preaching that God the Father is descended from other gods before him, Ostler would rather have us understand Smith's teaching to imply only that "when the Father condescended from a fullness of his divine state to become mortal, he was born into a world and had a father as a mortal" (Ostler 2006, 444). Ostler begins his defense of this interpretation by noting that Smith continues to stress that Jesus does "precisely" what the Father did before him (p. 445). As we saw above, this strategy fails to suit Ostler's purposes because if the analogy holds, it proves too much. If Jesus follows the Father's example, then the pattern is

that of a person birthed by divine parents, who achieved exaltation through obedience to eternal laws, entered into mortality, and exercised power to take his life up again after death. Yet this is exactly the traditional LDS interpretation that Ostler seeks to overturn.

As an additional consideration to move people to his view on this passage, Ostler points out that George Laub's journal notes from this sermon state that "the holy ghost is yet a spiritual body and waiting to take upon himself a body, as the Savior did or as god did." Ostler concludes from this that "Joseph Smith taught that already divine persons, including the Son and the Holy Ghost, take upon themselves bodies" (Ostler 2006, 445). The major problem with this reliance on George Laub's journal is that Ostler's quotation of this portion of the journal is incomplete, and misleadingly so. Laub's sentence continues on where Ostler provides a period. The sentence proceeds as follows: "... as the Savior did or as god did *or the gods before them ...*" (Ehat and Cook 1980, 382, emphasis added). Laub extends the analogy: "the Scriptures say those who obey the commandments shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with of Jesus Christ we then also took bodys to lay them down, to take them up again" (p. 382). Laub's understanding of Joseph Smith's teaching is that humans do just what Jesus did, which is just what the Father did before him, and what other gods did before him. The Father, the Son, and we humans are but three links in an eternal chain of gods. Contra Ostler's contention, Laub's journal provides deeper evidence that Smith's thinking about God is much more akin to the traditional LDS interpretation than Ostler's.

Thus, after examining Ostler's attempt to reinterpret Smith's mature teaching on God's nature, it looks as though the traditional LDS interpretation of Smith's teaching is correct, in which case Beckwith's argument holds. While providing evidence for the God of traditional

Christian theism, the moral argument for God's existence does not offer such evidence for the LDS theologian since God is subject to eternal laws that exist independent of God, and to which God is subject. Further, if sound, the moral argument, by pointing to a divine being who is the grounding for objective moral values and duties, serves as a defeater for any worldview that does not contain such a being. Mormon theology, having no such being to serve as the grounding for objective moral values and duties, has a considerable philosophical challenge.

It is worth noting that even if Ostler is right in his interpretation of Joseph Smith's mature teaching on God's nature, his kingship monotheistic theology does nothing to rescue Mormonism from the moral argument for God's existence. This is because Ostler still envisions moral goodness as existing independent of God. On Ostler's kingship monotheism, even if God has existed from eternity past as the head God, moral laws are co-eternal and exist independent of God.

Ostler contends for a view of moral obligations grounded in "the eternal nature of uncreated realities and our inherent capacities for progression and growth to realize our divine nature" (Ostler 2006, 110). His "agape theory" of ethics holds that "moral laws define the conditions that are necessary for the growth and progress of intelligences to partake of the divine nature" (p. 110). His view is that we act such that "each shall have the best life possible within the constraints posed by eternal conditions necessary for mutual self-realization" (p. 110). In his view, humans have divine potential, so the good is just "whatever leads to our realization of our humanity in a fullness of divinity" (p. 110). God's nature is divine, and so, in some sense, the good is "defined by the nature of God", but not necessarily so, as Ostler holds that it is possible for God to do something evil (p. 87). For Ostler, the good is "whatever leads to greater love and unity in interpersonal

relationships” (p. 111). This is objective, Ostler maintains, because it has an inescapable force, and it is the same for every person. What is clear is that its inescapable force and universality are not dependent on God ontologically. Ostler argues, “Love is not a law instituted by God, although it is a law expressive of who and what God is” (p. 114). Further, “there are eternal moral principles which condition even God, and these principles are found in the constraints inherent within intelligences for mutual self-realization as divine persons” (p. 114).

Ostler’s “agape theory” points to an eternal law, the “law of love” that sits in judgment over the head God, Gods, and Gods in embryo. He posits an objective law that exists and to which humans and God himself must submit to realize their divine potential. There are several pitfalls associated with this position.

First, should God fail to abide by the law of love, he would cease to be fully divine. Being fully divine would seem to be a prerequisite for being the head God, and therefore it seems that on Ostler’s view, there are possible worlds where the head God is not the head God.

Second, Ostler is still holding onto a view of objective morality that falls prey to the Euthyphro dilemma in the same way the traditional LDS view does. Morality is not ultimately grounded in God’s nature, but God commands what is good after aligning his will to the good. God’s commands may be good, but only in virtue of his learning the eternal law and commanding that which is in line with that law. Thus, the moral argument for God’s existence does not offer proof for Ostler’s kingship monotheistic God any more than it provides proof for the traditional LDS view of Gods, or the ancient polytheistic gods of the Greeks and Romans.

Third, Ostler’s agape ethic bears a family resemblance to the atheistic ethics of Sam Harris discussed previously. Harris believed the

grounding for human ethics relates to objective facts about human thriving. In a like manner, Ostler's view does not escape the prudential orbit. He gives no grounding for the command, "thou shalt realize your potential." There may be facts about what will aid one's quest to greatness, but that does not make one's actions moral just because they are done in pursuit of that potential. Nor does Ostler offer a moral reason why one should be concerned with reaching one's potential rather than helping carrots reach their potential. Like Sam Harris, Ostler is left with an "is" but no "ought." He may describe the human condition, but he has no grounding to prescribe human action. Morality becomes a means to an end, but not normative. Harris and Ostler both tell us what they believe will aid human flourishing, but Harris's natural order cannot find a moral grounding that obligates us to pursue that flourishing, and neither can Ostler's God.

Lastly, Ostler's eternal agape ethic appears arbitrary. Ostler claims that the good is bound up with what is loving. But what if what makes us realize our potential was harming others? Would we not then be obligated in Ostler's view to do harm? There appears to be no reason to think that love would be the objective moral good on Ostler's view. He seems to tacitly understand this problem and posits "that the moral law arises only in the context of interpersonal relations" (Ostler 2006, 84). Ostler seems to see that only if the fundamental grounding of morality is tied in some way to a loving interpersonal relationship could love be tied non-arbitrarily to objective morality. Yet Ostler does not propose a loving relationship as the grounding of objective values and duties. Instead, it is one's potential that grounds what one should do, and this potential is led forward by loving action. Thus, at the heart of Ostler's agape ethic, there is no interpersonal relationship; there is a law, and there seems to be nothing to constrain this

law from taking a more nefarious form in which it obligates humans to harm others to reach one's potential.

The distinctively Christian teaching on divinity is that God has eternally existed as the triune God. God has eternally existed in three persons “who have always existed in a relationship of perfect love with one another” (Baggett 2013, 347). Non-trinitarian worldviews like Mormon theism of any variety do not suppose an eternal God who has always existed in loving interpersonal relations. By their nature, non-trinitarian theistic expressions are at a distinct disadvantage in explaining how the nature of morality could be essentially one of love (Baggett 2013, 347).

5. Conclusion

The metaphysical commitments of traditional Christian theism are compatible with the entailments of the moral argument for God's existence. The same cannot be said for LDS theism in either its traditional form or in the kingship monotheistic variety proposed by Blake Ostler. The moral argument for the existence of God, then, not only fails to support LDS theism, but it also serves as a defeater for that theistic expression. The God of LDS theology is not the full and final grounding for objective moral values and duties as the God of the moral argument is.

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Towards Re-Articulation of the Confessional Lutheran Doctrine of Church Fellowship with Application for the Contemporary Post-Denominational Ecclesial Milieu

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the confessional Lutheran doctrine of church fellowship (inter-denominational and inter-Christian relations), focusing on the “unit concept” articulation of church fellowship employed by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). One aspect of this investigation is a study of the North American post-denominational ecclesial milieu, particularly attitudes and assumptions regarding denominational membership and doctrinal confession. I identify four trends from the literature which make application of the “unit concept” problematic in the contemporary context. Prevailing WELS praxis assumes that the way to witness to the truth of Scripture in a pluralistic doctrinal

environment is by strict separation. Instead, I offer evidence to suggest that a biblical confession of the truth is best presented by wise and appropriate participation in the common life of the church. Key to this study is an exegetical analysis of Scripture passages used to support the “unit concept.” WELS theologians have sometimes incautiously conflated passages directed towards erring (or differently-believing) fellow Christians with passages directed at pseudo-Christian heretical teachers. This has led to a practice of church fellowship which treats (erring) fellow Christian believers in a way that is biblically appropriate only for antichristian heretical teachers—that is, strict avoidance of any religious contact. My study shows that often-cited passages such as Romans 16:17–18 are best understood as a warning to stay completely away from antichristian heretical teachers, and not (as they are currently applied by the “unit concept”) as a command to avoid all religious contact with any fellow Christian who differs in any matter of doctrine. This thesis moves in conclusion towards a re-articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship which affirms ways for confessional Lutherans to lovingly and appropriately interact with individual Christians of other denominations, while at the same time publicly and corporately expressing a full and clear confession of all of the truths of God’s Word without compromise.

Keywords

church fellowship, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, post-denominational

1. Introduction

“Be careful to act according to the entire Law which my servant Moses commanded for you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may succeed wherever you go” (Joshua 1:7, EHV). In his book *The Narrow Lutheran Middle* (2011), Prof. Daniel Deutschlander uses the metaphor of carefully navigating a narrow path of biblical truth between two false “ditches” on either side of the road. This picture of a narrow middle road between two sinful extremes helps Christians understand and apply some seemingly-contradictory teachings of Scripture in their lives. One example of teachings between which it is important to maintain a balance are God’s grace and God’s justice. An exclusive focus on God’s grace, writes Deutschlander, can end up in a denial of the existence of hell and the misleading error that everyone will eventually end up in heaven. On the other hand, an over-emphasis on God’s justice can lead to limits on God’s ability or willingness to forgive, resulting in despair for the troubled sinner, or else the all-too-common suspicion that good works and willing cooperation somehow add to Christ’s work as the cause of salvation.

This thesis, too, can be seen as exploring a section of the “narrow Lutheran middle road.” I am discussing the doctrine of church fellowship, which is, most basically, the question of inter-Christian and inter-confessional relationships: how do believers relate to Christians of other denominations with different doctrinal beliefs than their own? In the case of church fellowship, the two sinful extremes to be avoided by careful navigation of the “narrow middle road” are: (1) open ecumenism, also known as unionism, which ignores or minimizes doctrine and doctrinal differences for the sake of (external) “unity” at all costs, and (2) schismatic and sectarian separatism, which ignores or minimizes agreement in the

common core of Christian faith for the sake of (doctrinal/denominational) “purity” at all costs.

The basic observation of this thesis is that, in the admirable desire of confessional Lutherans to avoid the first problem,¹ it is possible for us to get perilously close (and sometimes slip into) the second ditch on the other side of the road. Too much emphasis on differences and “error” can lead to pre-emptive and unnecessary separation and ostracism from fellow Christians of different denominations. This separation ends up costing us opportunities for genuine interaction and mutual edification, which can in turn lead to suspicion, hostility, and a prideful and condescending “we’re right and you’re wrong” attitude, with the result that the very Christianity of these other groups is called into question.² I offer this thesis as a potential corrective to that sectarian tendency, while still remaining biblically “on the road” and not falling prey to unbiblical ecumenism on the other side.

2. Denominational Setting

This thesis looks at the current articulation and application of the doctrine of church fellowship in one small slice of confessional American Lutheranism, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The WELS was formed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1850 and continues to maintain its synodical headquarters in the Milwaukee area. As of 2018, it had a baptized membership of 353,753 in 1,276 congregations. The WELS also does gospel outreach in 40 countries around the world. It is the third largest

1 In this thesis, the term “confessional Lutheran” refers to church bodies which subscribe unreservedly to all of the Lutheran Confessional writings contained in the *Book of Concord of 1580* (See Dau and Bente (2006) or *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (2009)).

2 Matheson (2010) refers to this as the “We believe the Bible and you do not” mentality.

Lutheran denomination in the United States. The WELS school system is the fourth largest private school system in the United States. The WELS is in fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, a worldwide organization of Lutheran church bodies of the same beliefs. The WELS operates a publishing house, two ministerial-education preparatory schools, a college of ministry, and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, which educates almost all synod clergy (WELS Ministry of Christian Giving 2018).³

3. Historical Roots

The WELS emphasis on the proper practice of church fellowship is deeply rooted in its own synodical history and the shared history of confessional Lutheranism. At first, the Wisconsin Synod was unionistic rather than strictly confessional, and practiced church fellowship only loosely. The three founding pastors of the WELS had been educated at a union seminary in Germany that minimized the differences between Lutheran and Calvinistic Reformed teaching. However, under the influence of the first president of the Missouri Synod, CFW Walther, and other confessionally-minded leaders, WELS quickly broke with its sponsoring German mission societies,

3 Full disclosure: The author is a lifelong WELS member, a graduate of the WELS worker-training college and a former rostered called worker in various WELS schools. However, he also received his Master's degree, including exegesis and Biblical theology classes, from a non-Lutheran university, and is currently employed by an independent Lutheran (non-WELS) Bible translation agency. He worked on an ecumenical Bible translation project in Zambia for five years, cooperating with members of over a dozen different church bodies. He has neither blind loyalty towards nor a grudge against his denomination, but embarks on this study in a spirit of love and concern, in order to better understand, articulate, and apply this important biblical teaching in WELS circles.

rejected its former unionistic leanings, and pledged itself to confessional Lutheranism. This meant, first and foremost, a strong stand to reject pulpit, altar, and other forms of church fellowship with non-confessional church bodies. Kiessling (1990) and JA Braun (2000) relate the history of the WELS in great detail, while Schroeder (2011, 24–25) and ME Braun (2003, 13–64) provide additional background on early unionistic tendencies and the subsequent process of WELS becoming a truly confessional Lutheran church body.

Noland (2007) traces the continuing Lutheran concern for agreement on sound doctrine from the early church fathers to the time of the Reformation. He demonstrates that throughout this time, Christians (particularly Lutherans) were not afraid to separate from groups whom they considered to be teaching and confessing false doctrine. Bode (2014) highlights the historical Lutheran concern, beginning in the post-Reformation era, regarding efforts to minimize historical and doctrinal differences between denominations and form politically-united but doctrinally-heterogenous churches—a practice known as “unionism.” Bode identifies unionizing movements in Europe, particularly the Prussian Union of 1817, as key factors in the formation of Lutheran denominational identity. Schuetze (2000) tells the story of the “Old Lutherans” who emigrated to the United States in order to flee the doctrinally-damaging effects of such unionizing movements on the continent. These immigrants understandably resisted similar efforts to unite Lutheran and Reformed groups in America and sought unity solely on the basis of shared doctrine and practice. In 1872, these like-minded Old Lutherans assembled at a convention to formally constitute the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. In short, synodical conference policy was that Lutherans should work and worship together only with fellow

Lutherans who taught and practiced the same things in the same way. To do anything else—to fraternize or affiliate with differently-teaching (heterodox) Christians, even if they bore the name “Lutheran”—was to violate scriptural prohibitions against false teachers and endanger the pure doctrine of Scripture as confessed by the Lutheran church (Tietjen 1966, Schuetze 2000, Teigen 2003). This joining together with like-teaching groups and strict avoidance of those who teach otherwise is at the heart of the confessional Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship.

4. Contemporary Application

In general, the WELS position on church fellowship can be classified as conservative, exclusive, and restrictive. As defined by the WELS Theses on Church Fellowship (1970), “Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.” In practice, this means that WELS Christians will not join with other Christians for any “joint expression” of faith, which is very broadly defined as virtually any faith-based activity; see Brug (1996, 45–50), unless there is complete uniformity of public confession in every matter of doctrine, principally manifested by denominational membership. (Further details of the WELS position on church fellowship, known as the “unit concept” application, are found in section 8.1.) This restrictive stance sometimes causes questions and concerns for WELS members trying to live out their faith in an honest and authentic way in a pluralistic society where contact with other Christians is almost inevitable (see the many questions on the topic on the WELS Q&A website and in Brug (2013)).

5. Ecclesial Milieu

Today's North American religious context is typified by the fluidity and imprecision of what Penwell (2014) and others call a "post-denominational" mindset (Trueblood 1967, Toulouse 1994, Miller 1998, et al.). As is thoroughly discussed in chapter three of the thesis, the post-denominational situation in North America is characterized by a (sharp) decline in the membership, income, and cultural influence of the mainline denominations, as well as a decrease in denominational loyalty and affinity among members. Christians today are more likely to switch denominations than their parents were and are less likely to hold theological beliefs identical to that of their denomination of membership. In distinction to the mid-twentieth century heyday of denominationalism in which the WELS doctrine of church fellowship was developed, the contemporary post-denominational age has seen the lines within and between denominations becoming blurred, and the identification of a person's theological or doctrinal beliefs on the basis of their denominational affiliation becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible. (Further details of the contemporary post-denominational ecclesial milieu, and the effect that it has on the practice of church fellowship in a WELS context, are discussed in section 8.2.)

6. Problem Statement

In this thesis, I consider ways to re-articulate and re-apply the doctrine of church fellowship within the WELS context in biblically sound ways for a post-denominational age. The changed and changing ecclesial context makes contemporary articulation and application of the doctrine of church fellowship problematic. Assumptions that may have been true in the middle of the last century regarding shared beliefs, church membership,

denominational loyalty, awareness of denominational history and doctrinal positions, and exactly what (if anything) is confessed when two people work, worship, or pray together are simply no longer valid assumptions to make in North American churches today.

This thesis contends that, however valid and appropriate previous WELS articulations of the doctrine of church fellowship were for other generations in the context of inter-synodical controversy, the present post-denominational context demands a contemporary re-articulation that applies to today's ecclesial milieu in a meaningful way. This is the heart of biblical practical theology. Re-visiting doctrinal resolutions of the past to ensure that they are still relevant and appropriate in today's setting, to the children and grandchildren of the original theologians, is vital for passing on the Christian faith to those generations. Scriptural truths do not change, but if the context has changed, then the ways those truths are articulated and applied to the context can (and often should) change as well. It does no good to continue fighting the battles of a previous era; each generation must confront the issues at hand and contend for the faith anew.

7. Research Design

The primary research question which controls this thesis (see Smith 2008, 127) is formulated as follows:

- How might a fresh re-articulation of the confessional Lutheran doctrine of church fellowship be applied in today's post-denominational ecclesial milieu?

From this primary research question flow five related, subsidiary research questions. Each subsidiary question controls a step in the research methodology, explained below:

- What have (WELS) Lutheran theologians taught about the doctrine of church fellowship? (Theological tradition)
- What are the key characteristics of today's post-denominational ecclesial milieu that impact the doctrine and practice of church fellowship? (Situation analysis)
- What does the Bible teach about relationships between believers who differ on matters of doctrine (which Lutherans call "church fellowship")? (Scriptural examination)
- How might the research findings suggest a re-articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship by confessional Lutherans today? (Critical correlation)
- How might a fresh re-articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship be applied to some critical issues facing the confessional Lutherans today? (New construction)

The overarching design of this thesis follows the contours of the Zerfass Method for Practical Theology (van Wyk 1995, 97–98). The Zerfass method begins by considering the theological tradition under discussion (step 1) and a situation analysis which may indicate a less-than-ideal praxis (step 2). It then proceeds to offer a critical correlation of the two (step 4), with the goal of generating a new construction (step 5) that offers improved praxis. For this thesis, I introduced a modification to the standard Zerfass model by including a scriptural examination of the biblical basis for the doctrine of church fellowship, including an exegesis of standard proof texts and other relevant passages, as an intermediary step three. This grounds the investigation more thoroughly in Scripture according to Protestant evangelical standards for theological inquiry (Smith 2008, 183–201, de Wet 2006, 57–58).

8. Chapter Outline and Summary

8.1 Chapter two: *Theological tradition*

The thesis proper begins with an overview of the theological tradition (Zerfass step 1), which examines the current WELS praxis of church fellowship and its historical and biblical roots. I use Brug (1996), a popular book on this doctrine, as a frame to organize the chapter and review a wide selection of WELS literature as it pertains to church fellowship.

Of particular interest is the distinctively-WELS articulation of the *unit concept* of church fellowship. The term *unit concept* first appeared in 1959 during discussions which led to a break in fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and has been refined and propagated as the WELS position ever since. Brug’s working definition lends itself well to articulating the unit concept: “Church fellowship is every expression of faith in which Christians join together because they are united by their acceptance and confession of all of the teachings of Scripture” (1996, 20). The unit concept is twofold: In practicing church fellowship, (a) *every* joint expression of faith requires complete agreement, acceptance, and confession of (b) *all* of the teachings of Scripture exactly as articulated by the WELS.

The WELS position regarding (a) is that all of the various ways in which Christians express church fellowship are equally joint expressions of shared faith. The activity of church fellowship is an indivisible bloc—one is either jointly expressing the faith, or one is not. In the WELS view, altar, pulpit, worship, prayer, service, and other types of fellowship are not expressing essentially different kinds or levels or degrees of shared faith, but *any* joint expression of faith *is* church fellowship (WELS *Theses* 1970, 21–29). Regarding (b), all doctrines of Scripture are given by God. They are

therefore equally authoritative, though not necessarily equally crucial for our salvation. Believers are not free to pick and choose from an arbitrary number of so-called “important” or “fundamental” doctrines and predicate church fellowship on agreement with only this limited list, but must instead base *any* expression of church fellowship on confessed agreement on *every* doctrine of Scripture (WELS *Theses* 1970, 31–32). The unit concept is strongly affirmed by virtually every WELS writer on the topic since the 1950s.

This chapter concludes by identifying two assumptions that underlie the WELS position on the doctrine of church fellowship. These assumptions directly influence the application of church fellowship principles in a wide range of settings. The two assumptions are: (1) practicing any type of church fellowship with people who believe differently about any point of doctrine gives the appearance or impression that one agrees with, supports, or tolerates their error,⁴ and (2) membership in a church body equals complete agreement with all that that church body teaches.⁵ These assumptions come under scrutiny in subsequent chapters.

8.2 Chapter three: Situation analysis

Step two in the Zerfass methodology is the situation analysis, a close look at the contemporary ecclesial setting. This chapter engages with sociology-of-religion literature to highlight key landmarks in the North American

4 For examples of the first assumption, see Gawrisch (1980, 245), Vogt (1991, 55, 70, 90), WELS Conference of Presidents (1996, 391–392), Braun (2003, 143), Otto (2007, 7–8, 14), E Schroeder (2009, 6), M Schroeder (2011, 39), Brug (1996, 101; 2013, 172), Paustian (2000, 1), and Deutschlander (2015, 461).

5 For examples of the second assumption, see Gawrisch (1980, 241–242), Vogt (1991, 54), Kunde (1994, 15), Schuetze (1996, 337), Brug (1996, 20), and Schaller (1996).

ecclesial landscape today. The following four attitudes are drawn from an extensive review of the literature of post-denominationalism;⁶ unfortunately, space in this brief summary does not permit a thorough and detailed accounting of the findings of each individual study. Let the following general comments suffice.

The first of landmark attitude of the post-denominational age is the declining significance of denominational membership or affiliation. In contrast to the state of affairs during the high tide of American denominationalism in the 1950s, the contemporary milieu is characterized by a large and growing pool of believers who do not place much importance on denominational affiliation, either their own or that of their local congregation. This group is also more likely to switch denominations than previous generations, usually for reasons other than doctrine. The rise of so-called “non-denominational” and “community” churches is closely tied to this phenomenon. These post-denominational Christians, as a group, are neither well-acquainted with nor particularly concerned about the exact doctrinal stance of their own denomination. Members of this group are also less likely to assume that they know what other Christians believe simply on the basis of their denominational membership. WELS practice assumes that a person’s doctrinal beliefs align with those of their denomination of membership, but this post-denominational attitude of the declining significance of denominational affiliation significantly undercuts the validity of this assumption.

6 Studies referenced in this chapter include Trueblood (1967), Toulouse (1994), Handspicker (1993), Miller (1998), and Penwell (2014), along with Lindbeck (1984), Newbigen (1989), Carroll and Roof (1993), Hadaway and Marler (1996), Ammerman (2001), Richey (2001), Pearcey (2004), Peay (2005), McLaren (2006), Moorehead (2006), Murphy and Asprey (2008), McNamara (2010), Leeman (2012), Barna (2014), Rice (2014), Burge and Djupe (2015), and Wax (2020).

The second feature generally characteristic of the post-denominational milieu is latitudinarian attitudes towards doctrine and truth. Contemporary Christians, influenced by secular post-modern skepticism towards universal truth claims, tend to be more flexible and open regarding doctrinal and theological belief statements. Many of today's believers, in contrast to those of a generation ago, can be classified as doctrinal minimalists, with a higher tolerance for doubt, debate, and diversity within the Christian church. Personal experience and the experience of others is often given higher importance than received dogma or historical tradition when wrestling with a problem or issue in the church. The prevailing latitudinarian attitude creates a situation where it is easy for Christians, perhaps of widely different doctrinal beliefs, to join together in expressions of faith, in prayer, or to worship and work together constructively in congregations or church bodies without the perception of scriptural contradiction or compromise. This same attitude makes it highly unlikely that a typical WELS fear—that joint participation in an expression of faith or church fellowship creates the expectation or assumption of identical doctrinal beliefs—will be borne out in actual practice.

The third attitude of the contemporary ecclesial era is the high value placed on authentic community. Contemporary Christians tend to prioritize individuals and relationships over doctrinal and confessional uniformity and will tend to cast a wider net than previous generations in their desire to build authentic community. Within such communities, diversity of background and perspective (within norms that still qualify as “orthodox” Christianity) are viewed as valuable fresh voices in the conversation, rather than as potentially-misleading sources of false doctrine or dangerous heterodoxy. This attitude will undoubtedly find itself at odds with the WELS perspective, which values complete doctrinal conformity as the *sine qua non* for Christian community and the practice of church fellowship.

The fourth landmark attitude characteristic of contemporary post-denominational Christians is a rejection of exclusivist claims and the ‘different is wrong and wrong is sinful’ trope of earlier dogmatic articulations. The contemporary generation seems predisposed to a strong skepticism towards any person or group (including their own denomination) which claims to be doctrinally pure and uncontrovertibly correct on every point, and which in turn labels disagreement and differences of belief as sinful error. The exclusivist and perfectionistic claims of many denominations and theologies tend to be perceived as unlikely, unprovable, and—worst of all—arrogant. Contemporary Christians are likely to hold truth claims more lightly and remain open (at least in theory) to correction and refinement of their position based on future evidence, experience, or interaction with others. This attitude views denominational rivalries as a source of embarrassment or discomfort, rather than as a unifying reason for pride in having taken and held to a principled stand. The WELS insistence on resolution of longstanding doctrinal differences⁷ before church fellowship relations can begin will certainly run afoul of this contemporary anti-exclusionist predisposition.

This thesis re-examines these assumptions in light of what is (or more likely, is not) assumed about the harmony of a person’s confession and beliefs with their denominational membership and inter-personal interactions in today’s post-denominational world. The findings suggest that wise and appropriate participation in the common life of the church is a better means of expressing concern and effecting change than the tacit condemnation of silence and separatism.

⁷ For an example of this insistence that those who disagree with the WELS position must modify their stance before formal dialogue can begin, see Mueller (1996, 469–470)

8.3 Chapter four: Scriptural examination

In chapter four, the thesis turns to the scriptural examination and a study of the biblical passages upon which the doctrine of church fellowship rests. I examine two groups of passages in this chapter.

Passages of the first group are all concerned with gentle admonition aimed at restoration of an erring fellow Christian. Galatians 6:1, Matthew 18:15–17, Titus 3:9–11, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 are all studied as prototypical examples of the “admonish erring brothers” paradigm. Additionally, this section takes a careful look at the fellowship principle that can be derived from 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 and Paul’s application of that principle throughout the Corinthian correspondence. The basic pattern is clear: when a fellow believer is caught in a sin (moral or doctrinal) fellow Christians are to restore that person by gently showing them their sin and offering correction. Sometimes, the “error” is only apparent; rarely do we know the full story, and rarely are errors so clearly cut-and-dried as to be evident from cursory observation. In such cases, gentle admonition, interaction, and conversation (rather than immediate and confrontational accusation) are called for, so that all the facts come to light and Scripture can be appropriately brought to bear on all sides of the situation. In all cases, patience and humility are the order of the day, lest the would-be admonisher wind up falling pridefully into uninformed and unnecessary divisiveness based on incomplete information.

The second group of passages considered in this chapter contain warnings to take careful note of pseudo-Christian heretical teachers and avoid them completely. Romans 16:17–18 and 2 John 7–11 are studied as prototypical examples of the “mark and avoid” paradigm, along with Mark 13:5–6, Acts 20:29–31, 2 Corinthians 6:14–17, Galatians 1:6–8, 2 Timothy 2:24–3:5, and 2 Peter 2:1–3. As the primary *sedes doctrinae* for the doctrine

of church fellowship, Romans 16:17–18 receives close scrutiny.⁸ Again, the basic pattern is clear: Christians are to vigilantly watch out for those antichristian heretical teachers who corrupt the gospel message with doctrines that overthrow the foundation of saving faith in Jesus Christ, and completely avoid such false teachers and their wicked doctrines.

It is a major assertion of this thesis that these two groups of passages, dealing as they do with different groups of people, should be applied only to the situations and persons for which they were originally intended. Conflating these two groups of passages, as almost all WELS treatments of the doctrine of church fellowship do, results in a situation where the separation which is appropriate with antichristian heretical teachers ends up being over-applied to include complete avoidance of non-WELS fellow Christians. Thus, a well-intentioned and faithful fellow Christian of a different denominational background with a different doctrinal confession is treated as though he were an abominable heretic or apostate heresiarch with whom any kind of religious fraternization is a mortal danger to soul and salvation.⁹ This, I argue, is a significant flaw in the contemporary WELS application of church fellowship which itself requires a Scripture-based correction. Therefore, this chapter seeks to properly divide passages dealing with differently-believing fellow Christians on the one hand from those dealing with anti-Christian heretical teachers on the other, in order to clear the way for a re-articulation of WELS's relationship with Christians of other denominations in the rest of the thesis.

8 My analysis of Romans 16:17–18 largely follows that of Brux (1935), with expansion and the addition of corroborating analysis from modern scholarly research.

9 In a similar way, the term “false teacher” is often applied in an unhelpfully-broad way, and used to identify anyone who diverges from WELS teaching in any way from the pseudo-Christian apostate to close Lutheran kin separated only by the finest historico-theological shade of understanding.

8.4 Chapter five: *Critical correlation*

Step four of my modified Zerfass method is the critical correlation of the prior elements of the research. This chapter, the culmination of the thesis research, ties together the findings from previous chapters into a list of considerations for a contemporary re-articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship.

Following the lead of E. H. Wendland (1961, 7–8), a WELS pastor, missionary, and seminary professor who was himself an early critic of the unit concept, the chapter concludes with a tentative proposal intended to encapsulate the various concerns raised in this thesis and to initiate discussion of a contemporary re-articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship. This proposal is not intended to be a finely-crafted doctrinal statement, confession, or fully worked-out theological treatise. It should be taken as the first move towards re-articulation, and not as a proposed final product. It is intended to start a conversation, not end a discussion; to renew a careful study of the salient Scripture passages regarding church fellowship; and to overcome assumptions that such an examination would be pointless.

My own working proposal for re-articulation of the confessional Lutheran doctrine of church fellowship emphasizes: (1) the inward spiritual unity of all believers as members of the body of Christ, through faith effected by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace;¹⁰ (2) that historical and doctrinal divisions have dis-united the holy Christian church into

¹⁰ The “means of grace” in confessional Lutheran parlance are the gospel in word and sacraments (see Deutschlander 2015, 409–444). The gospel message, whether preached, read or heard in the words of Scripture, or delivered tangibly and publicly in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, is the means by which God provides and sustains our spiritual life.

many different denominations; (3) that we express God-pleasing universal Christian fellowship individually through joint acts of love and service with all members of the one holy Christian and apostolic church; (4) that we express denominational church fellowship corporately through joint use of the means of grace only with those members of the visible church who share our full confession of the word of God in doctrine and practice; and (5) that we pray that the time soon comes when the whole Church is fully united by the Holy Spirit in a common confession of all of God's word, while simultaneously working towards an even fuller expression of the true unity of the church in word and deed by meaningfully confessing the truth of the gospel to all. (The complete text of the proposed re-articulation is found in Appendix A.)

8.5 Chapter six: New construction

The final step in the Zerfass method is the proposal of a new construction. This chapter begins to apply the principles of church fellowship, as re-articulated in the previous section, to contemporary Lutheran life in the post-denominational age. I propose two questions designed to clarify the issues involved with participation (or non-participation) in a given interaction with fellow Christians of different denominations. The two questions are:

- Does abstaining from this activity cause offense by showing that I fail to recognize the other person as a fellow member of the body of Christ, when he may in fact be the very type of “weaker brother” that Scripture calls me to watch out and care for (Rom 14, 1 Cor 8)?
- Does participating in this activity compromise my clear Lutheran confession by implying approval or acceptance of a varying doctrinal

position, when Scripture tells me to hold to and proclaim the “whole counsel of God” (Ac 20:27; cf. John 8:31, Mt 20:28)?

These questions aid in the search for the “narrow middle road,” as Christians seek to avoid both offense against and denial of the *una sancta* on the one hand, and a misleading and confusing compromise of biblical confession on the other. The questions provide a basis for discussing fellowship situations in ways that are, if not substantially different, at least more informed and contextually-sensitive than those of the previous generation. Several specific difficult questions are considered as test cases for the application of a re-articulated doctrine of church fellowship.

9. Goal of the Research

An articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship, which is appropriate to the contemporary ecclesial milieu, will not only benefit WELS Lutherans, but also the church at large. Perhaps some readers have not seriously considered what the Scriptures have to teach about “church fellowship,” or how it applies to their formal and informal relationships with other Christians, particularly those with different doctrinal beliefs. A properly biblical theology of inter-church and inter-Christian relationships will help all believers navigate the “narrow middle road” between sectarian separatism and open ecumenism, conscious of both our membership in the universal body of Christ and our role as stewards of our respective denominational and theological traditions. Such an understanding of church fellowship will allow Christians to navigate potentially problematic inter-Christian relationships in order to engage wisely and appropriately in the common life of Christ’s universal church in the challenging and exciting post-denominational age.

10. Conclusion

Nafzger (2009, 362), writing about ways to “charitably and confessionally” relate to Christians of other denominations, encourages Lutherans to reexamine our praxis from time to time “to see if such agreed-upon ways of proceeding with respect to applying the scriptural principles of fellowship are still the best and most effective ways of relating to other Christians and Christian churches in the present context.” Particularly in light of his encouragement to consider the “present context,” this thesis has examined the WELS articulation and application of the doctrine of church fellowship in the contemporary post-denominational milieu.

This thesis has argued that the WELS articulation of the doctrine of church fellowship as a “unit concept” is based on an overly-broad understanding of Romans 16:17–18 (and several related passages), and that current WELS application of the doctrine is based on two faulty assumptions about church membership which are no longer likely to be the case among rank-and-file Christians in today’s post-denominational ecclesial climate. Based on these and other factors mentioned, a re-evaluation of the articulation and application of the doctrine is indicated.

I answer this need by offering this thesis, along with my working proposal, as a move towards beginning the discussion to re-articulate and apply the doctrine of church fellowship in a way which recognizes contemporary assumptions and attitudes and still remains faithful to the revelation of Scripture. A fresh articulation of this important doctrine allows more opportunities for Christians to confess the truth of Scripture to (and with) members of other churches and reinforces the biblical reality of the holy Christian church, all while retaining a salutary emphasis on doctrinal precision and faithfulness to God’s word.

Appendix A: Working Proposal for the Re-articulation of the Lutheran Doctrine of Church Fellowship

1. Church fellowship is the outward expression of the inward spiritual unity of the church, the body of Christ, which has been effected by the Holy Spirit through the word of God.
2. Although the church is spiritually united by faith in Jesus Christ, the church's head, because of historical developments and doctrinal differences the members of the church are dispersed among many different denominations.
 - a. Insofar as Christians share common faith in Christ as Savior, they all enjoy universal Christian fellowship with all other believers.
 - b. Insofar as Christians belong to various churches and church bodies, and vary in their confession and understanding of the truths of God's word, they practice denominational church fellowship only with believers who share their doctrinal confession and convictions, seeking to authentically express their Christian faith without compromise.
3. Confessional Lutherans express our universal Christian fellowship individually through joint acts of love and service with all members of the one holy Christian and apostolic church—all who confess saving faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. The practice of such expressions of universal Christian fellowship with individual fellow believers, including shared prayer, does not imply full agreement in every matter of doctrine, interpretation, and application of God's word—only shared saving faith in Christ Jesus.

- b. We seek wise and loving interaction with fellow Christians of different denominations, recognizing that their different historical, cultural, and denominational background may help them to see a truth or aspect of God's word that we have missed or misunderstood, and we humbly look to them for encouragement and opportunities to grow.
 - c. We seek wise and loving interaction with fellow Christians of different denominations also recognizing that their background may prevent them from fully understanding a truth of God's word that the Holy Spirit has helped us to see particularly clearly, and we rejoice in the chance to humbly share our unique God-given perspective.
4. Confessional Lutherans express denominational church fellowship corporately through joint use of the means of grace with those members of the visible church who share our full confession of the word of God in doctrine and practice.
- a. The withholding of denominational church fellowship at the corporate level does not imply that individual members of churches not "in fellowship" with us are not Christian or that they subscribe to a deficient version of the Christian faith.
 - b. The practice of denominational church fellowship is our way of preserving and enriching our theological and historical heritage, because we have by God's grace come to highly value it as the most adequate way of accounting for all that we find in the word of God and experience in the world around us.
 - c. We seek to avoid an overly-broad use of terms such as "false doctrine" and "false teacher," which are both presumptive and potentially misleading. We will carefully distinguish between Christians of other denominations and antichristian heretical teachers who

are clearly not Christian, recognizing that Scripture offers clearly different instructions to govern our dealings with each.

- d. As far as possible without compromising the means of grace, we seek wise and appropriate participation in the common life of the church, rather than separatism, as a way to share our treasured doctrinal inheritance with as many as possible.
5. We pray that the time soon comes when the whole church is fully united in a common confession of all of God's word. In the meantime, we work towards an even fuller expression of the true unity of the church in word and deed by seeking opportunities to confess the truth of the gospel to people of all nations (Matt 28:19–20).

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The Life and Teaching of Ezekiel: A Prophetic Model for Pastoral Theology in the Thai Context

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Abstract

This article is a recommendation for a model for Thai pastoral care that is derived from the study of the watchman model found in Ezekiel 3:16–21. The article is based on the author’s dissertation under the supervision of Dr Bill Domeris. There are three main parts in this article: exploring the current insufficient model for Thai pastoral care, the study of the biblical foundation in the watchman metaphor of Ezekiel, and the pastoral care model from the biblical foundation. Under the exploration of the current insufficient model for pastoral care in Thailand, the section conducts a review of scholarship and provides the interview results from selected Thai members. The next section focuses on Ezekiel’s appointment as a watchman of Israel (Ezek 3:16–21) where the role, identity, and function of the watchman are identified. The last section is an integration of the watchman motif, clinical pastoral education, and the Thai value clusters. As the result, the Thai pastoral care model is recommended in three phases: discovering the role of the carer, exploring the identity of the caregiver, and offering the

care. The model's goal is for an increase of the level of commitment among Thai church members.

Keywords

Thai Christianity, Thai pastoral care model, watchman metaphor, Ezekiel

1. Introduction

A new model of Thai pastoral care is greatly needed. Thai pastors are expected to become superheroes in their ministries. The minister juggles the responsibilities of administrating the church, preaching, performing church ordinances, evangelizing the gospel, converting people, visiting members, as well as giving counselling. This overwhelming number of tasks causes the pastor to provide insufficient care for his/her own sheep (Persons 1995, 71–72). In a survey done by the National Statistical Office of Thailand (NSO) (2015, 30), the commitment of Thai Christians in the past three years has decreased by two percent. The statistical numbers reflect the insufficient pastoral care offered to the members and suggests a need for a new comprehensive role and function for ministers in Thailand.

This article is a recommendation for a model for Thai pastoral care that is derived from the study of the life and teaching of Ezekiel. The study begins with the exploration of the need for a more comprehensive Thai pastoral care model through literature surveys and interviews. This is followed by the biblical foundation of this study. This section focuses on the life and teaching of Ezekiel, and the exegesis of Ezekiel's appointment as a watchman of Israel. The study divides his life and teaching into three dimensions: identity, role, and function. The last section will recommend a new model for Thai pastoral care, based on the life and teaching of Ezekiel,

within clinical pastoral education and Thai culture. The model will involve understanding the pastoral role, self-discovery, and performing the pastoral task.

2. Hearing the Insufficient pastoral care model in Thailand

To determine the degree of insufficiency of the present pastoral care model in Thailand, it is necessary to hear voices from the field. These will include Thai and foreign experts' views on the present theoretical framework in the Thai context and the voice of Thai churches.

2.1 The voice among literary scholars

Since the 1980s, churches in Thailand have put their efforts into establishing the Christian population in Thailand. Thai churches had increased their focus toward targeted evangelism such as church planting and other methods of reaching people (Bowdoin 2013). Additionally, scholars spent their time studying the meaning of different doctrinal teachings of Buddhism and presenting the Christian gospel in the best understanding of the Buddhist mind (Boonyakiat 2009). In terms of discovering more effective communication of the gospel, many Thai missiologists had found Komin's empirical research (1990) helpful toward their understating of Thai values and clusters in order to connect and reach the heart of Thai people (Mejudhon 1997). Some experts who studied the deeper understanding of Thai cultural ritual and social issues, contextualized it for communicating the gospel (Jaisaodee 2013). At the same time, Thai churches tried to provide a comprehensive method of learning as a way of training the ministers and lay leaders with the aim of effectiveness in ministry (Sawngwichai 1998). Their investment paid off when the Christian population in Thailand

reached 1.1 percent of the population (NSO 2015, 4). Despite the success of church growth, there are minimal discussions regarding the role and function of Thai ministers with regard to pastoral care; especially in reflection upon the faithfulness and commitment of Thai Christians.

2.2 The voice among the Thai churches

In addition to the literature review, qualitative interviews were conducted as part of exploring the understanding of the real situation with regard to the role and function of the pastor in Thailand. There were three groups of participants: Thai Christian scholars, Thai Christian ministers, and Thai Christian church members. All thirty participants were randomly selected from the four Protestant Christian organizations officially certified by the Department of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Culture of Thailand: The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), The Evangelical Fellowship in Thailand (EFT), The Thailand Baptist Church Association (TBCA), and the Seventh-day Adventist Church Foundation (SDA). The interview results are integrated into the Thai model of pastoral care.

The interview results suggested nine inputs relating to the need for a comprehensive model of pastoral care in the Thai context: (1) the need for a clearer understanding of the role and function of Thai ministers, (2) the need for a biblical model that provides a comprehensive view of pastoral care in the Thai context, in addition to the shepherd model, (3) the need for a contextual method of care training, (4) the need for an understanding of personal identity among ministers, (5) the need to develop a pastoral care model from the biblical prophet Ezekiel, (6) the need for people skills training, (7) the need for ministers to fulfil the primary task of teaching the Bible, (8) the need for a biblical example that directs pastors to reflect on their understanding of his/her role and function in order to provide effective

pastoral care, and (9) the need for a properly structured program of field training in necessary skills, including building personal relationships with church members.

3. Understanding the Watchman Metaphor in Ezekiel

The watchman metaphor in Ezekiel provides a comprehensive model for Thai pastoral care. The study employs the exegetical method, mainly in Ezekiel 3:16–21, where we discover the role, identity, and function of the watchman.

3.1 The role of the watchman

The best way of understanding the watchman is first to understand his role in the ministry. Who is a watchman and what does he do? Ezekiel's ministry began by receiving a clear commission to be a watchman, mainly recorded in 3:17 (repeated in chapter 33) "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me" (ESV). The general understanding of "watchman" is derived from the Hebrew word, *הַפֶּזֵז* which conveys the meaning of "watch out over or pay attention to" (Stein 2003, 431). The figure of a watchman is borrowed from real positions in everyday life. The first watchman picture was taken from a city employee. The city watchman is appointed to look out from some high vantage point to scour the landscape. His responsibility is to give warning to his fellow citizens of an imminent attack or danger. The second watchman figure was from a sentry in the military charged with the defense of the city. Block (1997, 144) explains the sentries on duty as military personnel who were stationed on the lookout and charged with paying careful attention to the enemy movement. With both contexts, the responsibilities were the same: (1) observe the

surrounding area, and (2) give warning of important incidents. There were two descriptions of the biblical watchman's responsibilities which provide the framework for his job, namely, to hear (שמע) the word from God and to warn (זהר) ; people). The watchman was responsible for receiving and delivering God's message in order to warn his audience of the coming divine punishment (Tiemeyer 2005, 381; Wright 2001, 66).

3.2 The identity of the watchman

Reflecting upon the watchman role, Ezekiel received his commission at the age of 30 near the Chebar canal, five years after resettlement in Babylon, as recorded in 1:3, "The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of Chaldeans by the Chebar canal and the hand of the Lord was upon him there" (ESV). The prophet Ezekiel was a son of Buzi. He was married, and his wife died not long after he was called into a watchman ministry (Ezek 24:15–27). There was no record of him having any children. Blenskinsopp (2012, 16) further explains Ezekiel's life as a part of the Zadokite priest clan, which he was trained in throughout childhood and youth and into his young adult years. Betts (2002, 25–31) makes a distinct note that the education of the priest would include the general responsibilities of overseeing the sanctuary, governing through assisting the leader and judicial duty, and becoming a spokesperson for Yahweh. At the same time, the young priest was trained to carry the teaching responsibility: teaching of the Torah through reading, explaining, and applying the law, and making judgments based upon the law and modelling the law through living (Betts 2002, 32–63).

Growing up in such an elite level of the society, Ezekiel was well known and respected by the community. During the second exile to Babylon, the young priest was part of the deportation with King Jehoiachin

(Ezek 1:1–2). Resettling in the Chebar canal community where he lived, Ezekiel was no longer serving as a priest trainee due to the lack of a temple. However, he was still recognized as a man of God. There were at least three incidents where the elders visited the prophet in his home for consultation (Ezek 8, 14, 20). As a person, Ezekiel was a part of the community, trained as a priest and was married. During a time of hardship, the priest trainee left Jerusalem with the people during the second deportation and lived among the exiled people.

3.3 The function of the watchman

In comprehending the function of a watchman in terms of hearing (שמע) the word from God and warning (זהר) people, Ezekiel was intended to fulfill two responsibilities. The first responsibility was to hear the message from God's mouth (ושמעתי מפי דבר). The watchman-prophet would listen to the message, having identified the source, and make sense of the message prior to delivery, being aware of what is happening and especially what is coming in future (Stuart 1989, 47). The biblical text expressed that the source of Ezekiel's message was God's mouth (Ezek 3:17b). There was no involvement of the prophet in terms of producing the message, interpretation of the message, or influencing the possible outcome. Stuart (1989, 47) further elaborates upon the lack of Ezekiel's creative involvement in terms of the authenticity toward the listener as a watchman passes on unchanged what he hears and learns. So that his own hearer can know that his message comes directly from God.

The second responsibility of the watchman was to warn while transmitting the message to them. The detailed explanation of the warning is found in Ezekiel 3:18–21. The passage depicts two groups of people to whom the watchman needed to provide the message, the wicked and the

righteous. In comparison to both terms, Block (1997, 144) notes that the wicked (עשׂר) is a term that is widely used in the OT to denote wicked, criminal and villainous. He further explains that the righteous (צדק) represents judicial court terminology, relating specifically to conformity to established norms, which for Israel were defined in the stipulations of Yahweh's covenant (Block 1997, 145). In terms of fulfilment of the responsibility, the prophet had a great decision to make. Once the watchman hears the message from God and chooses "not to warn," the outcome is similar for both recipients. The message recipients, wicked or righteous, died without hearing the message of warning. The neglect of the watchman's duty, by ignoring his responsibility to deliver the message placed blame on the watchman for the death of the people, making him guilty of murder (Block 1997, 146). Greenberg (1983, 88) describes the outcome as the prophet forfeiting his life. Yet, if the watchman chooses to deliver the message to the audiences, wicked and righteous, then the watchman has fulfilled his responsibility. Zimmerli (1979, 146) adds that the watchman will not be accountable for the iniquities of the recipients and the process is completed.

4. Thai Pastoral Care Model According to the Watchman Metaphor

In this study, a pastoral model has been derived from the foundational work of life and teaching of Ezekiel. The exegetical work in Ezekiel highlights three components that allow for reflection on the role, identity, and function of a minister in Thailand. The model is a process that contains three phases: phase one—discovering the role of the caregiver, phase two—exploring the identity of the caregiver, and phase three—delivering the care. Each phase of the process will interact with the recommendation of Thai Christian scholars with an integration of the understanding of Thai value clusters.

4.1 Discovering the role of the caregiver

Phase one, discovering the role of the caregiver, aims to accomplish the role regarding the presence of a Thai pastor. Role presence means to be able to understand the role for which one is commissioned, what one is called to do. The foundation of this phase is derived from the definition of the role of a watchman. As Ezekiel was commissioned as a watchman to warn the people about God, the pastor is commissioned to offer care to people on behalf of God. Commissioning is seen as an appointment from God, instituted and fully authorized by him for a person to be in a pastoral ministry. The commission of care covers a range of responsibility, from institutional duties (preaching, offering the Eucharist, and so on) to professional specialization (teaching the Bible, pastoral care). It is also understood in a wider sense that the calling is part of commissioning. At the same time, the commission provides a specific sense of the responsibility of a minister.

Some of the interviewees recommended that pastoral care skills be taught to the Thai ministers. Pastoral care is a special set of skills focusing on listening, being present, and journeying with the members. These skills would encourage the clergy better to understand, sympathize, empathize, and identify the needs of their church's members. The Thai ministers would be able to receive such training through the clinical pastoral education. There is currently a great need in Thailand for such training. In addition, the article suggested an adapted program from clinical pastoral education called clinical pastoral care which is the process of using feedback to improve the congruence and authenticity of one's spiritual caregiving relationship, which is to be added into Thai theological seminaries' curriculum. At the same time, it could be offered as part of the ministerial training. However, the contextual adjustment may be applied to people in the community

or students at an education institution. The training would equip pastors to focus on the role of the biblical watchman to provide pastoral care for church members. With such a focus, the percentage of faithfulness of Thai Christians would increase as well.

4.2 Exploring the identity of the caregiver

Phase two, exploring the identity of the caregiver, aims to achieve self-presence for the Thai minister. Self-presence is understood as the process of awareness; the minister is able to become aware of his/her life in the past which shapes their present situation. Learning about self refers to the process of reflection about one's personal life which involves learning about one's historical context; the value cluster of the society one lives in, and one's immediate context; the family values and the education one received, and the operational context; and the core of a person that guides their thoughts process toward action.

The minister's historical context is taught through a questionnaire on the value cluster in society. The questions are to help the minister to get acquainted with who he/she is through personal reflection and interaction with academic research. The minister's immediate context is a questionnaire on the value cluster in the family and training. The questions will help the Thai minister to experience the new perspectives through understanding his/her home, family value, and the driving force of his/her life. The minister's operational context is a questionnaire on the value cluster in decision making. The operational context refers to the core of one's being in terms of thought process as well as action. It is also known as the spiritual dimension. This article has chosen the least complicated source, from Dennis Kenny's *Promise to the Soul* (2002). Kenny (2002, 52) describes the core of human beings as divided into three dynamics. First, we

have the “wanting dynamic” which is the person who carries a life value of success and yearns for recognition. Next, the “giving dynamic” is identified in a person who would feel satisfied when their service is offered to others. And last, the “searching dynamic” is a person who avoids commitment.

4.3 Offering care

The last phase in the process is the offering of care. The offering of care refers to the completion of a watchman’s task in delivering the message to people. With the importance of the task, the methodology aims to accomplish the task under the presence of a Thai pastor, namely, the ability to fulfill the pastoral function by offering verbal and non-verbal care. As part of delivering the message, the minister is required to establish the connection and approach the members at their level of energy and be able to hear and express empathy for the situation they are in. In Thai cultural values, “face” is the first obstacle to connection. The minister should avoid an approach that might bring negative connection with the client including straightforward, negative performance feedback, strong criticism or face-to-face confrontation (Mejudhon 1997, 337). A good establishing of the connection would involve an appropriate tone of voice and choice of words. In addition, the connection could be established as well through action. The objective of the connection may be plainly understood as rewiring the thought from clergy to a family member to create confidence and establish the group in which both are walking. The debt of relationship determines the degree of success, because deep relationship bonding brings about acceptance of both the messenger and the message (Mejudhon 1997, 344).

Once connection is established, the goal of the minister to allow the member to experience God’s grace through the process of providing

structured care planning with information discovered in the journey. The structured care planning is organized into five recommended steps:

1. **The caregiver mindset—the non-fixed motive.** The non-fixed motive means offering an opportunity for the member to receive grace. The clergy cannot fix the recipient of care's situation; his/her job is to offer an opportunity for the member to receive grace.
2. **Learning the story.** It is the conversation where the pastor is listening and journeying through the life of the member in order to understand the life situation, convey empathy, and gather the necessary signs that indicate the need for care. The journey would begin with active listening skills and asking proper questions, utilizing open-ended questions, verification, affirmation, and confrontation.
3. **Identifying the needs.** As the pastor journeys with the members, the recipient of care will give specific information that disturbs his/her well-being; it could range from a common disappointment to complex mental illness or demon possession.
4. **Experiencing the care.** The caregiver discusses a possible path that will lead to an outcome for the recipient of care. The clergy needs to be aware of his/her role as assisting the client to recognize the problem and how he/she could deal with it. The pastor needs to explore the various resources that the member already has and how he/she could discover more resources for the situation which includes referral to the professional.
5. **Experiencing God's grace.** The focus is to affirm the recipient of care through ritual, such as prayer, reciting Bible texts, or any ritual in accordance with the context of the Christian denomination. Through affirming with the ritual, the member will recognize the presence of

God in the care he/she received and witnessed by the minister. The structured plan is blessed and serves as a mean of grace, and finds hope in God's grace.

The outcome may not reach the last step due to the open opportunity for the member to reflect upon the journey of care. The care progress may stop at any time based on the decision of the recipient of care. At least the person will have received an opportunity to reflect upon the situation. The work of the minister is done on such occasion; however, he/she would continue to visit at another time as part of the pastoral duty.

5. Conclusion

This article provided a model for Thai pastoral care from the watchman metaphor in Ezekiel. The investigation began with an exploration of the insufficient Thai pastoral care model via a review of literature and qualitative interviews. Next, the study provided the biblical foundation from the study of the watchman metaphor found in Ezekiel 3:16–21 with regard to the watchman's role, identity, and function. Within the biblical model, the last section suggested a model for Thai pastoral care. The model consisted of three phases: discovering the role of the carer, exploring the identity of the caregiver, and offering of the care. With hope, the model holds for its goal for the incremental increase of the level of faithfulness among Thai church members.

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Human Trafficking and the Church: Towards a Biblical and Practical Christian Response

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Abstract

How should Christians respond to the ever-growing international crime of human trafficking? This study seeks an answer by holding up the current situation to the light of the mission of Jesus as expressed in Luke 4:16–21, and formulating the outline of a practical, workable model of response. It explores the international and South African situation surrounding modern-day slavery and human trafficking from a Salvation Army perspective by consulting several expert studies, illustrating this reality by telling the stories of five women who were trafficked. Using the mission statement of Jesus as a basis for Christian love in action and building on the unique strengths of the church, this study suggests requirements and key areas for a response by which the church as a whole, as well as individual congregations and Christians may have a positive impact as part of a modern abolition movement.

Keywords

human trafficking, Luke 4:16–21, modern-day slavery, abolition

1. Introduction

Maria: She stands on a street corner, scantily dressed on a cold Johannesburg winter evening. Her eyes scan the passing traffic, and she is not keen to engage in conversation, although she seems grateful for the hot cup of coffee offered to her by a street worker. Maria is a commercial sex worker in the south of Johannesburg. She has a pimp and lives in a brothel. She was offered a job in Johannesburg via a niece, and travelled to Johannesburg alone, against the advice of her parents. Once in the city, she discovered that the nature of the ‘job’ was prostitution. She cannot leave because she does not have enough money to pay the fare home, and because she is addicted to drugs and needs the daily fix they provide.

Sophie: They are usually huddled together on the pavement that forms an island in the middle of the busy road. The older woman is always accompanied by two small children. On Sunday mornings they make their way into the church for worship. The children lead the blind woman to a vacant seat near the front. Just before the conclusion of the service they leave quietly and return to their assigned task for the day—begging on the street corner. Sophie is one of many beggars on the street corners of Johannesburg. These beggars are blind, many are elderly, and they are accompanied and led by children in their work. They are given accommodation and are taken to their ‘posts’ in the morning and collected again in the late afternoon. They are given food, but all their proceeds must be handed over to the man who runs the establishment. Sophie is from Zimbabwe and believes herself to be lucky to have been brought to South Africa, because she has been promised an operation that will restore her sight. She is not in possession of her passport or any of her documentation. It is not clear who the children are that accompany her.

Christina: She agrees to meet at a small coffee shop. She tells her story of terror. She was deceived by someone within the agency she worked for, transported a thousand kilometers, and forced to work as a prostitute until she was desperate enough to risk a dangerous escape. Does she have AIDS? Is she pregnant? She does not know. She refuses to report her story to the police because she has received serious threats from her traffickers.

Jennifer: She is brought to the shelter for victims of human trafficking¹ with a laptop computer, a mobile phone and very little else in terms of worldly possessions. A Zimbabwean citizen, she was lured to South Africa by a businessman who offered her a large salary to work for him as his assistant. She travelled to Johannesburg in possession of a valid passport and visa (both of which were taken from her upon her arrival), expecting to enter a very normal and pleasant working environment. The work she was required to do was indeed of a business nature as a private secretary, but she was locked in her apartment at night and did not receive any payment for her work until she escaped three months later.

Celeste: She stands fearfully, surrounded by a small circle of women in the city center of Johannesburg. They seem concerned and agitated as they discuss her situation in a language she does not understand. She is just seven years old and lost in a strange country, a small foreigner amongst strangers. She was taken from her remote village in Mozambique by a 'friend' of the family without her parents' permission and brought to Johannesburg. She somehow became separated from her abductor and was found and helped by a group of street hawkers. The reason for her abduction was never discovered.

1 All references to human trafficking in this article refer to the umbrella-term 'modern-day slavery and human trafficking'.

These are fragments of some of the stories that make up the human face of this study. These real people (their names and some details changed to protect their identity) illustrate some of the different forms of human trafficking. Their stories are heard first-hand by members of The Salvation Army's anti-human trafficking task team in South Africa. Some of their stories have happy endings, others do not.

The main question this study seeks to answer is how Christians should respond to human trafficking in the South African context. Sub-questions focus on what is known about human trafficking in South Africa, what the Bible says about challenging and responding to injustice, and how the church responded to slavery in history.

Using the Loyola Institute of Ministry research design, which typically moves from an empirical description of a given situation as it is, through a Biblical-theological description of how the situation should be, to a suggested practical response that could help to move the current reality closer towards the ideal situation, this study argues that the church can make a significant difference in the struggle against human trafficking. The 'what if' question (Sandelowski 1990, 164) becomes a pivotal part of the narrative section, and acts as a bridge between the present situation and the preferred situation by drawing attention to what could have been done to prevent the situation or resolve it more expediently and painlessly, moving the focus from the world as it is, to the world as it should be. To understand the preferred situation, or the world as it should be, a study of historical and biblical thinking reflects on themes of freedom and slavery, focusing on the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church. This study has been conducted through a Salvation Army lens, but hopefully, the resulting model will be equally useful for other denominations and congregations.

2. Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking—An Overview

The definition underpinning the study is provided by the Palermo Protocol (UN General Assembly 2000, 2), which defines human trafficking as,

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or in the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Essential criteria in deciding whether a case should be classified as human trafficking are legally classified under the elements of act, means, and purpose as laid out in this definition.

2.1 Scope of the issue

Reliable statistics are hard to come by. The fact that organizations and agencies tend to disagree on the scope of human trafficking in terms of statistics, adds further frustration. Today the Global Slavery Index,² a worldwide study on slavery published by the Walk Free foundation is a helpful tool and provides a clearer picture of the dimensions of human trafficking. According to the Index, South Africa ranks at 110/167 on a

2 <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/south-africa/>

worldwide scale of countries affected by human trafficking, and based on 2016 figures, an estimated 155,000 people are living in modern slavery in South Africa. On a worldwide scale, the Index estimates that 40.3 million people are living in modern slavery, of whom 71 percent are women and 29 percent men. Children make up a significant percentage of both these groups.

International and South African studies agree that human trafficking is a flourishing and often highly-organized criminal trade in human beings. These studies indicate the changing nature of the face of human trafficking, including the global movement of migrants and refugees that has become a worldwide crisis, leaving many people vulnerable to exploitation by both traffickers and smugglers (UNODC 2016, 1). The inclusion of targets towards an end to human trafficking in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (8, 5 and 16) is a significant development (UNODC 2016, 1). The conclusion of almost all international and South African studies that law-making and/or law-enforcement cannot solve the problem of human trafficking on its own should be of special interest to the church. The clear indication is that there is much to be done that can only be accomplished with the help of civil society on a grassroots level (HSRC 2010, 110; IOM 2008, 64; UNODC 2012, 94). The church, being situated in the very center of communities, has knowledge, power and resources that would be well spent in cooperation with other parties to prevent and reduce slavery and human trafficking.

2.2 Legislation in South Africa

South Africa started working on a law against human trafficking in 2008, under pressure from the international community in the form of a ranking system, also known as a tier system, devised by the US Department of State which placed South Africa on its Tier 2 watch list in that year. Further

pressure was caused by the imminence of the 2010 FIFA World Cup that was to be hosted in South Africa, and the links between international sporting events and human trafficking. The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill was signed into law in 2013 (Department of Justice Official Notice 2012). In the ensuing years, South Africa has fluctuated between 'Tier 2' and 'Tier 2 watch list' (US Department of State 2017, 362).

2.3 Vulnerabilities

Whilst anyone can be at risk of being trafficked, it is a crime that exploits vulnerabilities and feeds on world events like disasters, wars and conflict, migration, and economic crises. Some special vulnerabilities have been identified, showing the most vulnerable groups to include refugees and migrants, minority groups, women, children and people experiencing extreme poverty (The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission 2018). Further underlying issues are rooted in unemployment, gender inequality, and inadequate education (The Salvation Army, Southern Africa Moral and Social Issues Council 2010). Around the world unjust systems that perpetuate vulnerabilities and facilitate human trafficking still exist. These systems that are built on inequality and prejudice may be of a political, cultural, religious, or historical nature. Rigorous and honest research, followed by courageous and strategic action, is needed to challenge these systems.

2.4 The Salvation Army and social justice

The Salvation Army, having its historical roots in Wesleyan Methodism, has from its inception been actively engaged in issues of social justice around the world. Challenging the age of consent in Victorian England where young

girls of the poor classes were commonly exploited as sex slaves to wealthy merchants (Stead 1885), was the starting point of an active approach to sexual exploitation, including rescue shelters in Japan in the early 1900s (Garipey 2009, 44), a redemptive presence in the red-light district of Amsterdam (Duncan 1977, 48), and outreach in the brothels of Bangladesh (Brekke and Knut 2005), to mention just a few examples. Today, The Salvation Army's response to human trafficking is well developed and documented.

3. The Mission of Jesus and the Mission of the Church

Christians, in seeking to understand God's mind on any issue, will usually turn to the Bible as their first port of call. In doing this, the enquirer is inevitably left to wonder what, if anything, the Bible really says about slavery. On the surface the Bible appears to advocate for freedom and yet appears to accept slavery. References to slaves and slavery present a theological maze, perplexing in apparent dichotomy, leaving the reader confused and bewildered about its actual message.

It became clear that focusing on a specific NT passage would shed more light on the subject of slavery and how Christians should respond, and Luke 4:18–21 was selected. Known as the “Nazareth Sermon” (Kimball 1994, 179) or the “programmatically declaration” of Jesus (Abogunrin 2003, 225) this passage contains the first sermon of Jesus in the Gospel according to Luke, outlining his mission statement and the purpose of his coming with reference to Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1, 2. In studying these passages, the first question was about the mission of Jesus and the second question was about the mission of the church. This study reflected on whether the mission of the church is the same as the mission of Jesus, and, if so, the question raised was how God's people should respond to the crime and justice issue of human trafficking.

The context of the passage was studied, giving special attention to the significance of origin and order as well as culture and custom. In researching the text, the combination and word order of the quotations from Isaiah were noted, and a text analysis was conducted with special reference to freedom. Subsequently, the content of the passage was examined, reflecting on each separate section of the whole. Finally, an enquiry was made into Jesus's choice of the specific texts from Isaiah, and his introduction of himself as the real "I" of the passages. In doing so, the conclusion was reached that Jesus extends the mission plan of God in relation to the children of Israel in the OT, to the mission plan of God for all of humankind throughout all time.

This study concludes the mission of Jesus to be a holistic mission of word (proclamation, v. 18, 19) and deed (bringing release, freedom and salvation, v. 18) to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed in the realms of the spiritual, social, moral and physical. It also concludes that the mission of the church (the sent) is the mission of Jesus (the sender) who sent as he was sent by the Father, and that our mission too is one of word and deed to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed in every sense of the word (Mercer 1992, 457).

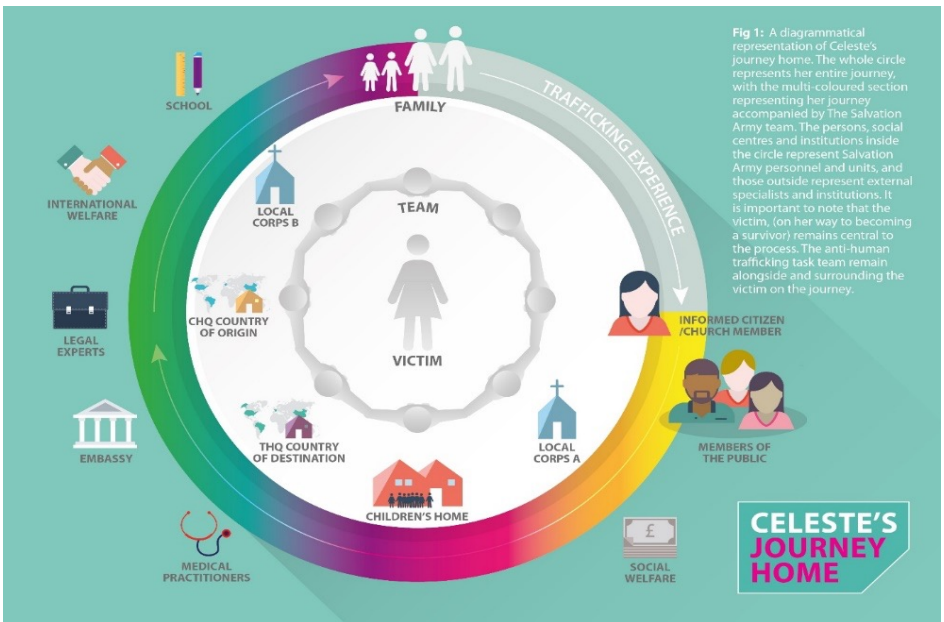
How then, should the church fulfil its mission in confronting human trafficking, a criminal act that robs human beings of their right to freedom and turns them into merchandise or property? This study proposes the following model of response.

4. Being Part of the Solution: A Practical Response to Human Trafficking

Returning briefly to the stories of Maria, Sophie, Christina, Jennifer, and Celeste, the question may well be asked: Is there, or could there have been, a way home for them? Perhaps an even better question would be: Is there

a way in which their traumatic journeys could have been prevented, and could the church have been part of this prevention? The model graphic below is entitled “Celeste’s way home” and indicates the centrality of the victim, the importance of the team (in this case The Salvation Army’s Anti-Human Trafficking Task Team in South Africa), and the impossibility of the task if it were to be undertaken in isolation and without numerous partners. In the case of Celeste, these partners include government agencies, non-government agencies, professionals, and experts, as well as groups and individuals representing civil society in finding a way home (or to a safe place) for victims of human trafficking.

Figure 1 Glossary:
Corps = congregation, THQ/CHQ = national head office



4.1 Strengths and limitations

In formulating a specific church response to human trafficking, it seems advisable to begin by focusing on the foundational realities of strengths and limitations of the church in responding to human trafficking. Strengths include its presence at grassroots level in communities around the world. A second strength lies in its good name, and the trust that the public, many governments, and other agencies place in its integrity and capacity to make a difference in matters of social justice. A third strength may be called the approval of heaven, as reflected in the conviction of Danielle Strickland (2006) in her address to the Canadian parliament, “that light is more powerful than darkness, and God is on our side.” However, taking a stand against human trafficking, the source of which is an evil kind of greed and cruelty, places the church in direct opposition to the very kingdom and armies of Satan himself. Whilst there are many things the church can do (raise awareness, educate, train, advocate, care for victims and survivors, support families, address the root causes of poverty, inequality and prejudice, and do a host of other things), there are many activities (law-making, law-enforcement, border control, criminal investigations, arrests, trials, sentencing, and international negotiations, to mention a few) required to eradicate this crime outside the scope of its mission or capacity. The church is not equipped to deal with the issue of human trafficking on its own. The diagram above illustrates this concept through the story of Celeste.

It is important to acknowledge that each incident of human trafficking is different, and each victim and survivor will have different needs and require a bespoke response. Therefore, to write about a model may seem generic and generalized. The best that may be done is to formulate the ‘broad strokes’ or the framework of a model within which it will be possible to respond meaningfully to the issue of human trafficking,

in the context of teamwork, and keeping the victim or survivor central to the process.

4.2 Requirements for a response

Inspired by the narratives of Maria, Sophie, Christina, Jennifer and Celeste (and many others) and guided by the ‘what if’ questions that emerged from their stories, this paper aims to answer the question of how the church should respond to human trafficking by suggesting a number of requirements as a guideline. It stands to reason that the specifics of a response to human trafficking will vary from place to place and from time to time. Human trafficking is a crime that evolves and changes constantly, and the response must also be adaptable and flexible.

Person-centered: It is important to continue to offer a response that is victim (or survivor) focused, keeping in view the fact that, “Every single occurrence of modern slavery is happening to a person—someone’s sister, mother, brother, father, daughter, or son” (USA Department of State 2012, 10). A person-centered response may also be focused on potential victims through awareness and education programs that are adapted to culture and location, as well as the demographics of the target group. To be ethical in our methods, rehabilitation models should ideally be self-determined and individually tailored, even though it would be cheaper and quicker to adopt a ‘one-size-fits-all’ response.

Bible-based: Since the mission of the church and its calling to respond to exploitation in the form of human trafficking is clearly founded on the Bible (see section 3), its response should also be Bible-based. It must be rooted in the biblical principles of love, justice, respect, protection of the weak and vulnerable, and the right to fullness of life (John 10:10) for all people.

Partnership-empowered: Cooperation is vital for any effective response and will include partnership between like-minded denominations, organizations, agencies, and specialists. Representation on national and international bodies should be a priority. It is important to remain in touch and up to date with the evolution of human trafficking, and with issues of research and response (HRSC 2010, 171). A holistic and comprehensive response will require teamwork that involves finding common ground and possibly a measure of compromise on non-essentials (Pallant 2012, 168, 169).

Learning-enhanced: It is important to continue to conduct and share ongoing research and documentation (UNODC 2012, 90). This should include creating a databank of resources containing knowledge, information, skills, and experience, as well as reference to the multitude of specialized training materials and manuals dealing with human trafficking that have already been developed by national and international agencies. Collating, storing, and distributing data, resources, information, and knowledge has become much easier and faster in the digital age. Data can now be stored in the cloud, and information is easily disseminated via social networks and web pages. It must, however, be borne in mind that information in the wrong hands could be profoundly counterproductive, and all information in any form must be compliant with modern data protection laws.

Impact-focused: Impact measurement is a vital part of a learning-based response (USA Department of State 2012, 10). Some questions the church will ask in order to measure the impact of its efforts, will be whether these efforts are helping to decrease the number of victims, whether its training provision is sustainable and increasing capacity for action, and whether its awareness-raising campaigns are appropriately targeted.

Strength-driven: In addition to work that specifically combats human trafficking, the Church should continue to do what it does well, which is to address the root causes of human trafficking. Poverty and the lack of social and economic security are major factors that push people into migration and situations of vulnerability to exploitation. The church must continue to work for economic development and advocate for education, especially for girls. The church must also continue to build capacity in the poorest communities, and support fair-trade and other ethical trading models. Combatting human trafficking must include raising awareness about the exploitation of people on farms, in factories and many other industries, and should reflect in its own dealings such as the purchase of supplies and the procurement of services.

Advocacy-enriched: Since human trafficking is a crime that feeds on numerous systemic root causes like poverty and discrimination, the role of advocacy cannot be overemphasized (Offutt and Bronkema 2016, 6; Fileta 2017, 55). More than just raising awareness, advocacy aims at bringing change for people who are disadvantaged or suffering as a result of systemic injustice. Because of its positioning in communities, the local church is in an ideal position to be an effective mechanism for advocacy. Any response to human trafficking should not be limited to treating the symptoms or even the causes of human trafficking but should also include the ‘upstream’ work of advocating for just structures and systems.

Motivated by the love of God and the example of Jesus: Jesus was, in his earthly ministry, concerned about every aspect of human suffering (see section 3), and he not only valued human freedom, but also gave his life to make freedom a reality. As believers, our struggle against human trafficking is based on our firm belief that “God’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14) in our efforts.

Having provided these essential requirements for a Christian response to human trafficking, it is possible to establish the basic key areas for an effective faith-based response. Whilst it would be necessary for all the requirements mentioned above to be present in a comprehensive Christian response, this is not the case with the key areas. Churches or congregations may choose to be involved in all, or only one or two of the areas mentioned, according to their capacity and mission priorities.

4.3 Key areas of a response to human trafficking

In reflecting on the areas of a Christian response to human trafficking, it is not necessary to re-invent the proverbial wheel. At a workshop held in 2016 by The Salvation Army and the Anglican Alliance in Nepal, the ‘seven P’s model’ was introduced and documented (2016, 32). The first three areas of response may be found in the Palermo Protocol (UN General Assembly 2000, 2), and a fourth was recommended in the USA Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report of 2012 (p. 7). Three further areas were considered important by Salvation Army consultation groups. The seven P’s, as reflected in The Salvation Army International Positional Statement of 2018 (pp. 4, 5) are Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnerships, Policy, Participation, and Prayer. As a member of the design team of this model, the author offers the next section as a basic summary and her own interpretation and understanding of the seven P’s model.

Prevention: The preferred way to combat anything undesirable is through prevention. Because of its unique position in communities, the church can be a powerful instrument in preventing human trafficking, utilizing at a minimum only its basic existing structures. Prevention initiatives may range from awareness campaigns, days of prayer, anti-trafficking or freedom Sundays, and fundraising.

Protection: Whilst prevention is aimed at people who may or may not necessarily be vulnerable to human trafficking, the area of protection focuses more on victims and survivors. When victims are identified, they need protection in terms of a safe exit from their situation and access to a place of safety where they may recover physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. Emergency support, short-term accommodation, basic supplies, care, support, and friendship are well within the scope that even the smallest congregation could offer. Church members are people from all walks of life, and amongst its members may be professionals and skilled persons who can offer expertise such as medical support, legal support, trauma care, skills training, counselling, and mentoring.

Churches may look out for and report cases of unethical labor practices and unscrupulous employment agencies. In cases of cross-border trafficking, the church as a worldwide body may also be of great value in terms of practical assistance in repatriation and rehabilitation.

Prosecution: The thought of being involved with matters of prosecution does not necessarily sit comfortably with the church and may seem quite out of its comfort zone. However, the church understands human trafficking as a criminal activity that affects the lives of thousands of people and the church realizes that calling people to account for their actions is an important part of combatting it. Churches can help by encouraging victims and survivors not to be silent but to call on and cooperate with law enforcement officers in the prosecution of their perpetrators. This encouragement may take the form of accompanying victims to police stations and courts of law, and of actively preparing them for court hearings. Victims/survivors must always be informed correctly of their legal rights, and church members should be aware of their legal limits and obligations as citizens.

In many places court cases take time, and witnesses may need to appear in several hearings over a period of months. In order to achieve success, it is often necessary to provide accommodation and the basic requirements of life for the victim while the proceedings are underway. The church may be of great help to someone whose life may be essentially in limbo until a legal court case has come to its conclusion.

Policy: The church as part of civil society recognizes its responsibility to be part of conversations about matters of national and international policy. The role of the church in advocacy is of great importance in the creation and implementation of effective policy regarding human trafficking, labor laws, laws relating to children's rights, and other related laws.

In addition to national and international legal policies, the church is also well positioned to influence many other policy issues like consumer habits and practices. Congregations, businesses, and individuals must be made aware of the consequences of their choice of products and services.

Partnerships: No single movement or organization can fight against human trafficking. In my experience, some of the most important partnerships the church should have are with the national police, prosecuting authorities, social welfare, and the national border control agency, as well as foreign embassies. On a more local level, each congregation is based in a community with schools, police stations, other churches and worshipping communities, clubs, groups, clinics and more—all of whom share a basic concern for the community and a desire for its people to live in safety. It is therefore easy for churches to reach out and join forces with other churches, non-government agencies, educational institutions, faith leaders and community leaders in order to safeguard their communities against exploitation and human trafficking and work together for justice and safety. The stories told in the beginning of this article illustrate the value of partnerships.

Participation: The church with all its varied expressions is well positioned to participate in the fight against human trafficking, with possible actions ranging from very basic to high-level, specialized involvement. In fact, even the smallest congregations in the remotest of places may be very successful agents of change, helping their communities to prevent human trafficking and creating safe and robust communities. Activities well within the remit of the church may include calls to prayer, freedom Sundays, peaceful marches or demonstrations, awareness campaigns and training events, as well as the sharing of information and resources. Churches can support and participate in any local community action against human trafficking, such as campaigns and awareness-raising events. Participation by local churches may also take a more individual form, such as church members volunteering their time and skills in efforts to prevent trafficking, protect survivors, and prosecute traffickers.

Prevention, protection, prosecution, policy, partnership, and participation are all vital areas of engagement in combatting human trafficking, and the church has a greater or lesser role to play in each one. There is one area of response, however, in which every single Christian and every Church unit can, and should play a part, and that is the area of prayer.

Prayer: Prayer is foundational to all Christian service. Mari Williams (Fileta 2017, 43) describes prayer as underpinning everything Christians do. “Prayer is at the core of the kingdom task of seeking justice.” Alita Ram (Fileta 2017, 45) agrees by naming prayer as the bedrock of every effort of Christians to work for justice. Brueggemann (2018, 66) describes prayer as “a refusal to settle for what is” and writes in his book *Interrupting Silence* that, “the very fact of prayer is a way to remain courageous, a way to resist resignation that would result in losing heart” (2018, 84).

Prayer is an appealing and inspiring challenge for groups and individuals of all ages, and it is accessible to all who share a burden for people who are exploited by means of human trafficking. Ideas and initiatives include prayer groups, prayer walks, special days of prayer such as an anti-human trafficking Sunday or weekend. Churches and denominations may choose to share in these events together in unity and solidarity.

Providing and regularly updating resources and prayer guides are helpful for focused and informed prayer, whether private or corporate. Prayer topics may include victims, survivors, vulnerable people, persons and organizations who work against human trafficking, politicians, police personnel, law makers, judges, prosecutors, and even perpetrators.

4.4 Getting started

This study reflects on the journey of The Salvation Army in Southern Africa in the early years of this century with the joy of having been a grateful fellow traveler, and with the benefit of hindsight. Much of the journey was a roller coaster ride, being catapulted from one stage of the journey to the next by increased knowledge and information, by need and by the open doors of opportunity, and the response was often more pragmatic and intuitive than strategic. Plotting the journey and noting the lessons learned might be useful to other churches and believers. This study confirms that any Christian response to human trafficking must be accompanied by prayer and guided by thorough research. Armed with prayer support and research, a church or group will progress to the stage of designing and implementing a strategy.

5. Conclusion

The stories of Maria, Sophie, Christina, Jennifer, and others have touched our hearts, broken our hearts, and filled our hearts with a longing for justice. This study endeavors to answer the question of how Christians should respond to the crime of human trafficking, by means of the Loyola Institute of Ministry research design. Starting with an empirical description of the situation in South Africa, and followed by a biblical-theological description of the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church, the study tells the story of one team, outlining some of the important lessons learned and suggesting a practical response that could help to move the current reality of exploitation of human beings closer towards the ideal situation of freedom for all.

The stories present the church with a question and a challenge. The question concerns how the heart of God responds to these and millions of other lives affected by human trafficking. The challenge is how his people will respond.

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A Phased-Hybrid Training Approach for Frontier Missionaries

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Abstract

Many missionaries go to the field inadequately prepared for the challenges they will face, resulting in high missionary attrition rates. This article describes a new approach for making integral ministry training accessible to more missionaries, especially those from the majority world. The article builds on modern missionary training approaches such as adult learning principles, reduction of cultural bias in training, hub-based phased training, and online e-learning. It then proposes a competency-based, phased, and hybrid e-learning approach to curriculum design. The approach can be used to make practical and affordable training accessible to more missionaries worldwide. The article briefly discusses a practical implementation of the curricular approach and the evaluation thereof. Finally, it calls for collaboration between mission organizations for the further development, implementation, and deployment of such training.

1. Introduction

Research has shown that missionary training reduces preventable missionary attrition rates. Mission organizations with higher requirements for missiological training exhibit lower rates of preventable attrition. Research also found that pre-field missiological training contributes significantly to a missionary's ability to persevere and to be fruitful in ministry. (Hay, Lim et al. 2007, 18, 55, 155, 156)

Nevertheless, many missionaries are still going to the field with little or no missiological training (Udall 2013, 1). Few churches and mission organizations have enough in-house resources to provide their own training. Even when such training is available, expenses such as course fees, travel, and accommodation place such training out of the reach of many missionaries.

Since the Reformation, so-called "Western" countries where the gospel is well-established, sent out most missionaries (Johnson, Bellofatto, and Hickman 2013, 76). From the 1950s onward, there was a major shift in the center of gravity of Christianity from the West to former colonies (Johnson, Bellofatto, and Hickman 2013, 15). As a result, the number of missionaries from the majority world (Majority World 2017) is on the increase (Lundy 1999, 147). This study focused on missionaries coming from China, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand.

Conventional training is often too expensive for many majority world missionaries, who mostly come from developing countries. Therefore, it is important to find a way to make training more accessible to them. This study endeavored to design, develop, and implement a missionary training curriculum that combines technology and face-to-face instruction to make the training accessible to majority world missionaries.

This article explains the organization and delivery of learning content, including examples of hybrid missionary training in different phases. Didasko Academy implemented part of the curriculum in its course series “Discovering Missions,” which is available online for free at www.dasko.org. This article provides an overview of the philosophy behind the design of the implementation.

2. Challenges in Training Majority World Missionaries

Because most existing training is aimed at learners from the Western world, it is important to identify the additional challenges majority world missionaries face. In addition to the difficulty they face in finding sponsorship to attend training in the West, they also need visas to get there. Many are not fluent in English, which is often the main language of instruction. There are also cultural challenges inherent in existing courses, for example, lecturers use unfamiliar examples to explain certain concepts. These reasons necessitate a new kind of training curriculum.

3. Designing the Curriculum

A curriculum is more than just a syllabus, it is a broader concept which includes the syllabus. A syllabus typically consists of little more than the list of the subjects and topics covered by the course of study. A curriculum addresses the entire persona of the learner, including their spiritual and character formation, the development of the specific skills they need, and a deeper understanding of their task. An effective and well-executed curriculum will produce the desired learning outcomes in learners. Therefore, the curriculum is a design for learning, similar to the design plan for a building, defining the intended learner experience (Wiles 2008, 3).

The philosophy behind the curriculum under consideration focuses more on the learner outcomes than on the content of the learning materials. The prioritization of course development is driven by the desire to reduce preventable missionary attrition and to help increase missionary fruitfulness in ministry. The greatest factors that reduce preventable attrition are early-on-field language and culture acquisition (Hay et al. 2007, 120) and pre-field missiological training (Hay et al. 2007, 18, 105). There are several factors to consider in designing a curriculum for missionaries. The first of these is the fact that prospective missionaries are adult learners.

3.1 Adult learning principles

The researcher conducted a study of adult educational principles, including formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Manolescu, Florea and Arustei 2018, 8), experiential (cf. Kolb 1984, 23; Kolb and Kolb 2005, 4) and situated learning (cf. Hwang et al. 2012 in Hwang et al. 2018, 137), coaching (Passmore 2015, 5) and mentoring (Clutterbuck 2004, 53), group facilitation (Bens 2005, 7), peer instruction (Crouch and Mazur 2001, 970) and reflective practices (Kolb in Keillor and Littlefield 2012, 5).

In a social constructivist curriculum, learners construct knowledge through mental and physical learning activities. Such activities include projects, solving problems, conducting experiments, participating in simulations and having real-life experiences. A constructivist curriculum improves learning by facilitating the sharing of meaning between individuals through collaboration with their peers. (Seyyedrezaie and Barani 2013, 64).

The study explains learner assessment, including the use of formative (cf. Crooks 2001, 1; Black and Wiliam 1998, 8) and summative

assessments (cf. Clough 2007, 40; Meyers and Nulty 2009, 9) and Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives to test the assessment framework and develop practical assessments (Krathwohl 2002, 212). Important contributors to the field of adult learning are Freire (2014, Spener 1992), Knowles (cf. Hatcher 2008, Bryson 2013), Vella (cf. Hatcher 2008, Vella 1994) and Kolb (Keillor and Littlefield 2012).

For adult learning to be effective, a curriculum should be learner-oriented. This means taking into account that adults are self-motivated, self-directed, have life experience and knowledge, are goal- and relevancy-oriented in their approach to learning, are practical, and need to be respected for who they are (Fidishun 2000, 6; Keillor and Littlefield 2012, 4). The material needs to have immediate relevance to learner performance and problem-solving abilities. Small groups and mutual accountability improve such learning.

A quote attributed to Winston Churchill may serve to sum up the attitude of adult learners: "I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught" (BrainyQuote 2018). This attitude to learning among adults can be addressed through non-formal and informal training. Because the cultures of majority world missionaries differ from those of the West, it is important to take culture into account when designing a curriculum.

3.2 Culture and curriculum

3.2.1 Cultural bias

Western curricula often contain unintended cultural bias, which can lead to "trained incapacity" if missionaries are taught praxis from the point of view of another culture (Herppich 2014, 212). Trained incapacity happens

when certain types of training or experience render an individual unable to think beyond the set of assumptions that they have been taught. Students learn “lessons” that were not openly intended as part of the curriculum (Martin 1983, 123). This has been called the “hidden curriculum” (Jackson 1968, 41). Reducing cultural bias requires a study of cultural characteristics of learners.

3.2.2 Geert Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions and training

Prof. Geert Hofstede has been a major contributor to the field of comparative culture. The clearest and best proven comparative data on cultures is based on research by Hofstede himself, first published in his 1980 book *Culture’s Consequences*. Many reviews of the validity of Hofstede’s approach have been conducted, all validating Hofstede’s results at the country level. Litrell (2012, 3) confirms the validity of Hofstede’s findings by referencing later studies by Fernandez et al. (1997); Kirkman, Lowe, and Gibson (2006); and Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou (2007). Even though Hofstede’s studies focused on countries rather than cultures within countries, the results are nevertheless useful for this article. The study found that three of Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions affect training courses, namely Power Distance Index, Individualism vs Collectivism and Indulgence vs Restraint (Vermont 2020, 139).

The cultural Power Distance (PD) Index measures the degree of acceptance of inequalities in society (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 54). A low PD score indicates an egalitarian society, where people try to equalize power, unless there is good justification. In cultures with a high PD score, people tend to accept a hierarchical order (Hofstede et al. 2010, 55).

People from a high PD culture expect and accept the fact that power is distributed unequally. Therefore, learners will expect the instructor to

have higher status than they do. For example, in Chinese society, instructors are seen as role models, knowledge transmitters, and at the center of the educational process. (Pratt 1991, 304) Learners from high PD cultures (e.g., majority world missionaries) prefer this greater social distance to the instructor than those from Western cultures (Hatcher 2008, 9). High PD learners tend to become uncomfortable with informal instructors who prefer to be called by their first name. To the instructor, they appear quiet and reflective in high-interaction classroom situations (Joy and Kolb 2009, 69). This has been the researcher's personal experience teaching such learners in a highly interactive classroom.

The study also found that the Hofstede Individualism vs Collectivism dimension affects training. Cultures with higher values in this index have greater individualism. In these cultures, the group expects individuals to care for themselves and their own nuclear family. Cultures with a low value for this dimension prefer a tightly-knit fabric of society, where relatives or members of a specific group expect total loyalty from others in the group and that they will look after them. Collectivists will involve more people before making decisions than individualistic people, preferring a consensus-style of decision making. They often express their self-image in terms of "we" rather than "I" (Hofstede 2001, 112). This can affect the situation in the classroom.

Hofstede's Indulgence vs Restraint Index also affects training. The Indulgence vs Restraint Index is an indicator of how strict social norms are in a culture. Stricter cultures value restraint and have lower scores on the scale, while those with more tolerance for allowing people to enjoy life have higher scores (Hofstede 2001, 280). A high indulgence score is also an indication that a culture allows more freedom of speech than a low score (Gómez-Rey, Barbera and Fernández-Navarro 2016, 227).

Cultural differences in learning do not end with Hofstede's indices. Culture also influences people's preferred cognitive learning styles.

3.2.3 Cognitive styles

Cognitive style describes the way individuals "think, perceive, and remember information" (Cognitive Style 2017). The cognitive aspect of culture has to do with how people think about things and how they gain knowledge and understand concepts. Therefore, people of a culture share a certain predominant "thinking style." A culture's cognitive style directly affects the way people of that culture prefer to learn (Hiebert 1985, 31) and is therefore pertinent to this study. According to Hesselgrave (1991, 305) there are three main cognitive styles: conceptual, intuitional, and concrete-relational.

People from Western cultures usually have a conceptual learning style and tend to prefer abstract thought, centered around concepts and driven by abstract ideas (Vail et al. 2002, 7–5). In such a cognitive environment, disciplines such as systematic theology are highly regarded and three-point sermons are the norm. This approach stems from Hellenistic thought which influenced early Christianity (Braaten 1968, 3).

Cultures with intuitional cognitive styles tend to revolve around psychical experiences, that is, driven by mystical experiences (Vail et al. 2002, 7–5). Hesselgrave (1991, 225) typifies Indians, presumably specifically Hindus, as having an intuitional cognitive style.

In contrast to the Western conceptual (abstract) cognitive style, cultures where concrete-relational thinking dominates use stories, parables, myths, analogies, and similes (Hesselgrave 1991, 223). People in such cultures view reality and life graphically in a setting of active emotional relationships in concrete situations (Hesselgrave 1991, 223). Such communication tends to revolve around concrete relationships, driven by

environmental realities (Vail et al. 2002, 7–5). Hesselgrave (1991, 225) typifies the Chinese as having a concrete-relational cognitive style.

Although there may be a predominant cognitive style within a culture, individuals from the culture will have a differing mix of cognitive styles. For example, when explaining a given topic, Western people usually start with the conceptual (the “big picture”). They may follow with some short illustrative examples (concrete-relational), but rarely explain the intuitional (“gut feel”) aspect of the concept. Concrete-relational cultures, such as the Chinese, usually start with a story, then progress to intuitional and lastly to conceptual. Indians tend to follow the opposite cognitive progression to Western people (Hesselgrave 1991, 208). The table below demonstrates this progression.

	Starting point	Progress to ...	Perhaps
The West:	Conceptual	Concrete-relational	Intuitional
China:	Concrete-relational	Intuitional	Conceptual
India:	Intuitional	Concrete-relational	Conceptual

(Adapted from Smith in Hesselgrave 1991, 208)

People of the majority world (in the above table, China and India) least preferred the conceptual thought processes that dominate Western-culture training. This difference in learning preference has implications for the training approach needed.

Most modern missiology courses originate in Western countries and, as such, have been designed and presented in conceptual form. The strength of this form is its presentation of missions in a theological framework and as a set of principles. For people with intuitional and

concrete-relational cognitive styles, this approach is too theoretical (cf. Lee 2000, 139; Hesselgrave 1991, 224). While discussing a correspondence course aimed at majority world pastors, Hesselgrave (1991, 224) said that the course was too theoretical and abstract and failed to engage the audience. The developers revised the course to include images and the resulting improvement in response was “nothing short of overwhelming” (Hesselgrave 1991, 224).

Missionary training differs from general theological training in more than just subject material. To be effective, it also requires a practical component.

3.3 Integral ministry training

The concept of integral ministry training (IMT) is widely accepted in the world of missionary training (Armstrong and Sells 2006, 17, Kayser 2003, 30, Whiteman 2008, 11, Wiseman 2015, 189, Wiseman 2016, 2, Udall 2013, 17). IMT is defined as follows:

Integral training delivers a learning experience that intentionally addresses the needs of the whole person, including their character and spiritual formation, skill development and their understanding. (Brynjolfson and Lewis 2006, 5)

In educational circles, these three areas of learning are called the cognitive (understanding), affective (character and spiritual) and psychomotor (skill) domains. IMT adds spiritual formation to these (Brynjolfson and Lewis 2006, 8). Good IMT-style training should rely on formal, non-formal, and informal learning and should be outcomes-based. The primary goal of IMT is to develop all the competencies missionaries need. Therefore, the next section discusses competency-oriented missionary training.

3.4 Competency-oriented missionary training

The outcome of good missionary training is missionary competencies needed for effective ministry. The goal of a missionary curriculum is not only to increase learners' effectiveness in serving Christ, but also to motivate and assist them to grow in him. The training should include numerous methods in several contexts. This flexibility caters for different learning styles to achieve understanding and to develop certain skills and attitudes. Both trainers and learners accept responsibility for the achievement of these outcomes, because both parties are fellow servants who are committed to extending God's kingdom. Therefore, based on their experience, competence, and authority, trainers guide the training process, accepting the uniqueness of each person's gifting, calling, and personality. Learners gain knowledge through learning obedience and diligence, which leads to maturity, understanding, and, ultimately, competence (Brynjolfson and Lewis 2006, 22). Learners are not only dependent on the input from their teachers but also learn from their peers with whom they interact during the training. The dissertation's IMT section provides a detailed list of competency categories.

This discussion on traditional missionary training gives the background for looking to how technological developments can contribute to the process in future.

3.5 E-learning and hybrid learning

3.5.1 Definition

There are numerous and diverse definitions for the term e-learning. Understandings range from "any learning that uses ICT [information and communication technologies]" to "a fully online course" (Boezerooij

2006, 18). In this article, e-learning means learning delivered, facilitated, and supported through the internet, using multimedia and social media technologies to enhance learning. It can be presented synchronously, asynchronously, be instructor- or self-paced and can be combined with coaching and facilitation in a blended approach.

3.5.2 Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning

E-learning can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous teaching methods include the use of text-only “chat” software, telephone-like voice over IP (VOIP) talks, video conferencing such as Zoom, web conferencing, or internet radio (cf. Huang 2002, 30; Meloni 2012, 2). Asynchronous methods include the use of virtual libraries or repositories of documents, illustrations, audio or video files, email, online discussion forums, social networking, wikis, and other forms of collaborative documents (cf. Huang 2002, 30; Meloni 2012, 3).

Even though most institutions use primarily asynchronous courses (Leo, Manganello, Pennacchietti, Pistoia, Kinshuk and Chen 2009, 489), effectiveness does not so much depend upon whether the training is asynchronous or synchronous. Research by Hrastinski (2008) and Wang and Newlin (2001 in Falloon 2011, 448) demonstrate that both of these approaches play a role in the effectiveness of e-learning. The issue is not to choose between the synchronous and asynchronous approaches, but rather to identify an effective and practical balance between the two (Falloon 2011, 448).

3.5.3 Hybrid instruction

Hybrid instruction is an intentional combination of e-learning and non-formal learning techniques such as coaching, mentoring, group facilitation

and situated learning (cf. Hwang, Chen, Shadiey, Huang, and Chen 2012 in Hwang, Chen et al. 2018, 137). Such an approach adds the advantages of traditional classrooms to e-learning. Coaches and facilitators need not be subject experts to achieve their goals. The expertise can reside in a combination of the online video mini-lectures and expert mentors who can interact with learners through online synchronous video conferencing.

This approach allows for a non-expert to be a facilitator of a learning group. Such a non-expert may be a group leader at church or a missionary team leader in the field. Such a person may not yet be an expert in the subject field that the group is studying, because the expertise resides in the video lecture and discussion questions. This approach introduces a paradigm shift in learning, because it is now possible to rethink where, when, and how quickly training should happen.

3.6 Rethinking the pace, the time and the place of training

3.6.1 The optimal time for training

Malcolm Knowles' "readiness to learn" principle indicates that adults prefer to learn information close to the time they need to use it (Hatcher 2008, 32). Immediate practical use of new knowledge leads to learning on a higher level on Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Such knowledge is also more likely to be in the learner's long-term memory (Krathwohl 2002, 212). This is called just-in-time (JIT) learning, a term originally borrowed from supply-chain planning in the manufacturing and distribution industry (Merriam-Webster 2020).

In traditional classroom situations, JIT poses the problem of the optimal time for the learner not always being a feasible time for the instructor. Asynchronous e-learning has changed that because learners can

start a course any time they like. Because e-learners are not tied to a specific time and place where they receive training, classroom and instructor availability is no longer an issue (Huang 2002, 28).

3.6.2 Course pacing

A side effect of asynchronous e-learning is that course designers can choose between instructor-paced or learner-paced courses. With learner-paced courses, learning no longer needs to be compressed into a short time, which reduces learners' cognitive load (Krathwohl 2002, 237). This independence from pace, timing, and place makes the concept of phased training possible.

3.6.3 Phased training

Parks (2016, 18) described an innovative four-phase approach to missionary training. In this approach, missionaries receive training at hubs situated in different locations and at different times of a missionary's development (Coles and Parks 2019, loc. 3229).

Coles and Parks call the first phase "internship." This phase is completed in the missionary's home country. This phase consists of both theory and practice. They call the second phase "residency," and it is completed at a training hub at the missionary's starting point on the field, culturally close to their ultimate target people. The third phase, "launch," is where they start applying their earlier experience among their target people (Parks 2016, 18). During this third phase, the coaches and trainers from phase three continue to assist and guide them. In the fourth phase, the missionary becomes involved in the training of other missionaries who are in the first three phases, and/or leads a new team (McBride 2018, 37).

This hub-based phased training model challenges the assumption that missionary training has to happen in a single location over a specific time. It implies that adult missionaries should ideally be trained just before they need a new skill or knowledge. While this is a great improvement over the traditional model, it can be made even more effective by combining the phased training with hybrid e-learning and situated learning. For example, purely cognitive training can be done with online e-learning that learners can complete without the presence of a training hub. For certain subjects, the affective (character and spiritual) and psychomotor (skill) domains can be taught using a hybrid combination of online e-learning, non-expert facilitators and synchronous video conferencing.

This hybrid approach makes more than four phases viable. The proposed curriculum's phases include the following: church, preparation, short-term visit, trade language and culture acquisition, heart language and culture acquisition, evangelism, initial disciple-making, church planting, and return.

A very important aspect of hybrid training is the inclusion of lecture videos.

3.7 Online video mini-lectures

Online video mini-lectures, or lecture sequences (Breslow, Pritchard, DeBoer, Stump, Ho and Seaton 2013, 14), are fast becoming the most prominent medium for instruction in e-learning (Scagnoli et al. 2015, 115). Video mini-lectures are focused messages that cover a specific topic (Scagnoli et al. 2015, 129). They are “mini” in that they are short, usually in the order of six to twelve minutes each. Mini-lectures “chunk” content into meaningful pieces (Miller 1956 in Scagnoli et al. 2015, 116), which helps to enhance learner memory (Dirksen 2012, 91).

The pedagogical roots of this approach lie in cognitive memory theory and specifically in the cognitive theory of multimedia learning. It has also become one of the best practices for online instruction (Scagnoli et al. 2015, 116). The most effective videos show the instructor's face, making eye contact with the viewer for at least part of the video (Guo, Kim, and Rubin 2014, 42). Such purpose-made videos create more of a one-to-one connection between the instructor and the individual learner than videos recording during a lecture (Scagnoli et al. 2015, 129). Based on a large-scale study of video engagement (6.9 million video watching sessions), Guo et al. (2014, 46) found that using close-up videos of the instructor making eye contact with the learner resulted in higher engagement levels compared to in-class filmed lectures.

The fact that learners can rewind videos reduces the need for the use of repetition in lectures. A study has found that well-planned videos reduce the required lecture time. For example, material that took 400 minutes in classroom lectures were reduced to only 260 minutes in video format, a 35 percent reduction. (Cummins, Beresford, and Rice 2016, 3)

Videos form only one part of the structure of a complete course.

3.8 Course structure

Each course consists of one or more modules. Each module contains a sequence of learning units, followed by a summative assessment. The course concludes with a course evaluation survey, an online suggestion/comments forum, and a discussion of next steps.

Dirksen (2012, 91) recommends presenting information in these shorter chunks because it allows for better retention of information. When the chunks of material are grounded in a rich context of other chunks, learners are also more likely to remember the connection between the

chunks (Dirksen 2012, 92). A typical learning unit (or chunk) contains a video mini-lecture using a concrete-relational approach, a formative assessment in the form of a multiple-choice quiz, a question for personal reflection, classroom discussion question(s), an online discussion forum with its own question, and, finally, a resource page which contains references and/or suggestions for further reading.

An individual online learner will typically ignore the classroom discussion questions while using the personal reflection question; classrooms (virtual or actual), could use both. Both individual online learners and facilitators have given very positive reports of this approach. The next section discusses how to identify course content that addresses all the required competencies.

3.9 The CPL Training Matrix

The objective of missionary competency profiling is to identify curriculum and training goals (Brynjolfson and Lewis 2006, 127). To be able to design a competency-driven curriculum that is taught in phases using hybrid methodologies, the researcher synthesized a three-dimensional matrix called the Competency-Phase-Learning domain (CPL) Training Matrix. The CPL Training Matrix makes it possible to analyze which learning domains should be targeted for each competency and during which phase. This analysis makes it possible to determine which training can be done purely online and which need a practical component. Illustration one below shows a simplified CPL Training Matrix.

The vertical axis contains the individual competencies. The researcher compiled the full list of over 240 competencies from Hesselgrave, Hiebert, Hoke, Kane, Kwast, McGavran and Mulholland (2009), Brynjolfson and Lewis (2006), Ferris (1995), and Brogden (2014). Competency categories

include biblical and theological knowledge, preparation to go into the field, fund-raising competencies, cultural adaptation, and language acquisition skills. The horizontal axis of the matrix contains the phase codes, indicating in-church training, missionary preparation phase, short-term visit, trade-language culture and language acquisition, heart-language culture and language acquisition, evangelism, disciple-making and church planting.

Illustration 1: The CPL Training Matrix

Phase Competency →	CHURCH	PREP	STM	TCLA	HCLA	EV	DM	CP	Cogni tive	Char acter	Spiri tual	Skill
Biblical	2											
Church commit	1							2				
Ethics												
Missiological		5	3			5	5	5				
Preparation		5		1	1	2						
Practical		5	3	5								
Fund raising		5										
Culture adapt				5	5	4	3	3				
... →												

The depth axis shows the domains of learning for each competency. A good example is the competency needed to learn a language and its culture. Acquiring this competency starts before a missionary leaves for the field (PREP phase). While raising funds, missionaries have to understand more or less how long it takes to learn a language. Once they do, they can explain to their supporters why they won't be fully involved in ministry for the first year or two on the field. Learning to explain the reasons for this is a purely cognitive activity and can be learned online through e-learning. Once they

are on the field and are learning language (TLCA /HLCA), missionaries have to know (cognitive) and be able to apply (skill) language acquisition methods so that they can learn the language effectively.

Each cell of the matrix contains an estimated instructional effort level between one and five. One indicates little instructional effort, and five indicates high instructional effort. Illustration two (below) will be used to explain how this works.

Illustration 2: CPL Training Matrix shown in spreadsheet layout

1	Category	Competency	CHURCH #1	PREP #1	STM #1	TLCA #2	HLCA #3	EV #3	DM #3	CP #3
2		<i>Numbers (1-5) indicate instructional effort. Assessment columns: "o": observe, "p": phone conversation, "x": exam / summative assessment, "q": question, "i": informal evaluation</i>	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess	Cognitive Character Spiritual Assess
104	COMMS	Discern what is cultural and what is biblical.		1	1 1	0	1 1 1 1 x	1 1 1 1 x		
105	COMMS	Can detect cross-cultural bridges for evangelism / disciple-making.				3	3 3	5		
106		Culture and language learning								
107	CLA	Recognizes the importance of language learning as ministry.		5	x 1	2	q	5		
108	CLA	Is committed to achieving ministry-level fluency in the language.		5 5	x		5 5 5 5	0		
109	CLA	Understands the need for and takes responsibility for life-long language learning.		1	x 1		3 5	3 5	3	3
110	CLA	Knows language acquisition techniques.		1	x	1 0	5 5 x 0	5 5 x 0		
111	CLA	Knows how to select language school or helpers(s), and how to learn language and culture from the community.		3	x 1		0 5 3 5 0	5 3 5 0		
112	CLA	Knows the rules of phonetics and importance		1	x		5 5 x 0	5 5 x 0	5	

In this sample part of the matrix, the competency heading “Culture and language learning” and its detailed competencies appear on the vertical axis. The training phase codes (CHURCH, PREP, etc.) appear along the horizontal axis.

Each phase along the horizontal axis contains the four learning domains of learning for that phase and an assessment column. The instructional effort levels found in each element lie on a scale from one to five. These numbers indicate the estimated amount of instructional effort needed to achieve the required competence in a missionary. A 1 means that little instructional effort is necessary, while a 5 indicates that a significant

amount of instructional effort is required for that competency during that phase in that learning domain.

The researcher estimated instructional levels for each competency, phase, and learning domain and placed them in a database. Computer analysis made it possible to construct a phased syllabus from the CPL data that indicates the degree of hybridity necessary per training phase.

The next section looks at how the curriculum performs in practice.

4. Findings

A small team at Didasko Academy implemented the initial part of the curriculum concurrently with the research. One of the courses, “Discovering Missions,” was used to evaluate the effectiveness and accessibility of the curricular approach.

The researcher evaluated the courses using a combination of pre-development opinion polls, a paper survey at a blended learning workshop, analysis of database log files, online course surveys, video analytics, informal interviews, and email exchanges. An analysis of the learning management system database found that learners from many countries had enrolled and completed courses and that most of them were from the majority world. This analysis was necessary to gain an overview of course usage and demographics, learner registration, course enrollment and completion.

The researcher evaluated each of the most important aspects of the curriculum design. These aspects were accessibility, phased/JIT, adult learning principles, competency-based syllabus, cultural issues, hybrid instruction, experiential learning and the social constructivist approach. The evaluation within just over a year of operations indicated that the early parts of the curriculum are effective and it is reaching its goals. Cultural

bias in the courses seems negligible, as the vast majority of learners who completed courses reacted positively to the culture-related questions in the course surveys. Most hybrid use has been via Zoom, because the coronavirus pandemic limited face-to-face blended use. Even though only one of the courses had been used in two face-to-face workshops, the survey results indicate that presenting such blended learning workshops can be effective in many settings. A total of forty-six missionaries who came from fourteen countries attended the two workshops. Learners indicated that they would have been more satisfied with their learning experience if the videos had subtitles and if they could have discussions in a manner and pace suitable to their specific culture. Because of the mixed audience, this was not possible but would have been, had the workshops been presented in their own countries by local facilitators.

The researcher also analyzed online video statistics to measure learner engagement time with the video mini-lectures. The average watch time was high, indicating good learner engagement. The highest average learner engagement was for videos between six and ten minutes in length. This finding is useful for determining the length of future mini-lecture videos.

Over 80 percent of majority world learners used mobile phones to access the courses. This fact shows that free online e-learning that is compatible with mobile devices makes courses financially and geographically widely accessible, especially in the majority world. In one case, a family of four in a township in South Africa did the courses together using a cellphone with mobile data. The courses were not as widely accessible linguistically as desired, with learners requiring at least some English comprehension over and above the translated subtitles. A significant portion of English second-language speakers activated subtitles in their own language.

The researcher also found that it is possible to produce video mini-lectures with negligible cultural bias when the lecturer appears in smart-casual clothes, standing before a neutral background. Learners from all cultures reported that they like the concrete-relational approach to teaching, surprisingly also those from the West. Concrete-relational teachings start with an illustrated and concrete anecdote or story, followed by an exposition of the concepts in the story, instead of starting by explaining concepts and then using anecdotes as illustrations.

Learners reported that they found the availability of reflection questions, group discussion questions and online discussion forums, in addition to optional reading material after each video, to be beneficial. This finding proved that the “chunking” of learning into small learning units works well for different cultures, as long as the video mini-lectures are kept between six and ten minutes in length. This blended learning approach also proved effective in two classroom situations.

Furthermore, the study found that a broad range of learners could be effectively trained using a hybrid combination of online e-learning and non-formal coaching by collaborating with non-expert local-culture facilitators. Non-expert facilitators or team leaders who are sensitive to the local culture can lead such hybrid training, making IMT possible. Initial findings from the limited on-field use of the approach indicate that ongoing IMT using hybrid training is viable for training missionary teams on the field. This viability makes it possible for the entire curriculum to be designed from the ground up, using a phased approach.

The CPL training matrix data showed that the required pre-field training was mostly cognitive, making it possible for online e-learning to play an important role in pre-field missionary training.

5. Recommendations

The researcher believes that mission organizations and seminaries can use the CPL training matrix as a basis for developing effective missionary training syllabi. However, the instructional effort level estimations in the CPL training matrix would need to be refined through usage and further research.

As mentioned earlier, the practical application of hybrid instruction for IMT on the mission field requires the collaboration of mission organizations and churches to further the development and utilization of such courses. Collaboration is important, as few organizations have sufficient resources on their own to develop all the courses necessary to develop the competencies missionaries need. The researcher recommends that organizations investigate the viability of using such training in their contexts and decide how they can collaborate with other organizations to implement a joint training program. Once such collaboration is established, further research into the effectiveness of using on-field hybrid training should be conducted.

6. Concluding Observations

Mission organizations and churches from all countries can benefit from the findings of this research. Missionary candidates usually come from diverse geographical locations and some are still in full-time employment during their preparation period. Therefore, it is difficult and expensive to gather them together for pre-field training at a time and place that suits them all. Because the research found that pre-field fully online missionary training is a viable approach to prepare candidates, the researcher hopes that more mission organizations and churches will adopt this approach. Distributing

training over time by using hybrid training both before and on the mission field can reduce learner cognitive overload caused by missionary training intensives. Team leaders can act as course facilitators, even if they have little or no missions experience themselves. This approach implies that the combination of pre-field online training and in-field hybrid training can serve to reduce the length and cost of current intensive pre- or in-field training courses. Such courses could then be repurposed as organizational orientation. The rapid increase in the use of Didasko courses in many countries, as well as the positive comments and referrals by the vast majority of learners, lend strong support to the hypothesis. All indications are that mission organizations and churches will be able to use this approach to training, as it will help overcome limitations of resources and will serve their missionaries better. The researcher hopes that this will ultimately result in the expansion of God's kingdom and thereby glorify the name of Jesus.

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Vers un Modèle Africain de Dialogue Inter-Religieux: cas de Vodun Xεbyoso et de l'Eglise des *Assemblées de Dieu* dans la région Maxi au Bénin

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Résumé

Des modèles de recherche et des approches de dialogues interreligieux et œcuméniques ont été développés par des experts occidentaux, en particulier ceux qui appartiennent à des institutions philosophiques et religieuses bien établies. La plupart d'entre eux ont une longue histoire de littérature et ont écrit des volumes de livres sur de différentes théories. Mais cet article cherche à faire avancer la recherche méthodologique sur le dialogue interreligieux entre les communautés orales en Afrique subsaharienne. Dans la plupart de ces communautés, il existe très peu de sources écrites ou presque rien qui puisse encourager les rencontres interreligieuses. La thèse tente de répondre aux questions suivantes: comment le dialogue interreligieux est-il possible dans les communautés orales africaines? Qui sont les agents d'une telle rencontre religieuse?

Comment mener un dialogue interreligieux pour apporter l'harmonie dans les communautés et faire avancer la mission de Dieu en Afrique? Sur la base d'une expérience empirique du dialogue interreligieux qui a duré sept ans dans le contexte du Vodun Maxi au Bénin, le chercheur développe un nouveau modèle de recherche contextuelle «MADIR» (Modèle Africain de Dialogue InterReligieux) capable de réconcilier des groupes religieux conflictuels en utilisant à la fois des théories socio-anthropologiques et des principes bibliques enracinés dans les Évangiles pour apporter la paix dans les communautés. Cette approche peut servir également d'outil de recherche efficace pour la théologie africaine.

Mots-clés

Dialogue interreligieux; Modèle de recherche africain; communautés orales; Vodun; Assemblées de Dieu

Abstract

Research models and approaches in interreligious and ecumenical dialogues have been developed by experts from the West, especially those associated with well-established philosophical and religious institutions. Most of them have a long history of literacy and have produced volumes of work around their various theories. But this summary seeks to advance methodological research around interreligious dialogue among oral communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. In most of these communities, there are very little or no written sources that can encourage interreligious encounters. The thesis attempts to respond to the following questions: how possible is interreligious dialogue in African oral communities? Who are the agents for such a religious encounter? How can interreligious dialogue

be conducted to bring harmony in the communities and advance the mission of God in Africa? Based on seven years of empirical experience of interreligious dialogue in the Vodun Maxi context of Benin, the researcher develops a new contextual research model “ M.A.D.I.R” (Modèle Africain de Dialogue InterReligieux) that is a capable of reconciling conflicting religious groups using both social-anthropological theories and biblical principles that are rooted in the Gospels to bring peace in the communities. This approach equally serves as an effective research tool for African theology.

1. Introduction

C'est un conflit interreligieux entre les adeptes des Vodun, représentés par les prêtres des Vodun Xébyoso et la communauté des Eglises Evangéliques des Assemblées de Dieu (EEAD) en région Maxi au Bénin qui est à l'origine de la découverte du Modèle Africain du Dialogue InterReligieux (MADIR). Le conflit se manifestait par des incendies d'églises, des violences conjugales marquées par le renvoi des femmes de leur foyer pour cause de conversion au christianisme, entre autres. Mort d'hommes et dommages corporels graves n'étaient pas rares.

Toute tentative traditionnelle de dialogue pour la résolution de ce conflit fut impossible à cause de l'absence des pasteurs aux différentes convocations. Le chercheur, natif Maxi et pionnier de la création de l'église baptiste en cette région, a été interpellé par rapport au conflit.

Les premières investigations et tentatives auprès de ces pasteurs, s'étant soldées par un échec, la décision fut prise d'investir dans la recherche pour la résolution de ce conflit qui perdurait. Il aura fallu sept années pour que cela se concrétise. Sur cette base, la recherche a exploré

comment partir d'une expérience africaine comme cadre théorique pour formuler une méthodologie de dialogue.

La recherche sera résumée par trois principales sections. La première relatera le contexte et les motivations de la naissance du Modèle Africain du Dialogue InterReligieux (MADIR). La deuxième section exposera MADIR, dans ses grandes lignes, mettant en exergue sa nature spécifique, ses caractéristiques et les sept étapes qui la composent. La troisième section montrera non seulement, comment l'application du MADIR en région Maxi révèle son efficacité dans la résolution du conflit, mais suggère aussi, une nouvelle approche missiologique dans le contexte des peuples verbomoteurs.

2. Contexte de naissance de MADIR

La genèse de MADIR remonte à la résolution d'un conflit né de l'introduction dans une ethnie Maxi, du christianisme pentecôtiste, tradition religieuse étrangère à ce terroir. La population, jadis unie, s'était divisée en communautés conflictuelles. La résolution du conflit a pris sept ans avant de se concrétiser le 07 février 2017. Ce sont les deux causes fondamentales à l'origine de cette longue durée de résolution du conflit qui ont motivé la formulation de MADIR. Elles sont : les approches existantes – aussi bien de la tradition africaine que des traditions religieuses instituées – ont montré leurs limites et l'absence de spécialiste pouvant favoriser un tel dialogue. La section suivante expose ces deux causes.

2.1 Limites des approches existantes pour le contexte d'étude

Du côté des traditions africaines. La documentation sur les approches traditionnelles et des interviews réalisées, ont révélé plusieurs approches

telles que : les palabres sous leurs formes : « familiale », « clanique », « villageoise » ou « royale » (si le village a un roi) ; les méthodes traditionnelles dites « *Adjalassa* » (Quenum 1999 : 119) ; celles qualifiées d'« Ordalie » (Hazoumè 1978 ; Penoukou 1982) et le « tribunal coutumier » (Penoukou 1997). Ces différentes approches nécessitent la présence physique des groupes en conflit. Mais les chrétiens Maxi, adoptant le principe de rupture avec leur passé et leur identité, voient la pratique de la palabre incompatible avec leur foi, parce que cela les met en présence des païens.

Du côté des traditions religieuses instituées. La revue littéraire a montré une pléthore de théories sur le dialogue interreligieux et oecuménique, élaborées par des experts occidentaux. Ces théories, actes des colloques, ou des travaux des experts, ne traitent que du dialogue intellectuel.¹ Elles sont inappropriées pour un peuple verbomoteur. Ces derniers ont besoin du dialogue du vivre ensemble et du dialogue d'engagement (Levrat 2003, 36-40).

Et le dialogue œcuménique (Sicking 2011) qui vise l'unité au sein d'une même tradition religieuse, qu'elle soit chrétienne, musulmane, hindouiste, etc., ne pouvait pas s'appliquer dans notre cas d'étude. Quand au dialogue interreligieux, oeuvres de spécialistes, argumentant à partir des textes ou écrits sacrés, il est inapproprié au peuple verbomoteur qui n'a ni spécialiste, ni texte sacré.

A l'opposé, les communautés en conflit étant un peuple verbomoteur n'utilise que la parole « parlée » et non la parole écrite, qui porte sa pensée et la transmet. Et la parole n'est pas que l'émission du son. Les gestes et les rythmes en constituent le second déterminant qui porte et

1 Le dialogue intellectuel est « une affaire de spécialistes, il peut être scientifique, littérature, philosophique, ou théologique » (Levrat 2003/0927, 38).

transmet la pensée.² Il s'ensuit que la résolution de leur conflit doit passer par la réussite de la réalisation du « dialogue du vivre ensemble » précédé du « dialogue d'engagement ».

Cependant, réussir à ramener une ethnie divisée au dialogue du vivre ensemble nécessite certaines compétences (savoirs faire et savoirs être) indispensables que doit posséder l'agent du dialogue.

2.2 Compétences exigibles au chercheur de MADIR

L'investigation dans la résolution du conflit est née à partir de l'échec des premières tentatives auprès des chrétiens évangéliques. Mais le rapprochement avec les prêtres Vodun a révélé que cet échec est aussi dû à l'incompétence du chercheur, surtout dans deux domaines. Le premier domaine d'incompétence relève de la technicité de la pratique du dialogue à la base : « le dialogue du vivre ensemble » et « le dialogue d'engagement ». Le second domaine d'incompétence, concerne l'identité « contextuelle » requise pour dialoguer. C'est la résolution du problème d'incompétence dans ces deux domaines qui fait l'objet de la section suivante.

La technicité de la pratique du dialogue à la base. A défaut d'intégrer une école de résolution de conflit qui n'existe d'ailleurs pas au Bénin, il a fallu s'investir dans des voies d'expérimentation pratique de résolution de conflit. Cela a conduit à adhérer à des centres de pratique de dialogue, à la participation à des symposiums sur le dialogue et l'expérience de la maison de la paix du Professeur Albert Tevoedjre(2018).

L'adhésion au Centre Panafricain de Prospective Sociale (CPPS) en 2014 a favorisé notre initiation à la **pratique** du dialogue interreligieux.

2 Grâce à l'« anthropologie du geste », Jousse (1975) a ouvert un chemin pour la découverte de nouvelles lois et méthodes pour le décryptage et l'analyse du « Style oral rythmique et mnémotechnique » chez les Verbomoteurs.

Le centre gère un programme de formation, dénommée « La promotion de la paix par un autre chemin » qui initie des rencontres de formations et d'interventions sur des cas pratiques de conflits. Entre autres activités réalisées, les symposiums, les journées internationales de prière et la création de la « Maison Africaine de la Paix », ont favorisé l'acquisition de nos compétences en dialogue.

Les compétences acquises pendant cette phase préparatoire étaient indispensables. Cependant le dialogue interreligieux n'est pas seulement une question de technicité de la pratique du dialogue. Un autre élément aussi déterminant concerne la personne de l'agent devant conduire le dialogue.

L'identité « contextuelle » pour dialoguer. Deux réalités ont mis à nu nos carences identitaires au début de ce processus du dialogue. Il s'agit de la langue et des rythmes Maxi qui se présentent comme les facteurs d'intégration culturelle sans lesquels aucun dialogue ne serait véritablement possible.

Tous les échanges se tenaient en langue Maxi. Ainsi, lors des premières interventions, nous avons été constamment repris par cette expression : « *dɔ xo nu mi do gbe mi tɔn me* » ce qui équivaut à : « parles-nous dans notre langue ! ». Ceci, parce que notre discours était truffé de mots et expressions français. Né de deux parents Maxi et ayant grandi au village, c'était inconcevable que nous ne puissions tenir une conversation entièrement dans notre langue maternelle. Cette expérience a non seulement révélé une inaptitude à parler la langue Maxi, mais surtout qu'un problème d'identité était en jeu. Il était donc urgent de résoudre ces problèmes fondamentaux avant toute entreprise du dialogue.

La participation à des activités de réjouissance (fêtes, mariage, etc., où il y a toujours des danses), ou de douleur (pertes diverses, funérailles

où le rythme funéraire *Cingumε* est indispensable pour l'adulte, etc.) a mis le comble à la révélation de notre acculturation qui constituait un autre obstacle majeur à tout dialogue. En effet, c'est avec l'anthropologie du geste de Marcel Jousse (1969), que nous avons compris qu'il ne s'agit pas du rythme pour le rythme ou de la danse pour la danse. Mais c'est par le rythme que l'identité psychologique de la communauté s'anime à travers des procédés musicaux à plusieurs niveaux.

Ainsi, les deux grandes pièces manquantes au « puzzle de notre identité » que furent le problème linguistique et l'acculturation aux rythmes ethniques Maxi, ont été très tôt prises en compte par l'inscription au cours d'alphabétisation et d'initiation aux rythmes ethniques : le « Cingumε » et les panégyriques. Cette transformation s'est concrétisée par « l'enculturation aux formes d'éducation et d'apprentissage » (Hounssounon-Tolin 2014, 25), qui est un moyen naturel chez les peuples verbomoteurs pour l'acquisition d'une certaine maîtrise de la culture. Car « tout homme doit subir le processus d' « enculturation » dans son environnement ethnique, sans lequel il ne saurait exister en tant que membre d'une société ».

Ainsi, la maîtrise de la langue et de certains rythmes, a participé grandement à notre réintégration communautaire au pays Maxi. C'est à cette condition que fut amorcée la résolution du conflit qui avait duré près d'une décennie. Et de cette expérience, nous avons formalisé une approche africaine pour faire le dialogue chez le peuple verbomoteur et qui sera objet de la section suivante.

3. MADIR, nature, caractéristiques et étapes

MADIR est une stratégie de recherche relevant d'un système de recherche qualitative. Son objectif est double. Comme toute recherche qualitative dont le but premier est de collecter des données d'analyse pour solutionner

un problème, MADIR vise un second objectif qui est pratique, celui de découvrir un contexte, un peuple, une culture et surtout un problème relationnel.

La présentation succincte du modèle se fera à travers les quatre sections que sont : La nature spécifique de l'approche, les caractéristiques fondantes, les sept (7) étapes qui assurent sa réalisation et la méthode de collecte de données la plus appropriée.

3.1 La nature spécifique de MADIR

La spécificité du modèle vient du fait qu'il ne parte pas d'un thème de recherche, mais plutôt d'un objet de recherche. Il est donc une stratégie de recherche. La définition et l'illustration dans les lignes qui suivent permettront de saisir la spécificité de MADIR.

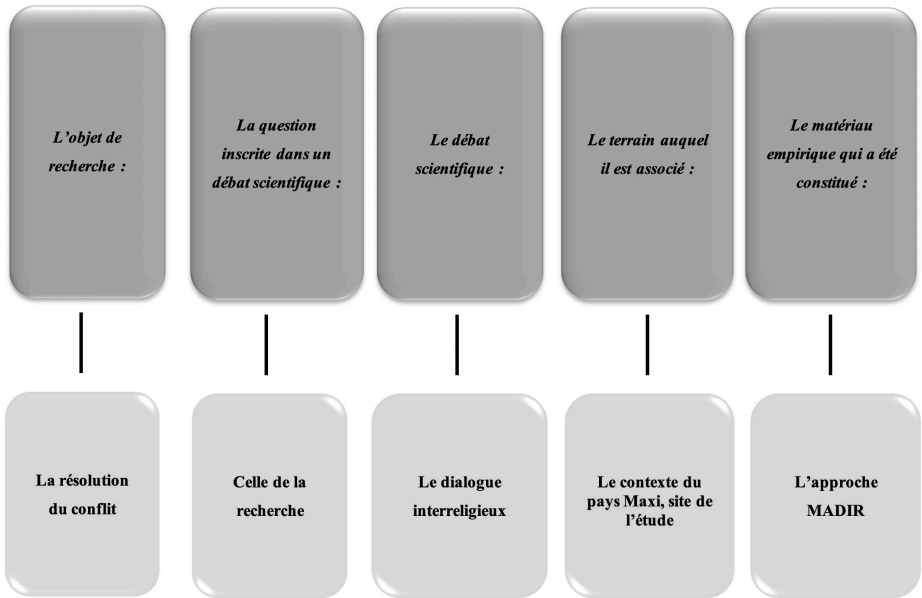
3.1.1 MADIR, une stratégie de recherche

La meilleure définition de la stratégie de recherche est celle de Duchesne & Haegel. Nous la recopions sans commentaire, mais l'illustrons dans un schéma. « Par 'stratégie de recherche' on entend non un thème, mais bien un objet de recherche construit comme tel, autrement dit une question inscrite dans un débat scientifique et associée à un terrain, à partir duquel sera constitué un matériau empirique » (Duchesne et Haegel 2014,5).

3.1.2 MADIR, processus méthodologique

Le schéma met en parallèle la structure séquentielle de la définition de la stratégie de recherche et la méthodologie de formulation de MADIR.

Graphique N°1 : Méthodologie de formulation de MADIR



3.2 Les caractéristiques repères

MADIR est une approche de recherche exploratoire car il n'y a généralement pas d'hypothèse à tester. Mais elle recherche plutôt une nouvelle compréhension des réalités socio-ethnologiques. Les six principales caractéristiques qui la fondent et qui sont inspirées des travaux de Creswell (2009), ont été contextualisées. MADIR est donc un outil de recherche ethnographique d'approche qualitative spécifique. Elle se réalise dans un cadre naturel de vie où les participants constituent la centralité de la recherche. Dans MADIR, le rôle du chercheur est fondamental et

spécifique car il travaille sur les données d'analyse significatives que sont l'identité ethnique et l'histoire culturelle.

3.2.1 MADIR : un outil de recherche ethnographique

L'ethnographie est « une stratégie d'enquête dans laquelle le chercheur étudie un groupe culturel intact dans un environnement naturel sur une période prolongée en recueillant principalement des données d'observation et d'interviews » (Creswell 2009 : 13). L'aspect descriptif de l'ethnographie, indispensable pour l'analyse et la compréhension du problème d'étude, est doublé de l'objectif d'intégration culturelle ayant pour finalité l'identification ethnique. C'est cette intégration et l'identification du chercheur au peuple de sa recherche qui font que MADIR est une approche de recherche qualitative spécifique.

3.2.2 MADIR : une approche qualitative spécifique

La spécificité de MADIR est ce que Creswell désigne par « paradigme de la recherche qualitative ». Cette dernière a pour but « de comprendre une situation sociale, un événement, un rôle, un groupe ou une interaction sociale particulier (Loke, Spirduso et Silverman, 1987) ... ce qui implique une immersion dans la vie quotidienne du lieu choisi d'étude. Le chercheur entre dans le monde des informateurs et, à travers une interaction continue, cherche les perspectives et la signification des informateurs (Creswell 2009 : 194). Les deux aspects consistant en l'immersion et la découverte des perspectives et significations des informateurs, dans le cas de MADIR, exigent une compétence linguistique incontournable. C'est ce paradigme linguistique qui fait la spécificité de notre approche. On en conclut que la maîtrise de la « langue du peuple de la recherche » est incontournable.

Un autre élément qui confère à MADIR une spécificité est le cadre naturel de la recherche.

3.2.3 MADIR : un principe du cadre naturel de la recherche

Les éléments qui désignent le cadre naturel de la recherche sont, le terrain ou site naturel de vie du peuple de la recherche, l'absence d'usage de laboratoire pour la recherche et enfin, le bannissement d'instruments (questionnaires ou autres à faire compléter par des informateurs). Le premier élément indique qu'il s'agit de l'environnement où vit le peuple concerné. Et MADIR est applicable prioritairement dans le monde rural bénéficiant d'une certaine homogénéité linguistique, culturelle et religieuse. Le second élément stipule que la recherche ne peut pas se faire en dehors de ce cadre naturel de vie ou créer un environnement ou un système particulier à l'intérieur dudit cadre naturel. Le peuple verbomoteur étant très sensible et suspicieux, toute interférence à leur cadre de vie détournerait des réalités à analyser. Le troisième élément indique que tout instrument de collecte d'information (comme questionnaire) qui s'interposerait entre le chercheur et le peuple, aurait la même conséquence que celle susmentionnée. La rencontre du peuple objet de la recherche dans son cadre naturel de vie est une recommandation non négociable pour l'application de MADIR.

3.2.4 MADIR : un principe des participants au centre de la recherche

La compréhension ou la signification que les participants accordent au problème en étude fonde la centralité du sens des données de MADIR. En effet, « *dans l'ensemble de la recherche qualitative, le chercheur reste concentré sur l'apprentissage du sens que les participants ont du problème. Pas le sens*

que le chercheur apporte à la recherche, ni ce que les écrivains expriment dans la littérature » (Creswell 2009, 175). Dans le cas de MADIR, ce n'est pas le chercheur qui détermine l'échantillon, mais ce dernier émerge des différents niveaux de structuration de la société. Et comme chez le peuple verbomoteur, la représentation du peuple obéit à des règles sociétales (hiérarchie fonctionnelle), c'est à la communauté que revient le droit de désigner ses représentants. Avec MADIR, on dénombre plusieurs catégories d'échantillons. La première est issue de l'ethnie et les autres, des communautés antagonistes.

Le moyen d'accéder à la signification des données constitue l'une des particularités de la recherche qualitative mise en exergue par Creswell : « s'engager dans les activités que fait la population d'étude » (Creswell 2009, 16). Dans le cas de MADIR, l'objectif de cette implication dans les activités du peuple est double. Le premier consiste à accéder à la signification du problème telle que le peuple le conçoit. Le second, très spécifique à notre approche, consiste à s'identifier au peuple. Il s'agit d'un moyen d'établir une certaine confiance entre le chercheur et le peuple au point où ce dernier puisse se soumettre aux recommandations du chercheur. Ce dernier élément met en lumière l'importance du rôle du chercheur dans MADIR.

3.2.5 MADIR : une prépondérance du rôle du chercheur

L'importance de la personne du chercheur dans MADIR est mise en exergue par Creswell dans l'assertion que « les chercheurs dans l'approche qualitative, sont ceux qui rassemblent réellement les informations et qui ne tentent pas d'utiliser ou de s'appuyer sur des questionnaires ou des instruments développés par d'autres chercheurs » (Creswell 2009 : 175). La recherche qualitative étant une recherche interprétative, elle exige l'implication du chercheur dans une expérience soutenue et intensive

avec les participants. Dans le contexte de MADIR, le chercheur doit jouir des compétences communicationnelles propres au site de la recherche. L'histoire, la culture et les valeurs fondamentales du chercheur doivent s'apparenter à celles de ceux du contexte d'étude. Particulièrement la compétence linguistique favorise l'arrimage entre son identité et celle du peuple d'étude.

En conséquence, l'importance du rôle du chercheur dans le cas de MADIR s'exprime par le double objectif de la recherche qualitative que constitue d'une part, la collecte des données à analyser et d'autre part, l'intégration communautaire du chercheur. Ce deuxième objectif oriente sur les données principales à examiner.

3.2.6 MADIR : des données de base, identité ethnique et histoire culturelle

Creswell rapporte les quatre éléments que Miles et Huberman (1999) ont identifiés pour la recherche sur site : « le cadre (l'espace où la recherche aura lieu). Les acteurs (qui seront observés ou interviewés). L'événement (ce sur quoi les acteurs seront observés ou interviewés), et le processus (la nature évolutive des événements organisés par les acteurs dans l'environnement) » (Creswell 2009, 178). La spécificité de MADIR n'est pas le phénomène intrinsèquement qui sera observé ou étudié, mais ce sont les acteurs (deuxième élément) dans leur rapport avec le phénomène (restauration, mission ou religion) qui constituent le point focal des données à analyser. C'est pourquoi MADIR adopte un principe en deux volets corrélatifs pour l'observation des données : « l'identité ethnique comme base du dialogue et l'histoire culturelle pour rétablir la confiance mutuelle ».

Ainsi, les principes : « l'identité ethnique comme base de dialogue » et « l'histoire culturelle ... » demeurent les principes d'intégration culturelle pour toute recherche empirique chez le peuple verbomoteur.

Ces six caractéristiques qui fondent MADIR permettent de comprendre les sept étapes qui en assurent la réalisation.

3.3 Les sept étapes de réalisation de MADIR

MADIR est une stratégie de recherche qui vise une nouvelle compréhension à développer du lien entre les données d'analyse, le peuple d'étude et le chercheur. Pour une présentation simplifiée et compréhensible, la description arbore l'outil en trois (3) grandes phases, comportant sept étapes. La schématisation de MADIR dans un tableau favorise la vue d'ensemble des étapes à l'intérieure des phases. Chacune des sept étapes de l'approche, s'appuie sur des travaux d'experts qui leur prêtent un soutien scientifique, mais qui ne seront pas développées dans le présent résumé.³

3.3.1 Schéma des relations phase/étapes

Le tableau ci-après permet de visualiser dans leur ensemble les éléments de MADIR avant leur description.

3 Pour un développement détaillé, se référer à notre Dissertation de thèse.

Tableau n°1 : Phases et étapes de MADIR

PHASE	ETAPES	TITRE DES ETAPES
Phase 1 (préparation)	Première (I)	Revue des travaux scientifiques sur le dialogue interculturel et interreligieux et initiation pratique au dialogue.
Phase 2 (exploration)	Deuxième (II)	Description socio-anthropologique de l'ethnie de l'étude.
	Troisième (III)	Description pratique et théologique d'une religion endogène.
	Quatrième (IV)	Description pratique et théologique d'une religion instituée.
Phase 3 (formulation)	Cinquième (V)	Analyse critique ou descriptive de la situation à la lumière des données bibliques.
	Sixième (VI)	Approche pratique du dialogue de résolution de conflit, de mission ou de théologie dans l'ethnie d'étude.
	Septième (VII)	Résumé du processus de l'application.

Source : nos travaux, 2020

Ce tableau met en relief le lien organique entre les différentes phases et les étapes correspondantes ainsi que leur contenu.

3.3.2 Description des phases et étapes

Les phases se suivent dans une logique de préparation à la formulation en passant par l'expérimentation. Chacune comporte un certain nombre d'étapes dans une logique correspondante. La description se fera par phase, chacune avec ses étapes, introduite par une question indiquant l'objectif à atteindre par l'étape.

Première phase et l'étape première

La première phase ou phase préparatoire décrit tous les préparatifs pour l'acquisition des prérequis théorico-pratiques indispensable à un bon dialogue. Elle n'a que la première étape.

L'étape 1 est celle de la « revue des travaux scientifiques sur les dialogues culturel et interreligieux ». Elle répond à la question : « **Que disent les experts ?** ».

Cette étape examine les travaux des experts sur le dialogue. Elle correspond à une revue littéraire dans les autres méthodes de recherche. Le chercheur doit se familiariser avec les travaux de ces experts avant d'entreprendre sa propre recherche de terrain.

Le chercheur gagnerait en compétences en participant à des colloques, des symposiums sur le dialogue culturel et interreligieux. La pratique dans des centres ou des structures expérimentales du dialogue serait un atout supplémentaire qui facilitera la recherche empirique chez le peuple verbomoteur.

Deuxième phase et les étapes 2, 3 et 4

La deuxième phase ou phase de la recherche proprement dite, commence depuis l'implication du chercheur sur le terrain de la recherche jusqu'à l'aboutissement de la réconciliation, dans le cas de résolution du conflit. Dans le cas de la mission, l'aboutissement sera la création de la première « église indigène ». Ou, s'il s'agit de la théologie, cette phase sera sanctionnée par la description de la plus grande religion ou croyance ethnique. Ce sont les étapes 2,3 et 4 qui rendent compte des résultats de cette phase.

L'étape 2 met en lumière comment l'immersion au sein de la communauté ethnique a permis de comprendre et d'analyser la société, la culture et l'homme « ethnique » pour être en mesure d'ébaucher l'histoire,

la sociologie, l'anthropologie, la linguistique et le rythme de l'ethnie étudiée (Maxi, Cf. notre thèse). Cette étape 2 répond à la question : « **Quel est le peuple/ethnie/groupe à étudier ?** », et fait une description socio anthropologique de l'ethnie. La description peut exploiter la littérature existante, mais elle doit impliquer une recherche qualitative.

L'étape 3 décrit comment l'intégration religieuse a permis de comprendre et d'analyser la plus grande religion ou croyance de l'ethnie, pour être en mesure de décrire cette religion ou cette croyance de l'intérieur,⁴ son histoire, ses caractéristiques, le processus de son organisation et sa fonction dans son environnement. Cette étape répond à la question : « **Que dit la religion dominante du peuple ?** », et aboutit à une formulation religieuse de l'ethnie. Elle s'apparente à l'étape 2 de la méthodologie de Browning (1996) qui répond à la question « que dit le christianisme ? »

Dans un contexte d'inexistence de texte sacré, le chercheur a la responsabilité de produire la référence religieuse. Il s'agit donc d'une recherche empirique qui nécessite une recherche préliminaire consistant à identifier la religion⁵ représentative ou la plus grande du peuple d'étude. L'identification peut se faire selon les critères définissant une religion, élaborés par Eliade Mircea (1949). La formulation religieuse se fera sur ladite grande religion dont les premières élaborations suivront le contenu de la première étape de la méthodologie de Rolf Zerfass (Cf. document de SATS : Research Methodologies, p.11) « Tradition théologique », mais

4 La description ou la formulation religieuse se fera selon ce que les pratiquants conçoivent de leur religion et non selon une interprétation du chercheur. Généralement c'est au prix de plusieurs initiations qu'un tel niveau d'intégration sera atteint.

5 Dans le contexte religieux africain, il faut distinguer entre les croyances et pratiques parareligieuses (magie, sorcellerie et divination) et les religions proprement dites (Mulaga gwa Cikala 1971).

dont la théologie sera celle de la religion ethnique. Et comme il le suggère, elle va concerner « les croyances fondamentales » et couvrira les aspects historiques, les valeurs éthiques fondamentales et les données liturgiques ». Ce sera une recherche fondamentale incontournable, qu'il s'agisse de la restauration, de la mission ou de la théologie africaine.

L'étape 4 permet de comprendre comment notre intégration dans la communauté chrétienne la plus étendue (dans le cas de notre étude de cas c'est l'Eglise Evangélique des Assemblées de Dieu EEAD) nous a permis d'ébaucher l'histoire et l'organisation chrétienne, de décrire les stratégies d'évangélisation et d'exposer la sotériologie, telle qu'elle est comprise et vécue par les fidèles chrétiens du contexte. Cette étape répond à la question : « **Quel est l'impact du témoignage chrétien ?** » par la description pratique et théologique de la mission chrétienne.

En somme, les trois étapes 2, 3, et 4, fournissent les données et les éléments nécessaires au chercheur pour lui permettre d'entreprendre les analyses pour la recherche de solution ou la conception des stratégies de création d'église ou de formulation théologique, objet de la troisième phase.

La troisième phase et les étapes 5, 6 et 7

La troisième phase ou phase de formalisation commence par les analyses et les critiques, et se poursuit avec les descriptions et les formulations. Ce sont les étapes 5, 6 et 7 qui rendent compte de ces trois éléments constituant l'ensemble de la formalisation.

L'étape 5 analyse la situation à partir des données recueillies pour développer les facteurs historiques, socioculturels et théologiques du conflit. Cette étape répond à la question : « **qu'est-ce qui doit se passer ?** ». Son objectif est la recherche de la tâche normative à la lumière de la volonté de Dieu. Que ce soit pour la résolution, pour la mission ou la formulation

théologique, tout repose sur le modèle de Jésus-Christ, manifesté par l'amour inconditionnel dans le dialogue avec les humains. La concrétude du modèle de cet amour se voit dans son incarnation, son intégration dans le contexte socio-anthropologique des humains à sauver. Car, c'est à cette condition qu'il y a, d'abord dépassement de la révélation vétérotestamentaire, ensuite, compréhension puis appropriation de l'amour incarné qu'est le Christ. Il n'a pas seulement reconcilié le monde avec Dieu, mais il a aussi enseigné et laissé un modèle d'amour basé sur le dialogue. La réconciliation, la mission et l'élaboration d'une théologie africaine, doivent se concevoir, se formuler et s'exprimer à partir du modèle de l' « amour dialogal » du Christ.

L'étape 6 décrit la pratique et répond donc à la question : « **Comment s'opère le dialogue sur le terrain ?** ». Au niveau de cette étape, le chercheur passe d'une formulation théorique à une application pratique. Cette étape se présente comme un compte rendu de la mise en pratique des étapes 2, 3, 4 et 5.

Le chercheur décrit cette étape comme la vitrine, l'évaluation et le guide pratique de l'approche. Puisqu'elle est la concrétude de l'approche, cette étape rejoint ainsi toutes les méthodologies de la théologie pratique qu'Osmer résume de la manière suivante : « *la théologie pratique fournit souvent de l'aide en proposant des modèles de pratique et des règles de l'art. Les modèles de pratique offrent aux dirigeants une image générale du domaine dans lequel ils agissent et des moyens de modeler ce domaine vers les objectifs souhaités. Les règles de l'art sont des directives plus spécifiques sur la manière de mener des actions ou des pratiques particulières* » (Osmer 2008, 176). Cela peut donner lieu, par exemple, à une ébauche de l'histoire de l'église indigène naissante dans le cas de la mission.

Etape 7 résume le processus de l'application et répond à la question : « **Que conclure de la méthodologie appliquée ?** ». Cette étape

de la conclusion fait partie intégrante de la méthodologie. Elle permet de mettre en valeur l'aspect dynamique du modèle parce qu'il s'agit d'une approche de transformation de situation, de système, de communauté et de personnes. Ainsi cette étape permet au chercheur d'exposer les leçons tirées, les défis rencontrés et les limites de l'expérimentation de son application, pour permettre que les travaux ultérieurs en prolongent la perfection.

Ces sept étapes ainsi exposées, ne peuvent se réaliser que selon une stratégie d'enquête appropriée. Et selon Creswell (2009, 201), « le choix de la stratégie de collecte doit être présenté et défendu ». La section suivante s'attelle à cet objectif.

3.4 La méthodologie de collecte de données

L'entretien collectif est, parmi toutes les méthodes de collecte de données, celle qui récapitule à elle seule toutes les caractéristiques (§21) qui fondent MADIR. Les deux sections suivantes, la première, donne la définition et la seconde indique quelques raisons⁶ principales de son choix.

3.4.1 Définition de l'entretien collectif

Selon Morgan (1998), l'entretien collectif est d'abord une méthode d'entretiens de recherche, « autrement dit, il s'agit de données discursives destinées à l'analyse, provoquées et recueillies par un chercheur sur des thèmes qu'il a déterminés et qui peuvent... bien évidemment aussi concerner

6 Pour les autres conditions, se référer à notre thèse : Augustin C Ahoga 2020. « Vers un Modèle Africain Dialogue Inter-Religieux : Cas du Vodun Xébyoso et l'Eglise des Assemblées de Dieu dans la région Maxi au Bénin ». PhD diss. South Africa : SATS, pp. 34-36.

les enquêtés » (Duchesne and Haegel 2014, 42). Ensuite, ces entretiens sont collectifs, c'est-à-dire, qu'ils mettent en scène plus de deux personnes. « La relation sociale qui les caractérise ne se réduit pas au rapport enquêteur/enquêté et suppose donc une prise en compte des interactions sociales qui se jouent dans le cadre collectif de la discussion » (p.43). Cette description indique l'entretien collectif est la meilleure méthode de collecte de données pour MADIR. Car elle décrit bien le processus, le contexte, et les caractéristiques de la population. Mais il existe aussi autres raisons pour lesquelles cette méthode est choisie.

3.4.2 Quelques raisons du choix de l'entretien collectif

Il existe au moins sept autres raisons (cf. thèse) pour lesquelles cette méthode est choisie. Mais évoquons seulement les deux plus fondamentales : son lien avec la stratégie de recherche et le fait que cette approche favorise le dialogue.

a) Approprié pour la stratégie de recherche

La méthode de l'entretien collectif doit être rapportée à la stratégie de recherche dans laquelle on l'utilise. Par « stratégie de recherche » on entend non un thème, mais bien un objet de recherche construit comme tel, autrement dit une question inscrite dans un débat scientifique et associée à un terrain, à partir duquel sera constitué un matériau empirique (Duchesne et Haegel 2014, 5). La conception de MADIR est un objet de recherche élaborée qui touche au débat scientifique du dialogue interreligieux et qui a nécessité investigations et implication du chercheur sur le terrain de sa réalisation (pays Maxi) pour son élaboration. L'application de la stratégie de recherche ne saurait se dissocier de la méthode de collecte de données qu'est l'entretien collectif.

b) L'entretien collectif favorise le dialogue.

Duchesne et Haegel (2014, 35) montrent que l'intérêt de l'entretien collectif est de « saisir les prises de positions en interaction les unes avec les autres et non de manière isolée. Il permet à la fois l'analyse des significations partagées et du désaccord, grâce à la prise en compte des interactions sociales qui se manifestent dans la discussion ». Il s'agit d'une description du dialogue de recherche.

Nous en concluons que l'entretien collectif constitue la meilleure méthode d'investigation pour l'application de MADIR, qui a fait ses preuves au pays Maxi dont la section en fait l'écho

4. Application de MADIR chez les Maxi du Bénin

Nous présentons ici en quelques données informatives, les réalisations concrètes qui émergent de l'application de MADIR, étape par étape. Nos données ne concerneront que le volet de résolution du conflit, sachant que la suggestion de l'application en missiologie et recherche en théologie africaine de MADIR, sont à expérimenter.

4.1 L'étape 1 : Préparation à l'application de MADIR

La préparation concrète à l'application de MADIR s'est matérialisée par la constitution du groupe d'intermédiation culturel et religieux. Nous avons appliqué ici le principe d'intermédiation reposant sur la recommandation de Jésus à ses disciples de trouver « des hommes dignes » dans chaque ville ou village où ils se rendraient (Matt 10: 11). L'homme digne ou encore l'homme de référence remplit deux conditions fondamentales dont la première, l'impact social, lui est conférée par son vécu de valeurs sociétales appréciées par les gens au sein desquels il vit. La seconde condition,

corollaire à la première, est que l'homme digne est écouté et jouit d'une certaine crédibilité auprès de son peuple.

Ainsi, les trois intermédiaires au pays Maxi furent : le roi Tchaou Toffa de Logozoxe, un intellectuel et homme d'affaires, Ahoga Benoît, un Ancien de l'église Evangéliques des Assemblée de Dieu de Logozoxe, et Dah Kandénou, « hunnon » (prêtre vodun), ingénieur géomètre, homme politique et Chef d'Arrondissement de Logozoxe. Ils ont constitué le collège d'intermédiation sans lequel, notre intégration aurait été problématique.

4.2 Etape 2 : Intégration culturelle

Cette étape a permis de voyager dans le passé du peuple Maxi pour retracer le récit des évènements passés. Cette histoire ébauchée par les Maxi eux-mêmes, montre comment le socle culturel est bâti sur la communauté comme le déterminant des identités individuelle et communautaire. Cette étape montre comment l'anthropologie Maxi repose sur l'ancestralité et les entraves à la vie sont régies par l'ensemble des croyances institué par le système Vodun. L'exposé de la vision du monde de Thom Wright (1997) a servi de guide aux analyses et orientations.

4.3 Etape 3 : Intégration dans la religion endogène

Cette étape révèle le Vodun de son intérieur. Elle fait découvrir que si on naît dans les Vodun lignagers, on devient membre des religions Vodun par cooptation et initiation. Cette initiation ouvre le chemin à un processus de socialisation qui est une continuité et un approfondissement de la socialisation culturelle commencée au niveau familial. Le Vodun Xebyoso, représentant des Vodun au pays Maxi, se manifeste par le phénomène naturel de la foudre et du tonnerre. Ce Vodun exerce les fonctions de

justicier, de guérisseur et de régulateur des manifestations atmosphériques. Son influence impacte toute vie dans le contexte Maxi, à tel point qu'il constitue un défi pour la conversion aux autres traditions religieuses.

4.4 Etape 4 : Intégration dans la religion instituée

Cette étape a permis de remonter le cours de l'histoire des EEAD jusqu'à leurs origines aux USA, dans la ville de Findlay en Ohio. La création de cette dénomination au pays Maxi a suivi les voies traditionnelles des explorateurs, de la colonisation et des anciennes missions. L'histoire des EEAD montre que l'on devient membre par conversion « metanoïa », qui se comprend et se manifeste par une désocialisation ethnique, un rejet de sa propre culture pour l'adoption et l'intégration dans une nouvelle structure qu'est l'église. La fonction de la mission a consisté essentiellement à avertir les autochtones du danger qu'ils courent en demeurant dans leurs croyances voduistes et leur offrir l'opportunité de les quitter pour le salut de leurs âmes. Ce message et la rupture des chrétiens Maxi avec leur ethnie ont exacerbé les Hunnon qui ont réagi par violence et provoqué le conflit religieux qui a duré des décennies.

4.5 Etape 5 : Analyse et solution

Cette étape a permis d'identifier les causes du conflit, qui est d'ordre théologique du côté de la communauté de la mission et ethnique du côté de la communauté Vodun Xebyoso. La principale cause théologique relève de la sotériologie des EEAD que ceux du Bénin comprennent comme une rupture géo spatiale, sociologique, culturelle et religieuse. La communauté Vodun n'a pu tolérer la faute grave de rupture et d'ignominie ethnique. Elle a répondu par des stratégies dont l'une fut la violence physique. Cette

étape a montré que le problème est dû à l'absence de la compréhension et la pratique de l'amour biblique, caractéristique du disciple. La solution suggérée fut nommée « mission dialogale », qui doit reposer sur le modèle de Jésus-Christ. La « mission dialogale », pour résoudre le conflit, a aidé les deux communautés à la réappropriation de l'identité ethnique brisée. La reconstitution de l'histoire a été l'excellente stratégie pour cette réappropriation.

4.6 Etape 6 : Application pratique

Cette étape a mis en exergue l'efficacité de l'approche de résolution du conflit proposée. L'identité ethnique brisée par la rupture due à la conversion s'est rétablie par le moyen de la reconstitution de l'histoire des Maxi. Les acteurs de cette restauration furent le chercheur, et les trois intermédiaires, les hommes de paix de chaque communauté. La résolution a favorisé le partage des douleurs, indispensable pour le pardon et la guérison. Il s'agit surtout d'un recours aux principes bibliques de l'amour du prochain dont Jésus est le modèle.

4.7 Etape 7 : Synthèse, défis et perspectives

Cette étape rapporte le processus dynamique de MADIR qui repose sur les ressources humaines fondamentales que sont les intermédiaires culturo-religieux, et le « nouveau » chercheur. Elle expose aussi, les grands défis linguistiques, la durée d'investissement et surtout le défi financier qui incombe à la réalisation de MADIR. Enfin, cette étape relate l'originalité de MADIR et les perspectives qu'elle offre pour une nouvelle approche missiologique ou recherche théologique en Afrique.

5. Conclusion

Le Modèle Africain de Dialogue InterReligieux (MADIR) est une approche pour faire le dialogue dans les communautés africaines à la base. Il prend en compte les contextes et les données socioculturelles et anthropologiques propres aux peuples verbomoteurs. C'est une approche de recherche stratégique, fortement ethnographique. MADIR se présente donc comme une solution aux besoins pratiques de dialogue dans le monde moderne qui ne peut échapper au pluralisme des cultures et des traditions religieuses. Il permet de répondre au besoin de nouveaux paradigmes nécessaires dans l'interaction avec les autres religions.

MADIR offre aussi une voie d'application de la pensée de Louis Massignon qui stipule que « pour comprendre l'autre, il ne faut pas se l'annexer, il faut se faire son hôte » (Levrat 2003/0927, 8). MADIR se présente comme cet outil pour se faire hôte chez les autres, surtout chez le peuple verbomoteur, sans les dominer, ni les juger ni les cataloguer, mais pour pénétrer leur vision du monde et les comprendre tels qu'ils sont. MADIR, enfin, renvoie au principe de recherche énoncé par « Jousse (1969, 35) : on ne reçoit pas du dehors et toute faite une méthode scientifique. On se la crée partiellement à soi-même en ajustant celle d'autrui. Il y a aussi, en méthodologie, une équation personnelle ». Son introduction dans les laboratoires de facultés théologiques, le crédibilisera pour en faire un outil scientifique d'examen des réalités africaines. Et si amener l'Évangile au cœur de la vision du monde de l'Afrique, se présente comme le préalable à toute formulation, MADIR se présente comme un chemin nouveau à expérimenter.

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Vers une stratégie
d'évangélisation spécifique
auprès des groupes minoritaires
de la société plurielle sécularisée
des Antilles françaises :
Un défi pour l'Église adventiste
du septième jour et sa mission

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Résumé

Le principal problème de cette thèse est de parvenir à mettre en place une stratégie d'évangélisation permettant d'atteindre les groupes de population syro-libanais, indo-caribéens et blancs créoles sur le territoire sécularisé des Antilles françaises. Cette étude s'inscrit dans le domaine de la recherche descriptive qui a pour objectif de décrire un ou plusieurs éléments caractérisant un groupe de personnes ou ce que nous appelons de manière plus technique une *unité d'observation*. L'auteur fait observer

qu'aucune étude descriptive quantitative n'avait été élaborée dans le domaine de la théologie pratique dans les Antilles françaises à l'endroit de ces trois groupes minoritaires. L'évangélisation auprès de ces groupes minoritaires représente certes un défi pour la mission de l'église en lien avec la vision du monde de ces populations mais elle apparaît pourtant comme une mission possible et réaliste dans l'histoire de la mission de l'Église adventiste des Antilles françaises.

Mots-clés

Sécularisation, sécularisme, modernité, postmodernité, hypermodernité, Syro-Libanais, Indo-Caribéens, Blancs créoles, évangélisation, mission.

Abstract

The main objective of this thesis consists of developing an evangelistic strategy to reach the Syrian-Lebanese, Indo-Caribbean and white Creole minority groups in the secularized territory of the French Antilles. This descriptive research aims to describe one or more elements characterizing a group of people or what we call in a more technical way an observation investigation unit. The author notes that no quantitative descriptive study had been developed so far with regard to these three minority groups in the field of practical theology in the French Antilles. Regarding the various worldviews of these populations, evangelism among these minority groups certainly represents an enormous challenge for the Seventh Day Adventist Church of the French Antilles and its mission, but, nevertheless, it remains possible and achievable.

Chapitre 1. Introduction

1.1 Arrière-plan

Le message des trois anges, proclamé par l'Église adventiste, a connu un succès phénoménal au cours des 40 dernières années auprès de la population afro-caribéenne des Antilles françaises (Sempaire-Etienne 2017:21-72). Cependant, ce ne fut pas le cas auprès des autres groupes minoritaires du territoire des Antilles françaises, à savoir la population indienne, syro-libanaise et blancs créoles. Ce défi serait-il lié à un problème d'identité culturelle ? Les missionnaires européens et américains ont-ils omis de toucher les minorités ethniques de la population des Antilles françaises ? Se pourrait-il que ces populations manquantes à l'appel de l'Évangile se soient accordées d'autres priorités pour ne pas embrasser le christianisme ? Quoiqu'il en soit, aucun parmi ces différents groupes de population n'est représenté au sein des dénominations religieuses des Antilles françaises.

1.2 Le problème de recherche

Le principal problème de cette étude est de parvenir à mettre en place une stratégie d'évangélisation permettant d'atteindre les groupes de population syro-libanais, indo-caribéens et blancs créoles sur le territoire des Antilles françaises, que nous considérons comme étant sécularisé. Une telle entreprise n'avait jamais été envisagée dans l'histoire de l'Église adventiste des Antilles françaises. Y aura-t-il eu une certaine réserve dans la mission adventiste à l'adresse de ces groupes minoritaires, de peur de ne pas être confronté à leurs caractères antireligieux ? C'est en cela que Carrier (1990:200) affirme que « les chrétiens prennent conscience plus clairement aujourd'hui que l'espace à évangéliser, c'est la culture sécularisée. Lorsque

l'évangéliste entre dans cette perspective, il est confronté au drame spirituel de notre temps. Il se heurte à l'opacité des cultures qui font écran à l'Évangile. »

1.3 Questions clés.

Qu'entend-on par « sécularisation » ? Comment ce phénomène influence-t-il la société ? Quel est l'état d'esprit des groupes minoritaires dans la société sécularisée des Antilles françaises ? Quel est le regard de l'Église adventiste dans sa mission auprès des minorités sécularisées des Antilles françaises ? Quel est le fondement biblique d'une mission possible auprès de l'esprit séculaire ? Quelles sont les doctrines bibliques qui sont potentiellement affectées par le phénomène de la sécularisation ? Quelle stratégie d'évangélisation l'Église adventiste devrait-elle adopter pour faire face à ce phénomène et atteindre les groupes minoritaires ?

1.4 La méthodologie de la recherche

Dans cette section sur la méthodologie de la recherche, nous nous proposons de développer la méthode descriptive, avec une approche quantitative qui s'inscrit dans notre domaine de la théologie pratique. Compte tenu de nos expériences sur le terrain, il nous semble essentiel d'ajouter également l'analyse empirique, afin de répondre à toutes les exigences données dans le cadre d'une enquête auprès d'un groupe de population. La recherche descriptive a pour objectif de décrire un ou plusieurs éléments caractérisant un groupe de personnes, ou ce que nous appelons, de manière plus technique, une « unité d'observation ». Cette description n'est nullement littéraire, et encore moins poétique, mais est « une description concrète et concise de la réalité » (Vyhmeister & Robertson 2014:65).

1.5 Définition de la population et de l'échantillon d'étude

Concernant les échantillons, Smith (2008:237) fait observer que « l'échantillonnage est un moyen d'obtenir beaucoup d'informations de la part de personnes peu nombreuses. Pour qu'un échantillon soit représentatif de la population totale, il doit présenter toutes les caractéristiques de cette population. » Il est vrai que les groupes de population possèdent des traditions, des cultures et modes de vie qui leur sont propres et qui sont une marque d'appartenance au sein de cette société plurielle des Antilles françaises. Ce brassage culturel est riche de sens dans cette partie du monde, et il retrace l'histoire de plusieurs peuples venant d'ailleurs (Pépin 2012:199).

1.6 Description des procédés de la collecte des données

D'après une première observation, il nous faudrait nous approcher de ces unités d'analyse (Syro-Libanais, Indo-Caribéens et Blancs créoles) de façon simple et présentable. L'individu des Antilles françaises est très sensible à la présentation, et surtout à l'ouverture d'esprit avec son interlocuteur. Nous essaierons autant que possible de nous immerger dans chaque conversation en montrant de l'intérêt et le souci d'en savoir davantage sur la culture de celui avec qui nous nous entretenons.

1.7 Analyses et interprétations des données

L'analyse et l'interprétation des données sont considérées comme étant l'étape la plus passionnante de l'étude, car elles consistent à recueillir les informations et à les interpréter tel qu'elles se présentent (Dorvil 2007:412). Cependant il nous faudrait convertir ces données statistiquement, car l'approche quantitative ne peut se passer des simples descriptions ou observations subjectives, mais doit être transformée en données

numériques, c'est-à-dire objectiver et valider l'analyse par le biais de la « méthode des juges ».

1.8 Vérification de l'authenticité des résultats

Cette démarche consiste à examiner de près si les données recueillies révèlent la réalité du style de vie des différents groupes de population telle que nous la percevions en rapport avec notre hypothèse, les revues littéraires et nos observations sur le terrain. Gauthier (2003:130) le comprend également dans ce sens :

« Le scientifique doit décrire précisément le protocole qu'il utilisera pour tester ses hypothèses et, par ailleurs, il ne bornera pas son observation aux seuls faits qui confirment ses idées préconçues ; il prendra en compte toutes les observations disponibles, qu'elles soutiennent ses hypothèses ou non. »

Notre analyse empirique contribuera largement à la vérification authentique des résultats des unités d'observation.

Chapitre 2. Le processus de la sécularisation et ses influences dans notre société moderne occidentale

2.1 Définition du processus de la sécularisation

Le terme *saeculum* revêt une pluralité de sens tels que : la vie présente, une longue période, le monde dans son aspect temporel, le monde en opposition avec la sphère religieuse. En effet, la sphère religieuse avait toute autorité dans la chrétienté médiévale ; le « séculier » était synonyme d'infériorité. Le temps présent appartenait au *saeculum*, et celui-ci cherchait le secours du monde religieux pour bénéficier de l'éternité.

Au milieu du XX^{ème} siècle, le processus de la sécularisation se définit comme un phénomène à la fois universel et multidimensionnel qui s'inscrit dans un processus de « changement culturel et social » enfermant et englobant « tous les aspects de la vie et de la pensée humaine » (Rasi & Guy 1985:45, 46). Berger (1971:276) affirme à juste titre « qu'il existe une sécularisation sociétale et culturelle ; il y a donc une sécularisation de la conscience. »

Le processus de la sécularisation restructure la pensée de l'individu en le dégageant des jous du pouvoir ecclésiastique d'autrefois, pour faire de lui un être autonome dont l'action et le mode d'existence sont strictement anthropocentriques. Il ne serait donc pas surprenant de constater une disparition progressive des valeurs et des principes qui, autrefois, réajustaient la cellule familiale, voire le comportement de l'individu. Lorsque l'on traite la question de l'influence du phénomène dans l'existence de l'homme ultramoderne, c'est évoquer toutes les dimensions qui ont trait à ses habitudes de vie, tant dans l'espace familial, sociétal que religieux. Dobbelaere (2004:29) cite Luckmann et Webber, qui affirment que la sécularisation affecte davantage l'aspect culturel de l'existence tel que l'art, la philosophie et la littérature. Dillon (2003:114) voit que ce processus de changement influe le comportement de l'homme, tout en entraînant une mutation importante au niveau de la structure sociale. La vision que se donne ce phénomène ne s'inscrit pas exclusivement à l'échelle universelle, mais sociétale, puisqu'elle implique des individus entiers avec leurs modes de vie, de pensée affectant même leurs spiritualités.¹

1 Depuis les 30 dernières années, nous assistons à un effritement de la cellule familiale. Les valeurs familiales qui réglementaient la vie de tous sont en voie de disparition et sont remplacées par des valeurs subjectives. Le cours d'éthique qui, jadis, était enseigné en classes primaires, n'est plus dispensé dans nos écoles laïques. C'est le

Depuis le début du XX^{ème} siècle, l'individu sécularisé a adopté un mode de vie dans lequel ses choix, ses goûts et ses pensées sont relativisés, et à la fois très subjectifs. Il peut sombrer dans le narcissisme et l'excentrisme, dans lesquels les choix ne sont plus éclairés par la conscience, qui est censée exercer le rôle d'arbitre dans ce qui est bien et ce qui est mauvais, dans ce qui est vrai et ce qui est faux.²

2.2 L'irréversibilité du déclin et le phénomène du renouveau

La sécularisation semble être irréversible, avec ses puissants effets sur le comportement et le mode de vie des individus. Mais qu'en est-il de l'aspect religieux ? Le phénomène envisage-t-il d'impacter ce qui est au plus profond de l'homme, à savoir sa spiritualité ? Pour comprendre la vision du phénomène du point de vue religieux dans la mentalité de l'homme sécularisé, nous devons nous rappeler que les siècles de domination de la sphère religieuse, qui restreignaient la liberté de conscience et d'expression sous peine de tortures et de bûchers de l'Inquisition à celle de la guillotine

principe de la liberté individuelle qui prime, dans la mesure où chacun respecte la dignité de l'autre. Pour les sécularistes, toutes les valeurs sont justes et se valent et, par conséquent, pourront être profitables en fonction de l'usage qu'on en fait.

- 2 Dans une autre partie de ce chapitre, une analyse plus approfondie sera consacrée au concept de la relativité. Mais il nous faut tout de même retenir ici l'aspect psychologique du phénomène sur l'esprit ; domaine dans lequel les chercheurs émettent des réserves parce qu'ils le jugent peu fiable, mais qui, à mon sens, me semble fondamental, car le processus de la sécularisation influe fortement sur le psychisme, afin de changer progressivement nos comportements et nos habitudes de vie. Le monde dans lequel nous vivons a connu des périodes sombres dans son histoire. Des populations entières appartenant à telles civilisations, telles nations ou tels États, sont nombreuses à avoir été victimes de manipulations, et parfois ont été entraînées dans des désillusions profondes.

de la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle, ont créé une émancipation de la pratique religieuse tous azimuts.³

De ce fait, l'homme ultramoderne veut se démarquer de cette ère ténébreuse pour se reconstruire en adoptant le processus dit de « déchristianisation », visant à la fois une désacralisation pure et simple de son nouveau mode d'existence. Pourrait-on évoquer un phénomène de déclin en termes de fréquentation et d'adhésion au catholicisme ? Certainement. Y aurait-il une désacralisation dans le renouveau charismatique en pleine émergence dans cette société moderne sécularisée ? Vraisemblablement. Laot observe, quant à lui, le phénomène du déclin religieux dans son analyse, mais encore une sorte de « déclergification » au sein du catholicisme (1990:52).⁴

Les spécialistes qui analysent le sujet perçoivent également des changements qui en résultent dans la sphère religieuse et chez ceux qui sont en quête d'une « spiritualité à la demande ». Soares (2009:35) voit le passage « d'un religieux dérobé, réfugié dans les grandes cathédrales à un 'religieux partout', défiguré et éclaté en miettes – une sorte de 'religion à la carte'⁵ offrant un christianisme de communautés émotionnelles

3 D'après Tschannen (1992:286), qui cite Wilson en ces termes : « Le processus de différenciation structurelle [...] a conduit non seulement à l'éradication de la participation religieuse dans d'autres sphères d'activité, [...] mais aussi à la perte de la présidence qu'exerçait jadis la religion sur la quasi-totalité de l'activité humaine. »

4 Langlois (1992:466) observe les dérives du monde séculier à vouloir victimiser les clercs en dénonçant « le fanatisme clérical ou le despotisme », d'où l'intronisation du processus de déchristianisation et de désacralisation programmé par le phénomène de la sécularisation. L'Église a joué un rôle considérable dans sa propre déconstruction. Ne serait-elle pas en partie responsable de ce processus de sécularisation ?

5 Dumas (2004:111), lui aussi, observe le développement d'une pluralité religieuse en ce troisième millénaire motivé par une recherche personnelle conscientisée par l'individu dans ses choix et ses pratiques. Pour lui, l'autorité religieuse est en soi.

garantissant épanouissement de l'être et guérison par le biais de l'onction de l'Esprit. »

2.3 Les différents types d'individus sécularisés

2.3.1 Le néo-matérialiste

Les matérialistes soutiennent la philosophie de la dépendance de l'homme à la matière. L'homme est potentiellement *créateur*, donnant un sens à l'existence de la matière. Dans son analyse, Schelling (1994:93, 94) emploie le terme « pouvoir être maître de soi » pour exprimer la supériorité de l'homme sur la nature. La visée de la philosophie matérialiste est vraisemblablement usurpatrice. L'homme s'arroge des prérogatives qui ne lui sont en aucun cas attribuées, à savoir être Dieu. Banks (2011:18) cite la pensée philosophique qui déclare : « Il était évident que l'homme ait créé Dieu à son image. » Jarry (1993:98) apporte aussi sa contribution en ces termes : « Car l'homme a créé Dieu, du moins le Dieu auquel il croit, il l'a créé, et ce n'est pas Dieu qui a créé l'homme (ce sont des vérités acquises aujourd'hui) ; l'homme a créé Dieu à son image et à sa ressemblance, agrandies jusqu'à ce que l'esprit humain ne pût concevoir de dimensions. » Cette prétention de se faire Dieu est une doctrine anthropocentriste et athée. De ce fait, la doctrine du matérialisme définit l'homme comme étant le dieu de la matière.

2.3.2 L'hédoniste

Pour l'hédoniste, il faut profiter des instants de jouissance que la vie nous offre, autrement c'est le basculement dans l'univers de la paresse

L'individu renonce à la religion qui impose ses pratiques, ses dogmes et sa hiérarchie en optant désormais pour une spiritualité personnelle et privée, d'où le phénomène de la « religion à la carte ». (Voir aussi Champion 2000:525-533).

et de l'oisiveté. L'idée de la mort pour ce type d'individu n'est pas une préoccupation tant que la maladie n'affecte pas son existence et n'empêche pas son épanouissement. Mais la pensée de la mort, de manière générale, ne peut lui échapper, car elle est en contradiction avec la vision qu'il veut se donner. L'hédoniste fait de la mort un passage dans lequel la souffrance est re foulée, voire inexistante. C'est en cela que l'euthanasie vient le reconforter, pour que ce passage ne soit pas vécu dans le martyre, mais comme un instant de bien-être. Ainsi la crainte de la mort est maîtrisée.⁶

6 Marsan fait le même constat du mal-être de ce type d'individu qui se nie lui-même par le « déni de la mort et du vieillissement », d'où l'expression, nouvellement employée, qui est celle de la « thanatotechnique » (2008:58).

Il est à remarquer que la pensée occidentale veut que l'homme soit le maître incontestable de son existence, au point même que la souffrance et la mort ne doivent en aucun cas altérer le bonheur et le bien-être de l'hédoniste. La philosophie biblique à propos de l'existence humaine est fortement opposée à celle de notre monde ultramoderne. Dieu est le Créateur de tout ce qui se meut sur la terre, et c'est de lui que tout être vivant possède la vie. Il serait donc absurde et contradictoire que l'homme, n'ayant pas le pouvoir de donner la vie (si ce n'est que par l'acte décisionnel divin de procréer), puisse mettre un terme à son existence. Le Fils de Dieu lui-même, dans son agonie et ses souffrances en Gethsémani, et qui détenait le pouvoir soit de procurer ou d'ôter la vie, se soumettait à la volonté divine. L'euthanasie, par conséquent, jette l'opprobre sur la dignité de l'être humain, et ses partisans rejettent la faiblesse et le besoin d'un Être suprême, donc Dieu, qui est le seul capable d'aider tout individu à retrouver le rebondissement et l'apaisement dont son âme a besoin.

Camus (1983:137), dans son œuvre *Mythe de Sisyphe*, considère que « se tuer, [...] c'est avouer. C'est avouer qu'on est dépassé par la vie que l'on ne comprend pas. » La pensée camusienne ne comprend pas le sens de l'existence. L'homme est « dépassé » et, de ce fait, ne voit que la mort comme issue. Mais qu'en est-il de l'héritage qu'il laisse aux membres de sa famille ? L'auteur n'en fait pas mention, et encore moins de la possibilité de recourir à Dieu. La philosophie camusienne conserve son caractère égocentrique en tant qu'elle prône le « divorce entre l'homme et son existence » et dépeint l'individu comme la pire des absurdités.

Se donner la mort, c'est faire violence à soi-même. Markovitch (1928:44), en effet, voit en Gandhi un homme possédant la force et le courage d'approuver la

2.3.3 L'individu hypermoderne

La postmodernité apparaît pour évoquer, en effet, la disparition de la modernité de par les découvertes scientifiques, le progressisme du monde occidental et du rationalisme séculier. La période de la postmodernité est liée à l'effritement, voire à une disparition des structures institutionnelles sociales et religieuses. Lyotard (1979:54) surnommait ce phénomène « les grands récits » ; c'est un ensemble d'idéologies incluant une « dimension explicative du monde », avec la diminution des repères et des structures institutionnelles et à caractère social telles que l'école, la famille, l'Église et les associations. Ces grandes idéologies, fortement influencées par le phénomène de la surconsommation, ont joué un rôle considérable dans l'émancipation de l'individu.

Du point de vue de la spiritualité, l'homme hypermoderne n'admet pas le rapport de la transcendance divine, et encore moins la réalité de la vie après la mort. Pour lui, l'individu se suffit à lui-même et ne doit se soumettre à aucune réalité, qu'elle soit temporelle ou atemporelle. Ce type d'individu refuse toute l'aliénation, tout asservissement du système communautaire (église, école, famille, etc.), en prônant l'émancipation existentielle, la *transcendance de soi*, le rapport à soi. La transcendance d'en haut fait intervenir la foi et l'espérance, tandis que la *transcendance à soi* n'existe que pour soi, tout en refusant de se projeter dans le futur. L'homme hypermoderne exclut le Dieu transcendant, le religieux et ses sacrements, car il veut se reconvertir en un nouvel homme jouissant à outrance du

souffrance et de renoncer à la violence. Selon Gandhi, « la souffrance consciente » se définit par la doctrine de la non-violence. Le seul moyen de vaincre la souffrance est de répondre par les principes de la non-violence. Il serait mieux de « se laisser poignarder et non de se poignarder soi-même ». En d'autres termes, il n'y a pas de plus grande absurdité que de porter atteinte à sa propre vie et à la vie d'autrui.

plaisir de la vie et recherchant toujours plus une nouvelle image de soi face au grand public, celle du « m'as-tu vu ».

2.4 Impact du phénomène de la mondanisation

Selon Bobineau, la mondanisation est le « processus social par lequel l'individu envisage son salut ici-bas, ici et maintenant, et non dans l'au-delà, non en fonction de l'après-vie terrestre. »⁷

Cette définition évoque en effet que l'individu hypermoderne n'a pas d'autres points d'ancrage que le monde terrestre. En d'autres termes, le salut ne vient pas de la réalité du monde invisible ou supranaturel, mais du monde matériel et visible. C'est un processus dont la visée consiste à reconverter l'homme post-postmoderne dans la matérialisation, la scientisation et la sociologisation plutôt que de se tourner vers la théologisation et la sacralisation. Raffoul (2005:136) a raison de dire que « la mondanisation est donc l'envers de la « théologisation. » Monod (2002:179), quant à lui, voit une fusion entre la notion de sécularisation et celle de la mondanisation, qui, à leur tour, vont se fondre dans la culture en abandonnant les exigences spirituelles pour espérer en une « religion de la technicité ».

L'analyse de ce chapitre sur la sécularisation nous semble incontournable pour mieux saisir les enjeux et les conséquences de ce

7 Monod (2002:252, 253), de son côté, apporte une analyse pertinente de la mondanisation en ces termes : « L'âge moderne est celui de la mondanisation, c'est-à-dire du devenir du monde, de la réalisation effective d'un *saeculum* sans sacralité, mais aussi celui de la mondialisation de ce *saeculum* chrétien, bientôt universalisé par la puissance combinée de la technique et de l'économie industrielle occidentale. Cette description met ainsi en lumière avec force un lien plausible entre la technicisation moderne du monde occidental et son caractère postchrétien. »

phénomène dans notre société hypermoderne, mais également son impact sur la pensée et le mode de vie des humains.

Chapitre 3. Aperçu sociohistorique et étude descriptive auprès de la population syro-libanaise, indo-caribéenne et celle des blancs créoles

3.1 Aperçu sociohistorique des groupes minoritaires de la Guadeloupe

La population guadeloupéenne est particulièrement connue pour sa composition multiethnique. Elle regroupe environ 72% de noirs et de métis, 14% d'Indo-Caribéens, 9% de métropolitains et de Caucasiens et 2% provenant du Moyen-Orient. Les 3% restant de la population sont issus des îles de la Caraïbe telles que la Dominique, Haïti et Saint-Domingue.⁸

3.1.1 L'immigration indienne

En 1854 et 1885, les immigrés de l'Inde vont s'ajouter à cette population blanche et africaine déjà présente dans la colonie. On les nomme les « Indiens » ou les « Coolies ». Bien qu'ils viennent pour renforcer la main d'œuvre africaine déjà existante sur l'île, ils n'ont toutefois pas le statut d'esclaves. Il est à remarquer que le statut juridique de ces nouveaux immigrés générait une certaine ambiguïté, au point que le gouvernement britannique va qualifier cette nouvelle immigration de « new system of slavery » (Schnakenbourg 2005:152, 388).

Au XVIII^{ème} siècle, l'hindouisme est perçu par le catholicisme comme étant de l'idolâtrie, du paganisme pur. Les fidèles de l'hindouisme sont exposés aux moqueries et injures, jusqu'à la disparition de toute trace

8 <http://www.uni-protokolle.de/foren/viewt/247186,o.html>

de dévotion de la spiritualité indienne. Schnakenbourg (2005:1162) évoque l'absolue nécessité, pour le catholicisme, d'éradiquer le mal. La population indienne va, de ce fait, subir une énorme pression de la part des représentants religieux catholiques, en commençant par la mise en place de séances de catéchèses, le dépouillement radical de tout ce qui a trait à l'idolâtrie, l'intervention des forces de l'ordre pour ceux qui ne se soumettent pas aux règlements. Cette tentative de substitution du catholicisme à celle de l'hindouisme, voulue par l'évêché de la Guadeloupe, ne favorisera pas une relation de confiance avec les planteurs et les religieux, mais générera un rapport de force, d'où l'émergence d'un syncrétisme qui va progressivement entrer dans ce processus de créolisation sur le plan religieux, sociétal et culturel.

3.1.2 L'immigration syro-libanaise

Quant aux immigrants syro-libanais, ils n'arrivent sur le continent qu'à une période post-esclavagiste, où l'économie de l'île reprenait son essor. Ces immigrants du Moyen-Orient sont de nouveaux peuples qui vont s'ajouter à ce patchwork multiculturel déjà existant sur l'île afin de promouvoir le développement économique de la Guadeloupe.

Les Syro-Libanais ne subiront pas les contraintes que les travailleurs hindous ont connues et, encore moins, l'esclavagisme auquel les Africains noirs étaient soumis et dont les conditions de vie étaient inhumaines. Pourchassés et persécutés par les musulmans de l'Empire ottoman, les chrétiens syro-libanais vont trouver refuge auprès des pays occidentaux, en particulier, la France et ses colonies (Abdulkarim 1993:113-129). Dès leur arrivée sur l'île, ils vont s'installer sur les grandes agglomérations de Pointe-à-Pitre et de Basse-Terre. Depuis lors, les magasins de vêtements,

de chaussures et les marchands de montres et de lunettes fleurissent, particulièrement rue Frébault à Pointe-à-Pitre.⁹

Les Syro-Libanais élargissent leurs réseaux commerciaux avec les fournisseurs et les fabricants dans l'arc caribéen, mais également en Asie, en Amérique du Sud et en Europe : des réseaux qui ne se limitent pas exclusivement au milieu dans lequel l'émigrant évolue, mais s'étendent à l'échelle internationale. Des responsables commerciaux sont chargés de faire le lien entre les fournisseurs et les clients ; mais, de manière générale, ce sont les clients qui se rendent sur place pour l'évaluation, la qualité et l'achat des marchandises auprès des fournisseurs. Les petits revendeurs syro-libanais sont largement répandus en Guyane et dans l'arc antillais (Diouf & Bosma 2004:170 ; Mieville 2004:266 ; Schlupp 1997:5).

3.1.3 La population des Blancs créoles

L'histoire de la population caucasienne en Guadeloupe tire son origine, au cœur du XVII^{ème} siècle, de l'arrivée des premiers colons français et espagnols (Tourneux & Barbotin 1990:7). Ces premiers Européens qui ont foulé le sol guadeloupéen avaient pour seul objectif de s'enrichir dans la recherche de l'or et de toute espèce de pierres précieuses que contiennent les îles de l'arc antillais. C'est dans cette optique que les colons vont

9 Lara (2011:92) dépeint, avec ses compétences artistiques, le paysage commercial des Syro-Libanais de la rue Frébault : « Le centre-ville était un ensemble de maisons en bois plus ou moins grandes, plus ou moins hautes. Tous les rez-de-chaussée semblaient occupés par des commerces de vêtements, de chaussures et de choses diverses gérés par des Syriens et des Libanais. Certains occupaient même les trottoirs et vantaient leurs marchandises avec un accent bien marqué. Partout les vendeurs criaient, la musique battait son plein et les gens, éventuels consommateurs, bavardaient très fort. »

développer l'industrie de la traite négrière, en faisant appel à la main-d'œuvre africaine.¹⁰

Depuis le début de la colonisation, les esclavagistes commençaient à bâtir leur empire dans l'arc antillais et plus particulièrement en Guadeloupe et en Martinique, en sacrifiant des vies d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants. Roger de Jaham, arrière-petit-fils de Békés, lors d'une interview télévisée en 1998, avait assimilé l'esclavage des noirs à « un crime contre l'humanité ». C'est le seul descendant de colons à avoir fait une telle confession sur une réalité qui, jusque-là, avait été niée. Mais, aujourd'hui, le peuple afro-caribéen est en quête d'identité culturelle et exige que la lumière soit faite sur les quatre siècles d'esclavage dans les Antilles françaises. À Cap Est, en Martinique, les Blancs créoles, dits « Békés », se sont démarqués du reste de la population de l'île en acquérant leur propre territoire, connu sous le nom de Béké Land, bien à l'abri des regards indiscrets. Ce sont plus de trois

¹⁰ Blérald (1986:12) explicite cette stratégie mercantile des colons avec plus de détails et de précisions en ces termes : « Il serait erroné d'en déduire que le mouvement d'expatriation Outre-mer du capital commercial a été spontané en France. En effet, au niveau des rapports de classe, ce qui caractérise la société française, c'est la forte propension à l'intégration féodale de la bourgeoisie marchande. Cette tendance détournait une fraction notable du capital-argent du circuit commercial au profit de sa conversion en offices, charges et placements fonciers et concourait, par le biais de l'anoblissement, à l'intégration idéologique et politique au système féodal de la bourgeoisie marchande. [...] L'État, en France, se trouve impliqué d'emblée dans l'entreprise coloniale et ce, fondamentalement, pour des raisons d'ordre fiscal, auxquelles, bien entendu, viennent se surajouter les motivations de suprématie dynastique propres à cette époque. La monarchie absolue représente la forme historique prise par la domination politique de la classe nobiliaire qui, pour surmonter la 'crise générale' de la société féodale, [...] se concentre et s'autonomise en pouvoir d'État. En ce sens il s'agit d'un État de transition, mais dont le contenu de classe demeure féodal dans la mesure où l'une de ses principales fonctions consiste à centraliser la rente féodale et à la redistribuer en partie, afin de permettre à la noblesse, déchue de la prééminence économique, de 'maintenir son rang'. »

hectares de terres, avec vue sur baie, qui appartiennent à l'une des familles des colons européens les plus influentes de l'île. Alain Huyghes Despointes est l'industriel le plus puissant des Antilles françaises et de la France métropolitaine. Les huit familles Békés détiennent à elles seules plus de 52% des terres en Martinique, et 90% des richesses agroalimentaires sont en leur possession, alors qu'ils représentent seulement 1% de la population de l'île.^{II}

3.2 Étude descriptive quantitative auprès des groupes minoritaires de la Guadeloupe

Cette deuxième partie de ce chapitre est axée sur une étude descriptive quantitative. Nous avons été agréablement surpris des réponses apportées à la spiritualité. Il y avait une cordialité et une ouverture d'esprit de la part des participants. Nous avons pu observer, dans la collecte des données, que la transmission des valeurs familiales est un principe essentiel dans les familles créoles. Sur les 73 questions posées, nous vous présentons quatre questions types :

3.2.1 Croyez-vous que la famille tire son origine de la création de l'humanité d'après les données bibliques ?

Une question sur la famille en lien avec la spiritualité monothéiste. Plus de 95% des Syro-Libanais croient que la famille émerge de la création de l'humanité d'après les affirmations bibliques. La population indienne en reste convaincue, avec un taux de 80%, mais la croyance demeure. Bien

II D'après un documentaire sur la puissance économique des Békés « Les derniers maîtres de l'esclavage » – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NoOS2f4xVg> ; voir aussi Beaudoux (2002:54).

que certaines d'entre elles adhèrent au mysticisme de l'hindouisme de la création humaine, une majorité admet toutefois le concept biblique de la création. Chez les Blancs créoles, les croyances sont mitigées à 55%.

3.2.2 Pensez-vous que le mariage entre un homme et une femme devrait, plus que jamais, être le modèle représentatif pour une société forte et équilibrée ?

Les Syro-Libanais sont plus convaincus et reconnaissent intégralement l'union édénique comme base principale pour une société forte et équilibrée, avec un total de 80%. Un tel résultat n'est pas surprenant, car les valeurs familiales, aussi bien que l'identité familiale, sont bien représentées au sein de ce groupe de population. Les Syro-Libanais croient que la prospérité d'une société ne peut dépendre que d'une famille reconnaissant la souveraineté divine sur toute la création. En revanche, la communauté indienne se prononce avec un peu moins de conviction que nos précédents sondés sur la question, affichant un taux de 40%. Pour les Blancs créoles, ils sont 20% à être convaincus que le mariage entre un homme et femme soit le modèle représentatif pour une société équilibrée. Ce chiffre reste très faible comparativement à nos deux premiers groupes de sondés.

3.2.3 Croyez-vous en l'existence d'un Dieu Créateur du ciel et de la terre et Sauveur de l'humanité ?

Les Syro-Libanais et les Indo-Caribéens croient profondément en l'existence d'un Dieu Créateur du ciel et de la terre et Sauveur de l'humanité, avec des taux de 85%. Les Blancs créoles affirment l'existence de Dieu et sa souveraineté avec moins de conviction que nos deux précédents groupes de population, avec un taux de 75%.

3.2.4 Croyez-vous personnellement qu'il existe une vie après la mort, où les bons et les méchants vivront en paix ?

Les Syro-Libanais et les Tamouls n'adhèrent pas à cette croyance qui prétend que les bons et les méchants s'uniront dans un commun accord pour vivre la félicité éternelle. Cette doctrine est étrangère non seulement au Coran, mais également aux Saintes Écritures. Les Caucasiens, eux, ne sont pas majoritaires face à une telle philosophie. Pourtant, il y a des croyants qui adhèrent à une vie après la mort. Certains sont sceptiques, bien qu'ils soient religieux. Ils n'ont pas tous un ancrage religieux qui leur permette d'avoir une bonne connaissance doctrinale.

Chapitre 4. Études descriptives de l'Église adventiste dans sa mission plurielle

Dans ce présent chapitre, nous entreprenons une autre enquête au sein de l'Église adventiste afin d'analyser les points forts et les points faibles de la communauté dans sa mission à l'endroit des groupes minoritaires. En effet, à l'issue de l'enquête, nous avons pu constater que la mission à l'endroit de ces groupes d'individu n'avait jamais fait l'objet de préoccupation dans la pensée des membres, tant sa mission s'était focalisée sur la population afro-caribéenne. Par conséquent, nous avons dû qualifier cette mission comme étant une mission oubliée. Sur les 27 questions du questionnaire, nous vous présentons quatre questions types :

4.I Seriez-vous favorable à ce qu'il y ait davantage de mixité culturelle dans les Églises adventistes en Guadeloupe ?

Selon les données du sondage, 25% des membres apportent leur avis très favorable pour que la communauté adventiste soit plurielle en son sein.

52% des membres de la communauté adventiste seraient plutôt favorable à ce qu'il y ait davantage de mixité culturelle dans l'Église. L'Église adventiste se veut ouverte à toutes les cultures, car elle a une mission universelle (Oliver 2009:2). 23% restent indécis.

4.2 Pensez-vous qu'au cours de ces dernières années l'Église adventiste s'est concentrée sur les autres groupes de la population guadeloupéenne ?

50% des sondés affirment que l'Église adventiste n'a plutôt pas centré sa mission auprès des groupes de population minoritaire. 12,5% estiment qu'elle n'a pas du tout axé sa mission auprès de ces peuples. Par opposition aux 12,5% qui prétendent qu'elle s'est plutôt développée dans ce sens, 25% des sondés ne se prononcent pas. Soit un total de 62,5% qui ne pensent pas qu'elle s'est concentrée ces dernières années sur les groupes minoritaires.¹²

4.3 Êtes-vous déjà entré en contact avec un Syrien ou un Libanais pour lui témoigner de Jésus ?

75% des personnes sondées dans l'Église adventiste n'ont jamais établi de contact avec un Syrien ou un Libanais. Ce chiffre peut surprendre, mais reflète la réalité de l'absence de contact des membres avec les Syro-Libanais. Par ailleurs, l'autre versant de notre sondage indique que 12% des membres

¹² La mission de l'Église adventiste dans les Antilles françaises a connu une croissance fulgurante durant les 40 dernières années auprès de la population afro-caribéenne, mais elle n'a pas su impacter le reste des groupes ethniques de son territoire. Une concentration trop accentuée sur la population noire laisserait entendre que les autres groupes ethniques sont hostiles et réfractaires au message évangélique. Nous ne pouvons en aucun cas écarter cet aspect-là, mais nous pouvons également affirmer que la technicité en termes de moyens et stratégies pour atteindre les autres groupes minoritaires n'était pas de mise à cette époque où pasteurs, missionnaires et laïcs ne percevaient que la dimension de la croissance numérique et du gain d'âmes.

sondés prétendent avoir été en contact avec un Syrien ou un Libanais pour leur témoigner de Jésus. Ce pourcentage indique une volonté de renverser les barrières ethniques et culturelles afin de favoriser des liens amicaux avec ce peuple. Dans ce même sondage, 13% restent sans opinion.

4.4 Pensez-vous que votre église serait prête à accepter la diversité culturelle en son sein ?

52% des sondés pensent que leur église serait éventuellement prête à accepter la diversité. Ce résultat reste satisfaisant, même s'il est loin d'atteindre la barre des 60%. Cependant, il nous faut tenir compte des 36% des sondés qui ne se sont pas exprimés à la suite de la question posée, et des 12% qui ne sont pas très optimistes quant à l'intégration de la diversité au sein de leur communauté.

Les relations interculturelles s'améliorent avec la population minoritaire, et elles constituent plus un avantage qu'un inconvénient. Il y a bien une volonté de construire et de « vivre ensemble » pour une société plus harmonieuse. En conséquence, l'Église adventiste observe ce changement et se l'approprie pour repenser sa stratégie d'évangélisation afin d'atteindre les minorités sécularisées.

Chapitre 5. Perspective biblique pour l'évangélisation dans un contexte sécularisé

5.1 Arrière-plan du livre des Actes

S'il y a un livre dans le Nouveau Testament qui revêt un caractère unique et exceptionnel, c'est bien le Livre des Actes. C'est le seul livre qui fait le prolongement aux récits des quatre évangélistes dans les écrits canoniques. Bruce (1990:27) a raison de souligner que « sans le Livre des Actes, nous

n'aurions pas eu ces informations sur les ministères des apôtres. » Marshall (1980:23) abonde également en ce sens : « L'histoire rapportée dans le Livre des Actes est perçue comme étant une continuité des œuvres puissantes divines de l'Ancien Testament et du ministère de Jésus. »

5.2 L'auteur du Livre des Actes

Bien que le Livre des Actes ne mentionne pas explicitement que Luc en soit l'auteur, de nombreux théologiens parviennent à cette conclusion. D'après son style particulier et sa phraséologie, le Livre des Actes a vraisemblablement pour auteur Luc le médecin (Moule 1957:10). Dans le troisième Évangile, Luc ne fait que rapporter les faits obtenus par les disciples à son « excellent Théophile », afin de lui faire part de l'authenticité des faits survenus au cours du ministère terrestre de Jésus (Hodgkins 2019:354 ; MacArthur 1994:23).

5.3 La datation du livre

La datation du Livre des Actes soulève, jusqu'à nos jours, de nombreuses interrogations, qui font que certains érudits ont prétendu que Luc aurait rédigé son livre avant 62 (Darrell 2007:40, 41).

5.4 Son destinataire

D'après l'Évangile de Luc, il est évident que le Livre des Actes s'adresse prioritairement à Théophile (Ac 1,1), un personnage n'ayant pas été témoin du ministère des apôtres. Dans son Évangile, Luc fait allusion à ce personnage comme occupant une position élevée dans la société, d'après l'adjectif singulier, « excellent », qui précède le nom du destinataire.

5.5 Interrelation littéraire

Dans le Livre des Actes, il existe des corrélations surprenantes avec les activités de Jésus mentionnées dans son Évangile, mais aussi des scénarios dont les répétitions sont stéréotypées. Les types de répétition sont très récurrents dans la mission paulinienne : la Parole est prêchée dans la synagogue (13.14 ; 13.42-52 ; 17.1-5 ; 17.10, 11) ; opposition de la part des uns (14.1-7 ; 17.5-9 ; 13.50) ; conviction de la part des autres (13.44, 48 ; 17.11-13). De nombreuses chaînes sont également révélatrices, tout comme celle de la Pentecôte après l'ascension du Christ (Ac 2.1-13), s'harmonisant avec l'effusion de l'Esprit en 10.44-46 et 19.6. La réinterprétation de la conversion de l'apôtre Paul (Ac 9) est mentionnée en fin de rédaction (Ac 22.26).

5.6 Orientation et contexte

Paul va se retrouver à l'Aréopage, où toutes les questions d'ordre juridique, philosophique, scientifique, familial et social sont débattues. Dans son discours, Paul va mettre en évidence la spiritualité des Athéniens et les objets de leur dévotion. Il va jusqu'à utiliser leur devise, « À un dieu inconnu », pour leur révéler le Véritable. L'approche de Paul est empreinte de sagesse, car il sait pertinemment que la prédication de l'Évangile doit refléter l'amour et la justice de Dieu envers tous les hommes. Il va donc retracer l'histoire de Dieu et de son intention envers l'humanité en envoyant son Fils comme preuve évidente par sa mort et sa résurrection. Mais les philosophes grecs rejettent le discours de l'apôtre lorsqu'il aborde la question de la résurrection d'entre les morts. La mission de Paul à Athènes ne peut pas être qualifiée d'échec à l'endroit des intellectuels sécularisés grecs, puisque quelques auditeurs ont cru et l'ont suivi dans son ministère. En conséquence, l'évangélisation auprès de la population séculaire

représente, certes, un défi majeur, mais elle demeure dans le domaine du possible, seulement si notre approche envers ce type d'individu fait preuve de miséricorde et de respect envers ce à quoi il est attaché dans tous les domaines de l'existence.

Chapitre 6. Reconsidération des doctrines théologiques pour l'esprit séculier de notre temps

Dans ce présent chapitre, nous nous proposons d'analyser quelques doctrines bibliques fondamentales qui ont été sévèrement impactées par les philosophies séculières à travers les temps jusqu'à nos jours.

6.1 La révélation de Dieu dans la Bible

Un autre mode de révélation est la révélation écrite. Celle-ci est une lettre ouverte de l'histoire de Dieu, de ses actions, de ses intentions et de ses projets pour l'humanité. La révélation écrite transcende l'histoire séculière de par son essence divine. Elle fait donc l'objet d'une révélation inspirée de Dieu (2 Tim 3.16 ; 2 Pi 1.21). Il est vrai que des hommes sont intervenus dans la rédaction de ce précieux document, mais sa valeur est toujours intacte et impacte positivement les êtres humains (Feichtinger 2018:55 ; Müller 2011:33 ; Canale 2007:194). Les Écritures ne peuvent être qualifiées de document historique au sens strictement temporel de l'histoire des hommes. Elles ne peuvent pas non plus être considérées comme un ouvrage philosophique ou ethnologique, comme il convient à tout auteur séculier d'entreprendre un projet rédactionnel. Les Saintes Écritures ont été écrites avec les sensibilités culturelles et intellectuelles de chaque auteur, mais elles n'en demeurent pas moins inspirées.

6.1.1 Les moyens de communications divines

Dès l'origine des temps, l'homme, en tant que créature divine, a été conçu pour être en communication avec Dieu. Le Créateur souhaite se révéler à notre esprit, bien que celui-ci soit endommagé et occasionne parfois des interférences avec le message que Dieu voudrait nous transmettre (Hé 9.14) (Wakely 2002:57). Dieu choisit, comme mode de révélation, la communication. Dieu ne communique pas avec toute l'humanité, mais avec une humanité choisie (Chapman 2009:39, 40). Ce peuple élu reçoit des instructions pour publier son message et conserver sa révélation (Ex 4.22 ; 1 Sa 2.27 ; 1 Rois 13.21). Brunner (1967:13) le déclare en ces termes :

« La révélation de Dieu, telle qu'elle nous est donnée dans la Bible, est une histoire. C'est par des actes que dans l'Ancien Testament Dieu se fait connaître à son peuple et, en même temps, par cette connaissance concrétisée, il se crée son peuple. Dieu se communique à son peuple dans un double sens : il lui révèle le mystère de son essence et le rend participant de sa vie : 'Je serai votre Dieu et vous serez mon peuple.' Le message des prophètes culmine dans la promesse d'une communication de Dieu par lui-même, inédite et définitive, d'une époque messianique, d'une souveraineté exercée par le Messie, parce que l'être de Dieu consistera dans un parfait 'Dieu est avec nous.' »

C'est au sein du peuple d'Israël que Dieu a choisi de se révéler et d'y maintenir un rapport privilégié. Israël est loin d'être une nation parfaite, mais son élection la qualifie de « nation sainte », de « sacerdoce royal » (1 Pi 2.9). C'est de son sein que viennent les prophètes et les hommes qui témoigneront de la justice divine, de sa bonté et de sa miséricorde, eux qui n'ont pas fléchi les genoux devant les cultes des Baals et des Astartés

malgré les nombreuses menaces de mort qui leur étaient proférées (1 Rois 19.1, 2 ; Jé 26.1-24).

La révélation écrite, dans l'ancienne comme dans la nouvelle alliance, c'est l'histoire de Dieu le Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit. Les trois personnes de la Trinité sont impliquées dans toutes les activités et dans tous événements de l'histoire d'Israël. Les auteurs bibliques ont été divinement inspirés de Dieu lors de la rédaction de leur livre pour révéler la justice de Dieu et le plan de salut en faveur de l'humanité. L'accueil de tous ces écrits inspirés dans nos vies donne un sens à notre histoire et transforme notre quotidien. Barth (1953:129) définit « la Parole de Dieu comme un acte de Dieu, et cet acte comme un mystère de Dieu. »

Loin de se révéler pour lui-même et par lui-même, Dieu se révèle pour son Fils, pour son avenir, dans l'optique d'accomplir le plan du salut en faveur des humains.¹³ La révélation de Dieu est également celle du Fils. En conséquence, les deux se conjuguent et s'harmonisent parfaitement (Knight 2001:41).

6.1.2 Une révélation au monde ultramoderne

La révélation divine se présente encore dans notre société ultramoderne. Les sciences technologiques, biologiques et aérospatiales sont autant de nouvelles preuves de sa révélation. Toutes les performances scientifiques et autres domaines réalisés par les humains affirment et confirment en effet l'existence d'une Intelligence supérieure. Le Dieu omniscient accorde l'intelligence aux hommes pour se faire connaître. L'homme ne peut pas se déconnecter spirituellement de l'En-Haut, puisqu'il a été conçu

¹³ Nous reviendrons plus en détail sur cet aspect dans une prochaine étude sur le ministère du Christ.

pour être en communion avec son Créateur. Il ne peut pas soustraire la dimension religieuse de sa nature, car, à la base, il est d'essence religieuse. L'Ecclésiaste déclare avec raison que Dieu « a mis dans leur cœur la pensée de l'éternité, bien que l'homme ne puisse pas saisir l'œuvre que Dieu fait, du commencement jusqu'à la fin » (Ecc 3,11). L'homme de notre monde ultramoderne n'est pas fondamentalement hostile à la spiritualité. Certes, il y a ceux qui se sont positionnés en faveur de l'athéisme, du panthéisme, voire du spiritisme, et qui s'opposent avec conviction au christianisme, alors qu'un grand nombre d'individus par ailleurs aspirent à la vérité.

S'il y a une doctrine qu'il nous faut bien intégrer en tant que croyants, c'est bien celle de la *révélation de Jésus par le Saint-Esprit* (Jn 14,16, 26). Après l'ascension du Christ, le ministère des apôtres va être impulsé sous l'influence du Saint-Esprit, mais également dans l'œuvre de tous ceux qui prendront activement part à la prédication de l'Évangile. Que dirons-nous donc de notre société ultramoderne ? Y a-t-il révélation du Christ par le Saint-Esprit ? Nous pourrions répondre affirmativement à cette question, puisque les XX^{ème} et XXI^{ème} siècles sont considérés comme étant les siècles de la révélation du Christ par l'Esprit Saint. La prise de conscience de cette révélation du Christ par l'Esprit relève d'une expérience de foi et d'une relation dynamique avec Dieu. Elle ne peut être sondée ni être comprise par une démarche intellectuelle purement subjective, mais elle est véritablement une interactivité – un rapport avec – une vie de dépendance avec le Christ.

6.2 *Le Christ et son ministère terrestre*

La *doctrine de l'incarnation* s'est inscrite au cœur de l'histoire, car Dieu était en droit de se révéler par le Fils pour relever l'homme de sa déchéance, afin de faire de lui un « participant à la nature divine » (Lc 1,31-33 ; 2 Pi 1,4). Mais

cette participation exige à la fois une affirmation et une action concrète de foi au Fils de Dieu. La kénose du Fils est la manifestation passionnée de l'amour du Père fécondant l'histoire humaine pour lui donner un sens (Ph 2.5-8). Et si le Fils a apporté un renouveau dans l'histoire des hommes, il y a lieu d'investiguer et d'approfondir davantage le pourquoi et son utilité.

Le message du Christ au monde est toujours d'actualité en tant qu'il lui est transcendant, lui apportant paix, joie et confiance. Le monde ultramoderne est en quête de paix et de sécurité. Cependant, la *présence du Fils de Dieu* dans notre histoire change radicalement la donne. C'est l'histoire de Dieu lui-même qui s'offre à l'humanité (1 Co 15.45). Il vient charger d'histoire de la part de Dieu dans l'histoire des hommes. Nous pouvons qualifier cette présence comme *plēroma*, « accomplissement du temps », le temps que Dieu a choisi pour se révéler dans la personne du Fils, pour nous révéler l'histoire de Dieu (Ga 4.4 ; Ep 1.10) (Vande Kappelle 2014:126 ; Roberts 2002:168).

La mort est l'un des sujets les plus évocateurs dans la réflexion humaine. Pourquoi en est-il ainsi ? Parce qu'elle fait partie intégrante de l'existence de chaque être humain sur cette terre. En quoi la *mort du Christ* est-elle suspecte dans notre monde, voire non fiable ? Le monde séculier accorde peu de crédibilité aux événements ayant trait à la transcendance : au ministère terrestre et céleste du Christ, à l'histoire du Dieu des Hébreux et à l'existence des anges. La mort du Christ est indéniable, car un tel événement échappe à l'histoire et à la science séculières en tant qu'il est de nature métaphysique et ne peut donc pas être vérifié. On ne peut nier que si l'on possède des preuves tangibles et irréfutables.

6.3 La doctrine de la vie après la mort

La crainte de la mort, même pour les plus robustes, préoccupe la pensée de l'homme ultramoderne. Il est donc impossible de nouer une amitié avec la mort, car elle nous prive de notre joie, de notre bonheur, et donc de notre existence. Elle s'introduit par infraction sans qu'on l'y invite. L'homme séculier est en droit de s'interroger sur l'intrusion de la mort dans son existence. Cette petite investigation sur l'état des morts devrait être menée non pas d'après les données philosophiques et médicales, mais d'après celles de la Parole de Dieu (Marsan 2008:58 ; Thiel 1998:221). En quoi la Parole de Dieu pourrait-elle apporter des éléments de réponse fiables aux interrogations humaines ? Parce que l'origine de la mort remonte à l'histoire de la création divine ; non pas qu'elle fasse partie intégrante d'elle dans l'acte créateur, mais en tant que conséquence de la désobéissance de l'être humain.

6.4 Le jugement dernier au monde ultramoderne

L'individu séculier exclut la doctrine du jugement divin dans les affaires des hommes, puisque Dieu n'y est plus. Pour lui, la conscience de l'être humain est son propre juge. C'est elle qui détermine en matière de choix, de goûts et de valeurs ce qui est convenable et agréable pour l'être dans son épanouissement personnel et spirituel. Mais cette spiritualité est hybride et ne peut être mise au même rang que celle du christianisme, en tant qu'elle se focalise sur l'ego de l'individu. Nous disions que la conscience de l'humaniste séculier est son propre juge. Cette conscience, il faut l'entendre au sens de l'intériorité subjective de l'être, et non d'une quelconque prise de conscience impulsée par l'Esprit Saint. Si l'individu humaniste met en

exergue cette dimension subjective de la conscience, c'est parce qu'il nie tout fondement de l'existence d'un Être suprême capable de le juger.

Chapitre 7. Recommandations et suggestions pour une mission spécifique auprès des groupes minoritaires

7.1 Contextualisation de la mission des groupes minoritaires sécularisés

Dans cette section, nous allons procéder à la contextualisation de la mission auprès de l'esprit sécularisé des trois groupes minoritaires. Cette contextualisation tiendra compte d'un certain nombre de paramètres théologiques et sociologiques que nous avons déjà analysés dans nos précédents chapitres.

7.1.1 L'individu sécularisé des groupes minoritaires et la méthode du Christ

Évoquer la question du *mode de vie* de l'individu sécularisé des groupes minoritaires, c'est aussi aborder la question de la pluralité culturelle dans laquelle il évolue. Bien qu'il soit rythmé par le postmodernisme venant de l'occident, il tient à garder une part de son identité familiale, culturelle, traditionnelle et religieuse. L'homme sécularisé est attaché à sa culture, comme partout ailleurs, parce qu'elle est profondément ancrée dans son être. Si l'individu créole perdait son identité culturelle, il perdrait inéluctablement ses repères. Il deviendrait même un individu de nulle part. La créolité aurait cette tendance à s'inscrire dans cette réalité, mais pas fondamentalement. L'homme créole est un homme passionné de cultures, de traditions et de spiritualités. Nous formulons ces entités au pluriel, car il vit dans un pluralisme dans lequel, justement, toutes les cultures

s’embrassent. La créolité, c’est le brassage culturel d’individus venant d’ailleurs pour n’en faire qu’une culture hybride (Cavalcante 2010:351).

Il nous est impossible de nous détacher de ce que nous sommes et de ce qui fait de nous telle ou telle civilisation. Le Christ, dans ses relations avec les personnes séculières, exerçait une démarche empathique et s’abstenait de toutes critiques liées à l’identité de l’individu (Mt 9.36 ; 14.14 ; 20.34). La foi de l’individu séculier est exprimée par des besoins physiques, psychiques, émotionnels et culturels ; autant de paramètres dont il nous faut tenir compte dans notre approche auprès de cette population.

S’il y a un phénomène qui est fortement impliqué dans la vie de l’individu sécularisé, c’est sans aucun doute celui du *magico-religieux*. Le magico-religieux est un syncrétisme de la pratique de la magie, de la sorcellerie et du culte liturgique du catholicisme. C’est comme un appel au secours du monde des esprits pour obtenir le succès dans tous les domaines de la vie. De nombreuses personnes acceptent la croyance de l’immortalité de l’âme, qui consiste à croire à l’absence physique du défunt et à sa présence en esprit dans leurs foyers. Autant de mysticisme même dans la doctrine de l’état des morts.

Lorsque Dieu donna à Moïse les prescriptions concernant les règles de conduite pour le peuple d’Israël, il leur déconseilla fermement la pratique du spiritisme : «¹⁰ Qu’on ne trouve chez toi [...] personne qui exerce le métier de devin, d’astrologue, d’augure, de magicien, ¹¹ d’enchanteur, personne qui consulte ceux qui évoquent les esprits ou disent la bonne aventure, personne qui interroge les morts » (Dt 18.10, 11).

7.2 *Recommandations et suggestions aux organismes de l'Église adventiste*

7.2.1 Création d'une commission de réflexion

Pour toute élaboration d'un projet, le principe administratif veut que l'on mette en place une commission de pilotage constituée d'acteurs potentiels ayant déjà collaboré dans le cadre de la mission auprès de ces groupes de population. Cette commission a pour rôle de donner une vision à cette mission en précisant les différents objectifs à atteindre à l'égard des personnes concernées. Cette équipe administrative a toute son importance au sein de cette commission, car elle donne du sens et valorise le projet lui-même (*Church Manual 2005:68-71* ; Fourmy 2012 ; Avila 2005:26). Cette commission d'évangélisation spécifique à l'endroit des groupes minoritaires ne devrait jamais être une option dans les projets d'évangélisation de l'Église adventiste ; autrement, elle donnerait l'impression d'être une mission secondaire ou sans importance.

7.2.2 Formation spécifique pour pasteurs et colporteurs

L'évangélisation des groupes minoritaires est un projet passionnant, qui suscitera la curiosité des uns et des autres, car elle est inédite dans l'histoire de l'évangélisation sur l'archipel. C'est en ce sens que nous recommandons qu'il y ait un espace de formation ouvert aux pasteurs, évangélistes, colporteurs et toute autre personne s'impliquant activement dans la mission auprès de ces groupes d'individus, afin de recevoir les éléments de base de l'approche de cette mission. Le sondage auprès des membres de la communauté a bien montré que 100% des membres souhaiteraient qu'il y ait un Institut de Théologie, et que 75% d'entre eux accepteraient volontiers de faire partie de ces groupes missionnaires spécialisés.

7.2.3 Projet de construction d'une clinique adventiste

Depuis de nombreuses années, l'Église adventiste du septième jour caresse le projet de fonder un établissement hospitalier sur son territoire. La vision de ce centre hospitalier revêt un caractère missionnaire, puisque ce dernier accueille des individus non chrétiens et d'autres dénominations religieuses sans aucune discrimination ethnique ou religieuse. La mission adventiste, quelle que soit sa nature, devrait transcender toute culture, race ou religiosité. On ne peut entreprendre un projet missionnaire évangélique sans prendre en considération la diversité culturelle des individus.

7.2.4 Projet d'un espace de diffusion TV pour les minorités

Notre société, absorbée par ce phénomène de l'image, subit une mutation technologique. Il faut prendre en considération cet aspect pour que le message évangélique atteigne également les groupes minoritaires des Antilles françaises. Notre sondage auprès de ces groupes a montré que l'ensemble de ces populations passe en moyenne plus de trois heures par jour devant leur écran de téléviseur, d'ordinateur ou de téléphone.

Si, dans le cadre de la mission auprès des groupes minoritaires, nous parvenons à atteindre une personne ou deux issues des minorités, nous pourrions les solliciter pour qu'elles témoignent de leurs expériences à leurs semblables issus de ces mêmes groupes, au sein d'une émission qui leur soit spécifiquement réservée. Ce projet, qui peut s'étaler à long terme, sera un investissement non négligeable dans la stratégie que nous voudrions adopter pour atteindre les minorités ethniques.

7.3 Recommandations et suggestions au niveau des sections locales

7.3.1 Création d'un groupe d'évangélisation annexe

Si la mission à l'endroit des groupes minoritaires est dirigée par la commission de la Fédération des Églises adventistes, cette mission concerne inéluctablement les églises qui lui sont rattachées. Les sections locales sont plus sensiblement concernées par la mission de proximité auprès de cette population. Il revient donc aux sections locales d'impulser cette mission pour que ces individus soient gagnés au Christ (Johnson 2011:142, 177). Il nous faut tout de même retenir que, d'après le sondage effectué auprès des membres, 98% d'entre eux sont d'avis favorable à ce que l'on procède à l'élaboration de projets d'évangélisation spécifique pour atteindre les groupes minoritaires.

7.3.2 Promouvoir la biodiversité et le développement durable

La biodiversité est devenue l'expression clé pour sensibiliser la population mondiale à la menace des espèces et à l'intérêt de la protection de l'environnement dans lequel nous évoluons. Les séminaires sur les écosystèmes, la biodiversité et le développement durable doivent impacter les groupes minoritaires. Ils doivent créer un renouveau dans notre gestion existentielle tout en se basant sur les principes fondamentaux des Saintes Écritures.

7.3.3 Axer davantage la mission sur le porte-à-porte

Si nous voulons que l'évangélisation ne soit pas limitée à un groupe de population, il nous faudrait alors repenser notre approche à l'endroit des groupes minoritaires sur notre territoire. Cette mission oubliée, qui date

déjà de plus d'un siècle, doit nous permettre de rééquilibrer la mission dans sa globalité afin que toutes les classes – tous les groupes ethniques composant la société guadeloupéenne – bénéficient du message proclamé par les trois anges. La mise en place d'une commission spécifique à cette mission sera constituée d'individus qui s'engagent déjà dans cette dynamique de proximité auprès des groupes minoritaires, de membres ayant des liens étroits avec eux et de spécialistes en la matière.

Si les acteurs de ces projets mettent en évidence l'esprit de collaboration, d'ouverture et d'empathie, sans pour autant négliger la qualité, le professionnalisme des interventions, alors les gens seront plus sensibles aux actions menées par les associations. Ainsi, l'Église adventiste pourra affirmer avec conviction que sa mission auprès des groupes minoritaires aura atteint toute race, tout peuple et toute culture qui occupait son territoire (Ap. 14.6).

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Implantation d'Eglises mahoraises sur un terrain d'Islam sous la laïcité française

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Résumé

Mayotte appartient géographiquement à l'Archipel des Comores. Elle est une petite île à forte majorité musulmane. Toutefois, l'islam pratiqué est spécifique. Par son statut de département français, elle est soumise à la loi française qui est basée sur le principe de laïcité. En plus, le fléau migratoire des clandestins et des réfugiés rend plus compliquée sa situation tant sur le plan juridico-politique que sur le plan socioculturel et économique. Cet article analyse le contexte de Mayotte et propose de mettre en place des stratégies pour aider les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte à relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. Stratégies qui s'appuient sur le principe de la laïcité française en addition avec le phénomène migratoire.

Mots clés

Implantation d'Eglises ; mahoraise ; Islam ; laïcité ; Mayotte

Abstract

Geographically, Mayotte belongs to the Comoros Archipelago. It is a small island with a Muslim majority, reflecting a unique form of Islam. Mayotte, an Overseas Department of the French Republic, is subject to French law which is based on the principle of secularism. The migratory scourge of illegal immigrants and refugees complicates matters on the legal-political level as well as the socio-cultural and economic levels. This article analyses the context of Mayotte and proposes strategies to help existing French churches in Mayotte to meet the challenge of planting Maori churches in Mayotte. These strategies are derived from the principle of French secularism and the unique migratory phenomenon.

1. Introduction

Le christianisme a pour mission essentielle d'implanter des communautés de croyants parmi toutes les ethnies du monde. A ce jour, de nombreuses recherches existent sur cette question qui se trouve au cœur de la théologie. On peut citer le travail de David J. Bosch dans son livre intitulé « Transforming Mission » qui a mis un accent fort sur l'histoire de la théologie des missions et sur la manière dont celle-ci a été façonnée et transformée au fil des siècles. Cependant, chaque pays a son contexte et son histoire, c'est pourquoi la stratégie de la mission varie selon la situation d'un pays à un autre.

Cet article s'intéresse à l'île de Mayotte, département français d'Outre-mer depuis mars 2011 (VoxEurop, 2017). Située dans la région sud du continent africain et plus précisément dans le canal du Mozambique. Cette petite île présente une particularité : il s'agit d'une terre à majorité musulmane placée sous la loi de la République française. Loi basée sur

le principe de laïcité française. De plus, géographiquement Mayotte fait partie des quatre îles de l'Archipel des Comores et l'islam à Mayotte est conforme à l'islam pratiqué dans la République islamique des Comores (Vice-rectorat Mayotte, 2019).

Sur l'île existent déjà des Eglises chrétiennes. Cependant, ces Eglises chrétiennes ont un positionnement plus axé sur l'accueil des étrangers et des Français de passage à Mayotte. Le culte se fait en français. Ce sont donc des Eglises françaises et le christianisme est pratiqué par une minorité. La population mahoraise reste fermée à l'Evangile parce que l'islam est bien intégré dans leur société. La pression de la famille décourage également la conversion. Certes, devant la forte pratique religieuse de l'islam par les Mahorais à Mayotte. L'Eglise est tentée de ne pas accomplir l'ordre de Jésus de faire aussi les Mahorais les disciples du Christ. Certains chrétiens sont même tombés dans l'affirmation que plusieurs chemins mènent à Dieu et que tous doivent être accueillis, que chacun voit Dieu comme il le pense.

En revanche, cet article est fondé sur la déclaration de Jésus dans l'Evangile selon Jean 14 :6 : « Je suis le chemin, la vérité, et la vie. Nul ne vient au Père que par moi ». Ce travail se veut ne pas lâcher ce qui est clair : Jésus est le chemin. Il n'y a aucun autre nom par lequel les humains puissent être sauvés. Malgré la pression de l'opinion autour d'elles, les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte doivent tenir bon et résister en s'attachant à Celui qui est la vérité. Il faut prendre les Mahorais là où ils sont pour cheminer avec eux : cela fait partie de la dimension d'amour du prochain qui doit demeurer première dans l'évangélisation.

En plus, étant un territoire français et une région ultrapériphérique européenne, Mayotte attire de plus en plus l'immigration clandestine et l'immigration des réfugiés venant des pays en guerre, ce qui engendre des problèmes sur le plan social et économique de l'île (Mayotte Islam, 2019).

Cette société à dominante musulmane fait désormais face au principe de laïcité de la République française à laquelle elle est rattachée. Elle fait face également aux problèmes causés par le fléau migratoire. La question fondamentale qui se pose alors est la suivante : comment procéder pour que la mission des Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte puisse relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises qui tiennent compte du contexte socioculturel, religieux, juridico-politique et économique de l'île ? « Comment aborder le musulman est une question qui s'est toujours posée tout au long de l'histoire et à laquelle une grande variété de réponses a été donnée » (Christensen 2001 :13). Le cas de Mayotte est vraiment spécial et mérite une recherche approfondie pour trouver la manière adéquate d'atteindre la population mahoraise par l'Évangile.

Dans son livre intitulé « L'implantation d'Eglises dans le monde musulman », Greg Livingstone (1999 :70) souligne l'importance des pionniers dans le processus d'implantation d'Eglises. Ces pionniers, ce sont des missionnaires formés et qui vont travailler dans les différents domaines d'une société musulmane. Cet article voudrait mettre en avant les stratégies à mettre en place à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de l'Eglise et destinées à l'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. Et tout ceci reste basé sur les principes missionnaires pour la communication dans une culture donnée proposés par Livingstone (Livingstone 1999 :118). La différence avec Livingstone, c'est que selon cet article, le travail en équipe se fait à partir de l'intérieur de l'Eglise française existante et se poursuit vers l'extérieur pour atteindre la population visée tout en basant sur la complexité du contexte de Mayotte qui est une terre musulmane avec son identité personnelle, mais sous la laïcité française.

Une analyse historico-critique de la société mahoraise semble nécessaire pour créer les conditions de compréhension du contexte

mahorais puis de diffusion de l'Évangile auprès des Mahorais pour montrer la théologie de mission. La situation de Mayotte actuelle n'est pas du tout comme dans le temps de la colonisation où le christianisme a pu s'installer au sein de certaines ethnies en Afrique ou à Madagascar. Mayotte est un cas unique tant sur le plan juridico-politique et religieux que sur le plan socioculturel et économique. D'un côté, Mayotte est une terre musulmane avec un islam spécifique, pourtant elle est soumise à la loi française par son statut de département français. Situation qu'on ne trouve pas dans d'autres pays à majorité musulmane. De l'autre côté, à la différence de l'époque des premières arrivées missionnaires à Mayotte, actuellement à l'ère de la départementalisation de Mayotte, il existe déjà des Eglises chrétiennes. Seulement leurs membres sont des chrétiens essentiellement d'origines étrangères ou métropolitains expatriés. Et le défi de cet article est d'implanter des Eglises mahoraises avec sa spécificité, à la fois culturelle, sociale voire ethnique de l'île. Il en résulte donc de procéder ce travail en examinant de près cette particularité du cas de Mayotte qui n'existe pas ailleurs.

Pour ce faire, comme Mayotte est un territoire français, il s'avère important dans un premier temps de comprendre le principe de laïcité française. Ensuite apporter une analyse de l'islam pratiqué à Mayotte face au principe de laïcité. Puis, analyser la complexité de la société mahoraise non seulement islamisée mais sous la laïcité française et subir les conséquences du fléau migratoire. Enfin, de ces analyses tirer les stratégies d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises : stratégies internes et externes des Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte et aussi stratégies de protection et de développement des Eglises mahoraises implantées. Stratégies qui s'appuient sur le principe de la laïcité française en addition avec le phénomène migratoire.

2. Comprendre la laïcité française

Mayotte est devenue française depuis 1841, mais pour y rester, elle a dû passer par des combats politiques vis-à-vis des Comores. L'évolution de son statut prouve ce combat : protectorat, colonie française, collectivité d'Outre-mer, collectivité départementale et enfin depuis 31 mars 2011, à la fois département d'Outre-mer et zone ultra périphérique européen (Collectivités locales, 2017). Un chemin long et difficile au regard de tous ces statuts. Et en tant que département, Mayotte est donc un territoire entièrement français soumis à la loi française dont le principe fondamental est la laïcité. Cette laïcité française a connu également son évolution au cours de l'histoire de France. Elle renvoie tout d'abord à un principe juridique de valeur constitutionnelle. Mais aussi une culture politique, un ensemble de perceptions enracinées dans une histoire longue et singulière (Ministère des armées, 2017).

À l'origine, après la Révolution française de 1789, le principe de laïcité de la République française s'explique « par la volonté de limiter l'influence politique de l'Église catholique : la séparation de l'État et des Églises a été considérée comme nécessaire à l'établissement de la démocratie en France » (Fromont 2012 : 308). Par la suite, « la laïcité repose sur plusieurs principes : la liberté de conscience, la séparation des pouvoirs politique et religieux, et l'égalité de tous devant la loi quelle que soit leur croyance ou leur conviction. Elle garantit à tous la liberté de croire ou de ne pas croire et la possibilité de l'exprimer, dans les limites de l'ordre public » (Cadène, n.d.). Mais aussi la liberté de changer de religion. « Elle suppose également la séparation de l'État et des organisations religieuses, de laquelle se déduit la neutralité de l'État, des collectivités et des services publics, non de ses usagers. La République laïque assure ainsi l'égalité des citoyens face au service public, quelles que soient leurs convictions ou croyances » (Cadène, n.d.).

La pratique de cette laïcité française est aussi compliquée à cause de la composante de la société française avec l'existence des pays colonies français qui sont restés français au lieu de demander l'indépendance. Ces pays constituent ce qu'on appelle « les départements d'Outre-mer français » (D.O.M.). Et parmi eux, il y a ceux qui sont à majorité chrétien comme la Guyane et d'autres à majorité musulmane comme Mayotte. Il est à noter que la France a connu différents régimes de laïcité au cours de son histoire qui se superposent aujourd'hui : un système concordataire pluraliste (qui subsiste en Alsace-Moselle), un système concordataire exclusif (pratiqué en Guyane), un modèle séparatiste partenariale qui trouve aujourd'hui son expression dans une reconnaissance informelle du religieux (Ministère aux armées, 2017).

Dans son ouvrage intitulé, « Les 7 laïcités françaises », l'historien et sociologue français Jean Baubérot, indique « qu'il n'existe pas un modèle français de laïcité, mais différentes représentations selon les acteurs sociaux. Leur contenu se modifie dans une certaine continuité. Le rapport de force entre leur partisans change » (Baubérot 2015 :16). En terme simple, dans son article sur la pratique de la laïcité, l'évêque Claude Dagens (2004) appelle à la laïcité comme à un principe de compréhension critique, un principe qui oblige à reconnaître et à critiquer ce qui manque à la société. De son côté, « la laïcité, pour le Conseil national des évangéliques de France (C.N.E.F.) n'a pas besoin d'un qualificatif : ouverte, fermée, positive, négative, etc. Elle a simplement besoin d'être vécue comme les textes la présentent, mais avec détermination : la liberté de vivre sa foi sereinement mais fièrement, dans le respect des autres religions et de ceux qui n'en ont pas » (CNEF 2013 :6). Ce qui implique que les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte peuvent s'appuyer sur le principe de laïcité française pour mieux vivre leur foi malgré la présence dominante de l'islam à Mayotte. Encore

plus, elles pourront s'appuyer sur cette laïcité française pour accomplir sa mission de propager la foi en Christ aux Mahorais. Ainsi, la prise de conscience par les Eglises françaises à Mayotte de l'importance de cet avantage que leur procure la laïcité française est primordiale pour relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises.

Cependant, la pratique de cette laïcité française n'est pas évidente. Elle évolue suivant les faits religieux notamment la montée de l'islam en France qui est liée principalement au phénomène migratoire. Des migrants qui sont issus des pays colonies français à majorité musulmane et qui continuent de pratiquer fidèlement la religion musulmane en arrivant en France. Dans ce contexte marqué par la présence de l'islam en France, l'État français doit faire face à de nouveaux défis pour assurer sa mission de garant de la liberté des cultes, tout en veillant au respect des principes de la laïcité. Dans le même temps, la laïcité est déformée et attaquée. Elle souffre de ne pas être expliquée. Cependant, il est à noter que de 1905 à nos jours, la loi de séparation n'a pourtant pas connu de modification substantielle et reste le socle d'un équilibre certain en France. Et c'est à la jurisprudence, notamment du Conseil d'Etat, qu'est revenu le rôle de garant de cet équilibre (CNEF 2013 :17).

Ce nouveau paysage religieux fait naître des questions qui ne se posaient pas en 1905, notamment sur la laïcité face à l'islam. Baubérot (2009), dans son article sur « l'évolution de la laïcité en France », indique que l'avenir de la laïcité française reste ouvert. Un certain apaisement ou une intensification des conflits internationaux constituera un facteur important d'évolution. Michel Bertrand (2012), dans son article sur les faits religieux et laïcité, montre que le paysage religieux de la société française laïque, déchristianisée, sécularisée, « est plus complexe qu'il n'y paraît. Certaines religions s'effacent tandis que d'autres officines religieuses font

le plein. Au nom de la laïcité, on voudrait reléguer la religion dans l'espace privé et elle s'est invitée comme jamais dans la campagne présidentielle » (Bertrand 2012 :3).

Cependant, dans son article sur « Eglise, l'islam et société », l'historien Jacques Buchhold (2006) parle de « laïcité d'inspiration chrétienne » qui est la liberté de chacun, musulman ou chrétien, de changer de religion. D'ailleurs, le mot *laïcos* en grec signifie ce qui est du peuple, populaire pourrait-on dire, bien que le sens s'approcherait plus de celui de profane. Il fut utilisé la première fois par l'Église des premiers siècles pour désigner d'abord l'assemblée qui assistait à l'office puis, plus largement, ceux qui n'étaient pas dans un état religieux, contrairement aux prêtres et aux moines, lesquels étaient des *kleros*. Ce qui donne les mots en français : les laïcs et les clercs.

Néanmoins, le poids du passé est tel que certaines religions se trouvent de fait privilégié : ce sont celles qui ont un enracinement ancien et qui, aujourd'hui encore, regroupent un nombre important de fidèles. C'est principalement le cas de la religion catholique. Malgré la laïcité qui vise à diminuer la domination de l'Église catholique dans la société française, celle-ci a conservé un certain nombre d'avantages ou en a même acquis de nouveaux par la suite.

Cependant, l'historien Jean-Paul Martin (2012), dans son article sur « la laïcité d'hier à aujourd'hui », met l'accent sur ces compromis de la laïcité avec l'Église catholique. Il parle du « compromis de la catholaïcité française », postérieurs à la loi de 1905. Avec la montée de l'islam en France, il s'interroge sur la tendance à voir disparaître ces compromis aujourd'hui dans la relation entre islam et laïcité en France. Cette idée peut être reportée dans le cas de Mayotte où c'est la laïcité qui est en compromis avec l'islam

dominant sur l'île. Avec l'apparition de l'Eglise mahoraise espérée par cet article, ces compromis devraient aussi disparaître.

Toutefois, compte tenu de la place qu'occupe l'islam à Mayotte, on est tenté aussi de croire que l'Etat aurait tendance à considérer plus cette religion par rapport à d'autres notamment le christianisme. Et ceci malgré le principe de laïcité qui oblige l'État à mettre toutes les religions sur le même point d'égalité. De même, avec le poids et la grandeur du catholicisme au niveau national, l'Eglise catholique à Mayotte reste également privilégiée bien que Mayotte soit une terre musulmane.

Bertrand dans son article précédemment cité, montre que « le protestantisme, 'religion de liberté', a été artisan de la laïcité et lui demeure attaché. Si les protestants français se sentent proches des principes de la laïcité c'est d'abord, pour une large part en raison de leur propre histoire, car face à un catholicisme hégémonique et intransigeant, elle a été, pour eux, la promotion d'une liberté : liberté de conscience, liberté de culte et, par conséquent, facteur de reconnaissance et d'intégration dans la société française » (Bertrand 2012 :5). Ce n'est donc pas par hasard que bien des protestants ont été, à la fin du 19^{ème} siècle, autour de « Jules Ferry (Ferdinand Buisson, Jules Steeg, Félix Pécaut), des pionniers de la laïcité et qu'ils furent, en 1905, parmi les artisans de la loi de séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat » (Bertrand 2012 :5).

Toutefois la laïcité correspond aussi, pour les protestants, à une *conviction théologique*. On peut dire, en effet, que la Bible, telle qu'ils la lisent et la comprennent, a été dans la culture occidentale, une des sources du grand mouvement de laïcisation que représente la modernité parce qu'elle témoigne d'une désacralisation de l'univers. Seul Dieu est saint et il se révèle dans sa seule Parole. Chacun est appelé à répondre, mais les réponses données dans la foi ne sauraient s'imposer à tous (Bertrand 2012:5).

Par contre la vie de sainteté que la Bible enseigne est un mode de vie chrétienne. « Ne savez-vous pas que vous êtes le temple de Dieu, et que l'Esprit de Dieu habite en vous ? Si quelqu'un détruit le temple de Dieu, Dieu le détruira ; car le temple de Dieu est saint, et c'est ce que vous êtes » (1 Corinthiens 3 :16-17). Les chrétiens sont saints par leur profession de foi, et doivent être purs et propres, à la fois dans leur cœur et leur conversation. Il est trompé celui qui juge être le temple du Saint-Esprit, et qui cependant ne se sent pas concerné par sa sainteté personnelle, ou par la paix et la pureté de l'Eglise. Ainsi, cette vie de sainteté des chrétiens des Eglises existantes à Mayotte est une idée à explorer pour attirer les Mahorais à l'Evangile.

Le choix d'une religion, comme le choix de ne pas avoir de religion, la liberté d'abandonner une religion ou de changer de religion sont des droits fondamentaux de la personne. Depuis 1946, la République française a fait de la laïcité un principe constitutionnel. Elle est devenue le pacte fondamental de la vie collective. C'est un acquis que personne n'entend remettre en cause, en dehors des conservateurs habités par la nostalgie du passé ou des fanatiques obsédés par la théocratie » (Bertrand 2012 :6).

Parallèlement à cette notion de liberté dans la laïcité, Baubérôt parle de « la liberté anthropologique », le fait que « l'être humain doit faire le bien mais peut faire le mal : sa liberté le rend responsable et s'oppose à la fatalité qui préside au monde des choses et des animaux ». Mais « l'enfant a besoin d'être guidé, d'obéir pour se préparer à vivre « en homme libre dans un pays libre » (Baubérôt 2015 :141). En revanche, la Bible enseigne « la liberté chrétienne » en Christ : « Tout m'est permis, mais tout n'est pas utile, tout m'est permis, mais je ne me laisserai pas asservir par quoi que ce soit » (1 Corinthiens 6 :12).

Cela implique qu'il est possible à un chrétien, malgré la vraie liberté qu'il a trouvée en Christ, de permettre à ses désirs charnels de l'asservir à

nouveau. Pourtant, sa liberté en Christ n'est pas faite pour qu'il pèche mais pour qu'il serve Dieu. Justement, c'est de cette liberté que les protestants étaient partisans de la laïcité pour diminuer l'influence des catholiques dans la société française. Résultat : on les reconnaît davantage ainsi que les autres religions. Ainsi, à Mayotte, terre musulmane, les chrétiens ont intérêt à promouvoir ce principe de laïcité française pour faire monter le poids du christianisme et pour enraciner durablement la Bonne nouvelle de l'Évangile.

Du coup, l'appui sur ce principe de laïcité française est un atout pour relever l'implantation d'Église mahoraise. La liberté que procure la laïcité devrait protéger les Mahorais, qui se convertissent au christianisme, face aux pressions de leurs familles. En effet, cette liberté permet avant tout à ces Églises françaises de se faire connaître davantage au sein de la société mahoraise. Et à travers elles, l'Évangile. Cette liberté permet aussi à ces membres de faire connaître aux Mahorais le droit de changer de religion librement, toutefois toujours dans le respect de l'individu et de l'ordre public.

De plus, de cette liberté, les chrétiens ont bel et bien le droit de partager leur foi et leur connaissance du Christ. La jurisprudence fait même état du « droit d'essayer de convaincre son prochain ». En effet, le prosélytisme, témoignage de foi visant à convaincre autrui du bien-fondé de sa croyance, est inhérent à la liberté de religion. Admettre que chacun est libre de croire ou de ne pas croire, d'adopter ou de changer de religion ou d'exprimer ses croyances impose de lui reconnaître la liberté d'essayer de convaincre son prochain. La Cour européenne des droits de l'homme a reconnu ce « droit d'essayer de convaincre son prochain », en développant les notions de prosélytisme de bon aloi, garanti par la liberté de religion, et de prosélytisme abusif, portant atteinte aux droits d'autrui, aux exigences de l'intérêt général (ordre public, sécurité, santé et morale publiques). Le

Comité des droits de l'homme des Nations unies affirme également ce droit dans son observation n°22 et la constatation du 21 octobre 2005 (CNEF 2013 : 73).

Pour la suite il est intéressant d'analyser comment se traduit concrètement ce principe de laïcité à Mayotte par rapport à l'islam dominant sur l'île.

3. Islam de Mayotte face à la laïcité française

La situation de Mayotte se présente sous deux aspects contradictoires : d'un côté, l'islam a été intensifié dans l'Archipel des Comores, y compris Mayotte, pour contrer les idées coloniales. De l'autre côté, Mayotte a cherché la protection de la France coloniale, contre les attaques de ses voisins des autres îles et c'est pour cette raison qu'elle a choisi de rester française. On peut donc déduire qu'au fond, l'islam à Mayotte n'est pas en accord avec la France, tout cela est plutôt lié à un intérêt économique qui ne dit pas son nom. Ce point est important dans notre recherche sur l'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises car si le divorce entre Mayotte et les trois autres îles de l'Archipel des Comores a été consommé sur le plan juridico-politique grâce à la départementalisation de Mayotte, il est nécessaire aussi qu'il en soit sur le plan religieux.

Il est à noter qu'avant l'arrivée de l'islam, Mayotte était une société traditionnellement marquée par la croyance ancienne animiste. En effet, c'est sur cette religion ancestrale qu'on a importé l'islam. Du coup, l'islam à Mayotte a sa spécificité qui la diffère de l'islam à son origine en Arabie. C'est pourquoi, il est fondamental de mettre en relief les marqueurs de l'islam à Mayotte pour comprendre ses spécificités et apporter la foi chrétienne à la société mahoraise :

Tout d’abord, en Afrique comme à Mayotte, le rite de la transe ou de la possession du croyant par des “esprits” reste très important. On le soumet seulement à l’autorité d’Allah. C’est du syncrétisme. A Mayotte, des pratiques très anciennes ont survécu en s’islamisant. Du coup, on peut déduire que l’islam à Mayotte n’est pas si stable qu’elle l’est en apparence. Même si la religion musulmane fait partie de l’histoire de Mayotte, le bouleversement de sa situation peut faire basculer la population vers une autre croyance plus stable. Justement, la départementalisation de Mayotte avec ses conséquences dans la vie des Mahorais, peut-être ce phénomène susceptible d’entraîner la population vers la recherche d’une autre religion. En outre, ce problème du syncrétisme semble être l’un des obstacles qui empêchent les Mahorais à s’ouvrir à l’Évangile. En tout cas, ce phénomène du syncrétisme est à éviter dans les stratégies d’implantation d’Églises mahoraises.

Cette pratique animiste rejoint celle du soufisme prôné par un grand nombre des Mahorais. En effet, la pratique du soufisme qui est un courant spirituel de l’islam marque également l’islam pratiqué à Mayotte. Dans son article intitulé « le soufisme, langue mystique des musulmans », le journaliste Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner (2013), indique que « le soufisme a pour objectif la soumission à la volonté de Dieu et la préparation pour la rencontre attendue avec lui. Mais, plus que les autres musulmans, les soufis insistent sur la nécessité de dompter en eux le *nafs*, le « moi » égoïste, fréquemment comparé à un cheval fougueux » et influencé par -Satan. Dans leur combat quotidien, les soufis s’appuient sur un *hadith* (parole prêtée au prophète) comparant le « petit djihad », à mener sur les champs de bataille contre les ennemis de l’islam, avec le « grand djihad », intérieur celui-là. Ce n’est qu’une fois que le *nafs* est maîtrisé qu’une place est libérée pour Dieu dans le cœur du croyant et qu’une rencontre, un dialogue deviennent alors possibles avec lui.

Cette rencontre est parfois décrite comme « extase » ou « transe », pouvant prendre la forme d'une attraction « vers le haut » ou « vers l'intérieur », menant vers Dieu sous la forme de cercles concentriques... D'où la définition du soufisme comme étant la langue des mystiques de l'islam, ou plus exactement « la langue des états spirituels, des stations mystiques » (Hoffner 2013). Le soufisme a donc une place prépondérante à Mayotte, qui explique l'organisation des festivités hebdomadaires qui animent la société mahoraise avec un engouement populaire. Et il n'est pas rare de déceler dans certaines célébrations une énergie semblable à celle des cérémonies animistes, qui ont elles aussi leur place – la danse des « *djinn* » est en l'occurrence la plus courante (Bahloul 2019).

Une chose qui marque aussi l'islam à Mayotte, c'est l'existence de ce qu'on appelle les cadis, qui sont en quelque sorte les autorités religieuses musulmanes. Ce sont des juges chargés de régler les questions juridiques dans une société musulmane comme Mayotte.

Et c'est sur cet islam tempéré sunnite, rattaché à l'école juridique chaféite marqué par le pratique animisme et soufisme qu'on a imposé la laïcité française. En réalité, la laïcité appliquée en Métropole n'est pas tout à fait celle qui est appliquée par les autorités à Mayotte. Elle se résume dans tout ce que l'Etat et ses représentants ont fait à Mayotte au nom de la laïcité. Ainsi, en raison de sa particularité musulmane, « deux types de statuts s'appliquent aux Mahorais : le statut de droit commun, identique à celui de la Métropole (administrations, tribunaux...), et le statut personnel dérogatoire au code civil et à la laïcité qui s'inspire du droit musulman et de coutumes ancestrales, africaines et malgaches...C'est un compromis entre le coran et le code civil » (Sénat, 2019). Toutefois, ce statut de droit local est appelé à disparaître petit à petit, à part l'affaiblissement du rôle des cadis, « l'abandon progressif du droit personnel au profit du droit commun,

plusieurs changements se réalisent dans la société mahoraise et qui gênent leur pratique musulmane » (Mayotte Islam, 2019).

Sunnites mâtinés d'animistes et encadrés par des confréries dynamiques, les Mahorais ont une lecture modérée du Coran. D'où l'agacement d'Abdoulatifou Aly, Député non inscrit de Mayotte et seul musulman élu à l'Assemblée nationale, devant le débat qui fait rage en métropole. « Ici, les valeurs de la République ont plus de sens qu'en métropole car elles démontrent leur capacité à intégrer la différence et prennent ainsi leur dimension universelle (VoxEurop, 2017). « Nous avons ici un islam qui s'accommode très bien de la République », confirme Hubert Derache, Préfet de Mayotte entre 2009 et 2011. « Il y a une forte opposition à toute radicalisation » (Hopquin 2011). Par contre, il y a aussi ceux qui ne partagent pas l'idée d'une parfaite harmonie entre l'islam de Mayotte et la République. Tant que la loi française n'empêche pas la pratique de l'islam, il n'y a pas de problème. Seulement, que les Mahorais le veuillent ou non, leur chemin pourrait rencontrer des entraves. Pourtant, chacun sait qu'il est impossible de modifier le Coran, ce qui suppose donc que c'est la loi française qui devrait s'adapter à l'islam de Mayotte, étant entendu que celui-ci ne présente pas de danger pour la République. Par conséquent, il y a certaines règles républicaines qu'il faut appliquer sans discussion, mais d'autres méritent un débat compte tenu de la particularité de Mayotte.

Toutefois, on se doute que la République française se limite aux bonnes intentions mahoraises, bien qu'elles soient exemplaires, et que des garanties institutionnelles sont nécessaires. Il ne faut pas oublier que c'est Mayotte qui voulait être française. La République cherchera toujours ses profits en dépit de l'identité de Mayotte. A part cela, il y a également un flou juridique sur un certain nombre de dossiers incompatibles avec un statut de département français (Taglioni 2009 :16).

L'islam de Mayotte pourrait donc être un modèle d'inspiration pour résoudre les problèmes liés à l'islam en France. Mais pour cela, l'islam doit trouver un compromis par rapport aux lois françaises qui entravent sa pratique. De ce fait, on peut supposer que le principe de laïcité provoquerait un parallélisme entre, d'une part, la déchristianisation de la France et d'autre part, la déislamisation progressive de Mayotte. En réalité, il s'agit là d'un bienfait pour l'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. D'où l'intérêt et l'importance d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises pour apporter un équilibre religieux qui sera un véritable atout à la pratique de la laïcité à Mayotte. Quand une autre pratique religieuse à part l'islam trouve sa place au sein de la société mahoraise en particulier dans la famille mahoraise, alors il sera plus logique d'enlever les statuts personnels de droit musulman qui ne sont pas conformes au principe de laïcité républicaine.

Au nom de la laïcité, les principes républicains ont réussi à réduire l'influence de l'Eglise catholique en France. Du coup, il est fort probable qu'au nom de la laïcité, les Républicains pourraient réussir progressivement à diminuer l'influence de l'islam dans la société mahoraise. Il faut seulement que les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte arrivent à utiliser cette complexité sur le plan juridico-politique et religieux de Mayotte afin de montrer leur visibilité au sein de la société mahoraise. C'est après qu'elles atteindront la population mahoraise en créant des Eglises mahoraises.

Cela donc devrait en quelque sorte aboutir selon cet article à une autre forme de divorce entre Mayotte et les Comores. C'est le divorce sur le plan religieux à part le divorce sur le plan politique et juridique déjà acquis lors du passage de Mayotte en département français en 2011. L'aboutissement à l'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises marquera ce divorce entre Mayotte et les Comores sur le plan religieux. L'analyse de la complexité de la société mahoraise renforcera la possibilité de ce changement sur le plan religieux.

Société mahoraise non seulement islamisée mais sous la laïcité française et subit en plus les conséquences du fléau migratoire.

4. Complexité de la société mahoraise

La mission est un ordre essentiel pour l’Eglise, elle n’est pas une branche annexe de la vie de l’Eglise. Jésus a expliqué aux disciples la nature et l’étendue de cette mission dans Actes 1 : 8 en disant : « mais vous recevrez une puissance, celle du Saint–Esprit survenant sur vous, et vous serez mes témoins à Jérusalem, dans toute la Judée, dans la Samarie et jusqu’aux extrémités de la terre ». Ainsi la mission des Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte devraient accompagner de la puissance du Saint Esprit. L’Eglise devrait se laisser guider par le Saint Esprit. Et c’est l’œuvre du Saint Esprit de donner à l’Eglise une vision dans sa mission en ouvrant leur intelligence à la réalité de la société où elle se trouve.

Mayotte étant une petite île, on comprend à quel point le phénomène migratoire caractérise la vie sociale, culturelle et économique de la société mahoraise. Cela a commencé avec le peuplement de Mayotte. Les immigrants venus s’y installer, ont gardé en général leur manière de vivre, ils ne s’identifiaient pas à la population locale. C’est pourquoi, même l’islam ne s’est répandu à Mayotte qu’à l’époque coloniale pour contrer l’idéologie des colonisateurs. Cela veut dire que les Mahorais ont dû s’identifier aux immigrants qui ont apporté l’islam à Mayotte.

En revanche, la démarche de cet article, est l’inverse de celle que nous venons de décrire. L’implantation d’Eglises mahoraises a pour objectif fondamental de garder ou de sauvegarder la culture mahoraise, ce qui signifie que les chrétiens migrants à Mayotte devraient tenir compte de la réalité locale. On doit pouvoir utiliser les langues locales, le *shimaore* ou le *kibushi*, dans les Eglises mahoraises à implanter. De même, l’architecture

des églises mahoraises à implanter devra être inspirée du contexte local et non pas des architectures importées de l'extérieur.

Il est à noter qu'avant l'arrivée de l'islam, Mayotte était une société traditionnellement marquée par la croyance ancienne animiste. Cette société traditionnelle mahoraise repose sur deux caractéristiques essentielles et structurantes, que sont : la matrilinearité et la matrilocalité. Ce qui signifie que les femmes ont un rôle clé dans la société mahoraise et cela jusqu'à nos jours.

C'est sur cette société mahoraise traditionnelle animiste que s'est posé l'islam. Jusqu'en 1890, la religion musulmane ne concerne que 10 % à 15 % de la population mahoraise. L'islamisation n'est devenue massive qu'entre 1890 et 1920 atteignant presque la totalité de la population. Celle-ci a plaqué d'autres institutions qui ont compliqué l'organisation sociale. Il s'agit principalement de la prééminence masculine dans les domaines politique (prééminence très relative d'ailleurs et toujours contestée) et religieux, de l'inégalité sexuelle (successorale ou testimoniale), du droit islamique et de la polygamie masculine, qui renforce, paradoxalement, l'identification matrilocale et matrilineaire des individus, en faisant de leurs pères des maris «itinérants» d'un village à l'autre. (Le Mouvement Matricien, 2012).

Ensuite, C'est sur cette société mahoraise traditionnelle animiste islamisée que s'est posé la loi française. Et en étant un territoire français, l'organisation sociale à Mayotte est donc régie sur le Code de l'action sociale et des familles (CASF). C'est un ensemble de dispositions législatives et réglementaires sur l'action sociale et la famille en France. Ce code organise pour une grande part la solidarité républicaine en direction de l'ensemble des familles sur le territoire français, quelle qu'en soient leur situation et leur composition. Mais, un problème se pose à Mayotte : les Mahorais ne

bénéficient pas encore de leurs droits. Le gouvernement français tarde à appliquer le code. Ce qui amène bon nombre de Mahorais à se demander si Mayotte est bien un département français et d'autres à quitter l'île pour la Métropole ou la Réunion afin de bénéficier des aides sociales.

La difficulté à laquelle Mayotte est gravement confrontée concerne l'immigration. Trop d'étrangers, dont la plupart sont en situation irrégulière arrivent en grand nombre sur l'île. Il y a aussi les réfugiés demandeurs d'asiles venant des pays en guerre. L'espoir de cet article, c'est que cette immigration de masse apporte un changement sur le plan religieux. D'autant plus que ce phénomène d'immigration de masse à Mayotte va en parallèle avec ce qui se passe dans le monde, notamment en France. On atteindra alors les Mahorais à travers les étrangers immigrants à Mayotte notamment les Malgaches et les Africains mais surtout à travers les Comoriens qui trouvent leur liberté de choisir une autre religion en venant à Mayotte. Il se pose aussi le problème de l'application du droit commun par rapport au droit local. Et c'est l'Union départementale des associations familles (UDAF) qui lutte pour l'accès au droit pour toutes les catégories de familles vivant à Mayotte.

Ainsi, la famille traditionnelle mahoraise a subi les conséquences apportées par l'islam ainsi que le mode de vie occidental imposé par la départementalisation. La première expérience conjugale de la jeune femme est toujours difficile. Il s'agit de vivre avec quelqu'un qui n'est jamais là. Effectivement, l'épouse se retrouve seule, après avoir vécu son enfance dans l'intimité de la famille maternelle, des sœurs, des frères et des parents en général. Souvent le mari rentre tard le soir, quand il n'est pas, un soir sur deux, chez son autre femme. Ainsi, la société mahoraise est caractérisée par le fait que tous les hommes et toutes les femmes ont, au cours de leur vie, plusieurs conjoints, les hommes en combinaison avec la polygamie, les

femmes successivement par le jeu du divorce, qu'elles peuvent elles-mêmes provoquer.

Il faut savoir que ce n'est qu'un épisode, peu discret et quelque peu vulgaire, d'une dispute conjugale se terminant souvent par une répudiation islamique, à moins que le mari épris soit prêt à subir d'autres humiliations. Les enfants sont bien sûr les victimes, ils assistent à la séparation du couple parental. Le plus souvent l'enfant reste auprès de sa mère, et l'image du père est alors incertaine. Il arrive aussi que la femme voie ses enfants repris par la famille du père, que ce soit contre son gré ou qu'elle-même les lui abandonne. Dans d'autres cas, l'enfant est élevé par son père et surtout par la nouvelle épouse de celui-ci. L'enfant pourrait être rancunier vis-à-vis de celle qui l'a laissé, volontairement ou non (Blanchy 1995 :95).

Cette instabilité familiale est sans doute les conséquences de la polygamie. D'ailleurs, la Bible enseigne que le plan originel de Dieu au moment de la création était le mariage d'un homme et d'une femme (Genèse 2 :18-24). La polygamie n'est apparue qu'après la chute. Les exemples bibliques montrent que les familles polygames connaissent de nombreuses querelles entre les épouses et parfois également entre les enfants, c'est-à-dire que la paix du Seigneur ne régnait pas dans les mariages polygames, les polygames souffraient des conséquences de leur décision.

S'ajoutent les maux de la société moderne comme la drogue et la délinquance qui ont malheureusement fait leur apparition à Mayotte et jouent un rôle important dans la perturbation et l'instabilité de la société mahoraise. Les ravages que fait la *Chimik*, drogue de synthèse très dangereuse et qui circule à Mayotte, provoquent des drames dans une partie de la jeunesse mahoraise. Parmi ces jeunes, des enfants qui ont grandi à Mayotte et livrés à eux même dans les rues, soit parce que leurs parents ont été expulsés car clandestins, soit parce que leur parent sont

divorcés. Ce n'est pas étonnant que ces jeunes provoquent des émeutes pour semer la terreur dans la vie de la société mahoraise. Celles-là peuvent être considérées comme leur vengeance contre le système établi dans la société mahoraise.

On peut en conclure que la société mahoraise est compliquée que jamais. Cette complexité est due principalement à la difficulté d'accorder la société traditionnelle mahoraise islamisée avec le mode de vie d'un département français. Statut de département qui oblige à appliquer le principe de laïcité. S'ajoute à cela le fléau migratoire qui affecte l'économie mahoraise, sa vie sociale et culturelle notamment l'éducation, la santé et surtout la vie familiale et la sécurité au quotidien. La société mahoraise ne jouisse pas parfaitement des bienfaits escomptés par la départementalisation. Il est à noter que ce fléau migratoire ne fait qu'intensifier le conflit communautaire déjà existant entre Mahorais et Comoriens.

Pour la suite, compte tenu de ces analyses du contexte de Mayotte, il conviendra de définir les stratégies nécessaires pour aider les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte à relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. Stratégies internes et externes de ces Eglises françaises et aussi stratégies destinées à protéger et à développer les Eglises mahoraises nouvellement implantées. Stratégies par l'utilisation du principe de laïcité française en addition avec le phénomène migratoire.

5. Stratégies internes et externes des Eglises françaises pour l'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises

L'idée d'une stratégie d'implantation d'Eglises remonte au ministère de l'apôtre Paul et de ses collaborateurs dans la Bible notamment dans le livre des Actes des apôtres. En effet, à cette époque, des Eglises étaient implantées dans des villes de païens. En fondant de nouvelles communautés, il est

clair que l'apôtre Paul obéissait à un plan stratégique. Dans la pratique, ces stratégies varient d'une culture à une autre, d'un pays à un autre, d'une génération à une autre. Ainsi, pour cet article, la mise en place des stratégies se fait d'après l'analyse du contexte du champ de mission qui est l'île de Mayotte. Stratégies basées sur l'utilisation du principe de laïcité en addition avec le phénomène migratoire.

Les bonnes stratégies à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte donneront un dynamisme à la vie spirituelle de leurs fidèles. Tous cela élargiront également leurs activités et donneront une autre dimension de leur visibilité au sein de la société mahoraise soumise au principe de laïcité française. Principe qui procure à ces Eglises françaises des avantages à mieux exercer leur mission et à relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. Ainsi, de l'intérieur de chaque Eglise française existante à Mayotte, il faut à la base garder l'unité des fidèles, sans quoi l'idée d'implantation d'Eglise sera difficile à réaliser. C'est la condition *sine qua non*.

Ensuite, former continuellement les fidèles avec des sujets non seulement pour les réveiller spirituellement mais aussi les éduquer à la pratique de la vie chrétienne surtout dans le témoignage de sa foi en Christ. Pour cela, il y a quelques sujets importants à apprendre aux fidèles d'après le contexte de Mayotte : l'esprit missionnaire, l'esprit de partage en allant vers les autres et en les accueillant. Dans le même sens, l'enseignement sur la famille chrétienne comme modèle dans la société, vu l'instabilité familiale à cause de la polygamie et le fléau migratoire conséquence de la départementalisation de Mayotte. Il y a aussi l'enseignement sur la divinité de Jésus ou sur l'authenticité de la Bible, et bien d'autres sujets seront au cœur de l'édification des fidèles. En effet, l'idée sur la divinité de Jésus est l'une des raisons qui empêche les Mahorais de devenir chrétiens. La

preuve c'est qu'on trouve la présence des Mahorais au sein des témoins de Jéhovah qui nient la divinité de Jésus, mais on ne les trouve pas à l'Église adventiste qui reconnaît la divinité de Jésus même si celle-ci abstient à la consommation du porc comme les musulmans.

A part cela, des formations spécifiques sont nécessaires pour le ministère auprès des enfants ainsi que pour le ministère auprès des femmes. De plus, avec l'immigration des comoriens qui arrivent à trouver leur place au sein des Eglises françaises. La création d'une section mahoraise à travers eux et certains fidèles qui se débrouillent un peu avec le *shimaore*, constituera un noyau fondamental de l'Eglise mahoraise à implanter. En parallèle avec ces stratégies internes des Eglises françaises à Mayotte, des stratégies à l'extérieur d'elles, seront à réaliser. Des stratégies qui mettent en pratique les acquis liés aux stratégies internes. Il s'agit ici de propager la loi de liberté de conscience que procure le principe de laïcité. Cela permettra à chaque Eglise française à Mayotte de montrer davantage sa présence au sein de la société mahoraise en renforçant ses relations avec les différentes entités.

Déjà, toutes les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte doivent soigner la relation entre elles pour former le Conseil d'Eglises chrétiennes à Mayotte. Il serait beaucoup plus important si les Eglises françaises fassent ensemble quelques choses au nom de ce Conseil. De même, leur relation avec les autorités de l'Etat et les élus locaux doit être sous les meilleurs auspices pour susciter et entretenir les valeurs communes de la laïcité française. Il y a également leur relation avec les différents établissements à savoir les écoles, les hôpitaux, etc. et ce, par l'intermédiaire des aumôneries que procure le principe de laïcité française. Il y a aussi leur relation avec les différentes associations à Mayotte pour l'aide et la promotion des actions sociales visant en particulier les familles. Toutes ces relations sont utiles afin que l'Eglise puisse propager la loi de la liberté de conscience. Liberté

qui donne aux Mahorais musulmans de changer librement de religion notamment à celle du christianisme ou la foi en Christ.

Avec le phénomène migratoire, les Eglises françaises à Mayotte ont aussi à renforcer leurs relations avec les partenaires ecclésiastiques de l'étranger en particulier avec les Eglises du nord-ouest de Madagascar, les Eglises du Kenya, les Eglises malgaches en France. Ces relations lui permettront d'avoir des missionnaires sur place. Des gens qualifiés ayant un arrière-plan culturel mahorais, contrairement aux missionnaires venant de l'occident. Et tout cela en collaboration avec l'Association missionnaire AIM qui connaît déjà le terrain. A part cela, pour éviter les problèmes liés à l'obtention d'un visa de séjour à Mayotte, et compte tenu du déficit des personnels enseignants, médicaux et autres à Mayotte, les Eglises françaises à Mayotte pourraient travailler avec les Eglises des communautés Malgaches en France, reconnues par l'Etat français.

De même, avec les Eglises des Communautés d'expressions africaines en France (CEAF), notamment avec la communauté congolaise de Congo-Kinshasa qui parle des langues de la famille bantou comme le *shimaore* de Mayotte. Il s'agirait d'inciter les Malgaches et les Africains de nationalité française, fonctionnaires de l'enseignement, de la santé ..., à demander leur mutation à Mayotte. Le service de mission de la Fédération protestante de France (DEFAP), pourrait, de son côté, être sollicité pour la formation et l'envoi de ces missionnaires à Mayotte. Ils seront considérés ainsi comme envoyés du DEFAP mais soutenus financièrement par l'Etat français en tant qu'expatriés.

Une autre stratégie grâce au phénomène migratoire, consiste à regrouper, par le moyen de la technologie, les Mahorais qui trouvent la foi en Christ en dehors de Mayotte. En effet, être en Métropole ou à La Réunion, les Mahorais se sentent libres de toutes pressions et devraient

s'intéresser au christianisme. En plus, avec le phénomène migratoire en Europe, beaucoup des Eglises à Métropole deviennent interculturelles. L'Eglise devient un lieu de rassemblement de différentes cultures dans lequel les Mahorais peuvent bien s'intégrer. Ceux-ci pourront pleinement participer pour relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. On peut animer un groupe de prière via facebook. On peut aussi créer une page facebook, sur lequel les textes sont publiés, où les intentions s'échangent avec aussi quelques messages pour l'organisation, ou bien simplement une belle œuvre picturale ou musicale.

En outre, le fait que Mayotte terrain d'islam est sous la laïcité française. Cet article s'inspire de ce contexte pour intégrer une nouvelle dimension, essentielle à l'implantation d'Eglise mahoraise. Il s'agit de « l'Apologétique selon le principe de laïcité française ». Ce principe octroie la liberté d'expression. De ce même principe, l'Etat est censé protéger les religions et devrait les traiter toutes de la même manière, c'est-à-dire sur un même pied d'égalité. D'où, la stratégie que propose cet article, celle d'inciter l'Etat à jouer son rôle de garant de la laïcité en organisant par exemple des rencontres interreligieuses où on parlera des sujets qui touchent la société mahoraise comme la vie familiale et d'autres. Ces genres de rencontre peuvent être organisés par d'autres organismes notamment les établissements scolaires, l'Union départementale des associations familles et d'autres. On pourra avec eux parler des sujets sensibles comme la divinité de Jésus par rapport à ce que les musulmans pensent de Jésus. La présence des média pour diffuser chaque rencontre au grand public est très utile. Cela devient un moyen important pour transmettre le message de l'Évangile.

Le dialogue s'impose d'autant plus que Jésus lui-même, dans les Évangiles, nous apparaît comme un homme de relation et de dialogue.

Certes, il a d'abord conscience de n'être envoyé qu' « aux brebis perdues de la maison d'Israël » (Mt 15, 24). Néanmoins, loin d'être enfermé dans sa particularité, il refuse toute barrière et se montre accueillant à tous ceux qu'il rencontre sur sa route, y compris dans les marges de la société et parmi ceux qui n'appartiennent pas à son peuple. Il est ouvert aux autres de manière inconditionnelle, pour que d'autres à leur tour s'engagent dans cette manière de vivre. Le style relationnel de sa vie – lui-même révélateur de la relation de Dieu avec l'humanité – fonde à son tour l'existence chrétienne comme une existence en relation avec autrui (Pare 2019 :2).

L'Eglise à implanter aura sa spécificité sur le plan doctrinal, liturgique et architectural, suivant son contexte actuel et son évolution. L'étude de ces spécificités à l'intérieur de chaque Eglise française la mettra dans une position d'implantation de l'Eglise mahoraise à tout moment. De ces stratégies, l'Eglise mahoraise à implanter sera un lieu où l'on pratique la devise de la République française : liberté, égalité, fraternité. Liberté qui donne aux musulmans vivant à Mayotte de changer librement de religion, en se tournant notamment au christianisme, la foi en Jésus Christ qui donne une communion vivante. Liberté par rapport à l'esclavage du péché car la vraie liberté est en Jésus Christ. Egalité car en Christ il n'y a pas de différence raciale, ni de classe sociale, ni de niveau intellectuel, ni de femme ou d'homme... Tous les immigrants venant à Mayotte peuvent s'inspirer de cette égalité au sein de cette Eglise mahoraise. Fraternité car cette Eglise mahoraise implantée sera d'abord un lieu de réconciliation entre Mahorais et Comoriens, et un lieu pour pratiquer le vivre ensemble autour de la foi en Jésus Christ, de l'amour de la culture mahoraise, et de la soumission à la loi de la République française basée sur le principe de laïcité.

Mais il faut avouer que cette Eglise mahoraise implantée sera fragile à cause de la complexité du contexte où elle est. Un contexte à la

fois musulman et aussi sous la laïcité française. De nouveau, d'un côté, ce contexte pourra être pour elle un avantage pour son développement et sa croissance, et de l'autre côté, ce contexte pourra être aussi pour elle une menace à son épanouissement. C'est pourquoi, pour la suite de cet article, il est important de prévoir et de définir des stratégies destinées justement à la protéger et à la développer au sein de la société mahoraise ancrée dans la République française.

6. Stratégies destinées à protéger et à développer l'Eglise mahoraise nouvellement implantée

Comme Mayotte est un département français, il en résulte aussi l'idée d'utilisation des lois françaises au profit de la création d'Eglises mahoraises. Lois qui sont basées sur la laïcité. On fait ainsi de la théologie contextuelle encore appelé contextualisation. D'ailleurs, celle-ci paraît aujourd'hui être la voie à suivre en théologie de la mission. Cependant, sa compréhension est diverse et variée au point où elle a généré un nombre de modèles pour expliquer comment l'évangile doit prendre forme dans des contextes variés de culture (Van Engen 1996, p. kindle 662). C'est pourquoi la contextualisation est vue de différentes manières. Charles Kraft parle du « christianisme approprié » lorsqu'il fait référence à la contextualisation. En effet, il la définit comme étant le fait de : « faire tout ce qui est nécessaire pour que le christianisme soit exprimé de manière à être approprié au contexte du groupe qui le reçoit » (Kraft 2005 : 4).

Selon Lamin Sanneh, la mission c'est la translation parce que « en établissant une distinction entre le message et sa calèche culturelle, la mission comme translation affirme la *missio Dei* comme la lumière cachée de son travail » (Sanneh 2009, p. kindle 37). Paul Hiebert souligne le fait qu'il ne doit pas avoir d'amalgame lorsqu'on parle de contextualisation. C'est

pourquoi il préfère parler de la contextualisation « critique » parce que pour lui, une contextualisation non critique ouvre la porte entre autres au syncrétisme. En effet, une approche critique de la contextualisation, dit-il : « se garde de rejeter ou d'accepter d'anciennes croyances et coutumes sans les examiner » (Hiebert 2002 :208). De ce fait, compte tenu du contexte de Mayotte marqué par la pratique de l'islam et la laïcité française, ainsi que par le fléau migratoire, on peut en définir des stratégies pour développer et protéger l'Eglise mahoraise implantée.

L'Eglise mahoraise à planter se trouve dans un contexte concret avec ses complexités qui résultent de différents contrastes : la culture mahoraise face à la culture française ; la distance géographique qui sépare Mayotte avec la France ; la religion musulmane de Mayotte avec la sécularisation de la France de tradition chrétienne. Ainsi, le bon témoignage de la foi chrétienne devrait être visible de tous soit à travers chaque fidèle soit à travers l'Eglise elle-même. Ceci constitue la base des stratégies pour sa protection et son développement. Cela couvre évidemment la création de cette Eglise mahoraise selon la loi française sur les associations culturelles.

En effet, l'apôtre Paul enseigne aux chrétiens l'obéissance aux lois. « Rappelle à tous qu'ils doivent être soumis aux chefs et aux autorités. Il faut qu'ils leur obéissent et soient prêts à faire tout ce qui est bien » (Tite 3 :1). Du temps de Paul, beaucoup de gens considéraient à tort les chrétiens comme les ennemis de l'Empire romain. Aujourd'hui encore, dans certains pays, les chrétiens passent pour les ennemis de la société. Il faut malheureusement bien admettre que les chrétiens sont parfois responsables de ce jugement à cause de leur opposition irréfléchie à leurs autorités. Ils devraient plutôt être reconnus comme de bons citoyens. Ils doivent s'efforcer d'être respectueux des lois de leur pays. Encore plus quand il s'agit de question d'implantation d'Eglises.

A part la création de l'Eglise suivant la loi en tant qu'association cultuelle, il est important de rappeler que le principe de laïcité française donne la liberté de s'exprimer et c'est à l'Eglise d'utiliser cette opportunité en se montrant davantage dans la société. Les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte devraient alors aller à la rencontre de la population mahoraise. Pour ce faire, il faut encourager leurs fidèles à s'engager dans la vie publique. A part leur engagement dans la vie économique, il est essentiel qu'ils s'engagent aussi dans la vie politique. Ceci malgré les risques que cela comporte car une mauvaise articulation de la religion et de la politique peut entraîner une soumission de l'une à l'autre. Dans notre « société fragilisée, incertaine de son avenir économique mais aussi brutalisée dans ses fondements anthropologiques », les choix politiques peuvent paraître réduits (KTOTV, 2019).

D'ailleurs, avec la laïcité les républicains ont pu diminuer l'influence de la religion catholique dans la société française. Aujourd'hui le parti politique des républicains existe bel et bien dans la société mahoraise, mais il faut que les chrétiens y intègrent pour promouvoir le principe de laïcité afin de diminuer l'influence de la religion musulmane dans la société mahoraise. D'ailleurs, Jésus a déclaré à ses disciples et à ceux qui l'ont suivi : « Vous êtes le sel de la terre » (Matthieu 5 :16). Or, le sel sert à protéger ou à conserver quelque chose, il faut donc le mélanger dans cette chose à conserver. La difficulté est qu'il y a des chrétiens qui ne veulent pas se mélanger ou s'intégrer dans la société mahoraise. Cependant, l'engagement politique est une façon efficace d'être sel de la terre et lumière du monde. Une manière privilégiée de rencontrer, d'influencer, de conduire des gens qui ne connaissent par le chemin de l'Eglise. Selon la logique de cet article, plus il y a moins d'influence de la religion musulmane dans la société

mahoraise, plus les Mahorais et Mahoraises auront l'audace de changer de religion. Droit qui leur est donné par le principe de laïcité française.

Une autre bonne stratégie à protéger et à développer l'Eglise mahoraise implantée consiste à pratiquer le dialogue interreligieux à travers la musique, vu que les Mahorais aiment la musique. Nombreux sont les gens sensibles à des musiques de confessions qui ne sont pas les leurs. Toutefois, il est à noter que le dialogue interreligieux à travers la musique n'est pas une forme de syncrétisme religieux. Certes, l'Islam à Mayotte n'a eu aucun mal à se mêler aux croyances existantes pour garder la cohésion sociale. Cela semblait même donner lieu à une richesse spirituelle. Mais l'idée d'utilisation de la musique comme expression du dialogue interreligieux se porte sur le moyen de montrer l'amour de Dieu et le vivre ensemble, ce qui est une valeur chrétienne.

En outre, l'intégration des chrétiens dans la vie sociale à travers différentes associations locales est fondamentale. Cela constitue une preuve de volonté à apporter des solutions aux problèmes sociaux à Mayotte. Parmi les associations à Mayotte, on peut citer « la Cimade », une association qui défend la dignité et les droits des personnes réfugiées et migrantes, quelles que soient leurs origines, leurs opinions politiques ou leurs convictions. Elle lutte contre toute forme de discrimination et, en particulier, contre la xénophobie et le racisme. » (La Cimade, 2019). D'ailleurs, il faut noter que la Cimade est une branche de la Fédération protestante de France, cela fait partie des actions sociales des protestants. Seulement à Mayotte ses membres sont plutôt des gens athées. Il serait donc bon que les chrétiens des Eglises françaises à Mayotte puissent trouver leur place au sein de cette association. Il y a aussi les associations qui œuvrent pour le bien de la famille comme l'Union départementale des associations familles (UDAF). L'intégration des chrétiens dans de telles associations est un moyen de

partager les valeurs chrétiennes de la famille. Cet engagement les pousse à être des modèles vivants que les Mahorais peuvent voir. Cela implique leur fidélité dans la vie de couple. Valeur à laquelle les Mahorais ne croient pas, ils ont des difficultés à rester fidèle à une seule personne.

Une fois de plus, dans le cadre de la stratégie de protection et de développement de l'Eglise mahoraise à implanter, il faut entretenir la relation avec les autorités. Certes, il y a la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat, mais cela n'empêche pas aux représentants de l'Eglise d'être en relation avec les représentants de l'Etat. Cela favorise la visibilité du christianisme à Mayotte et aussi pour la lisibilité de son message. En effet, pour être mieux reconnue dans la cité, l'Eglise devrait prendre soin, entre autres, des relations publiques. L'intérêt n'est pas seulement juridique. Ni seulement d'améliorer l'image de l'Eglise. Il en va de sa présence et de son engagement dans la cité. Il faut également prendre soins de la relation avec les autorités religieuses musulmanes.

Toutefois, l'Eglise doit être vigilante et veiller à ne pas confondre manifestation à caractère politique et manifestation à caractère social. L'engagement politique indiqué précédemment est un engagement individuel du chrétien, et les chrétiens peuvent avoir des convictions politiques différentes. Mais l'Eglise est apolitique. L'Eglise pourrait alors manifester pour la lutte contre les inégalités sociales, ou pour le combat à l'égalité réelle à laquelle Mayotte aspire. Ce sera intéressant de voir l'Eglise soutenir la population mahoraise pour l'égalité réelle du moins par rapport aux autres départements d'Outre-mer. L'Eglise pourrait également manifester contre des lois qui vont à l'encontre des valeurs familiales. Par exemple : manifestation pour l'abrogation de la loi Taubira sur le mariage des personnes de même sexe. Une loi n'est pas irréversible, on peut revendiquer son abrogation. L'Eglise peut aussi organiser une marche

pour la paix à Mayotte, une marche pour la réconciliation entre les deux communautés. Ce sont donc des manifestations pour de bonnes causes que l'Eglise devrait faire afin de témoigner la foi chrétienne mais aussi pour attirer l'attention de l'Etat.

Une autre stratégie de protection et de développement de l'Eglise mahoraise à planter consiste à l'affilier avec des groupements d'Eglises au niveau régional, national et international. Ce rattachement brisera l'isolement à la fois géographique et religieux de l'Eglise. Et surtout, plus elle est reconnue dans le cadre ecclésiastique internationale, plus elle sera reconnue par la société mahoraise musulmane et l'Etat français. Elle aura sa place dans la société mahoraise et aussi au sein de l'ensemble de la société française. Donc, l'ouverture de la société mahoraise à la foi chrétienne sera un moyen pour briser son isolement géographique. En effet, l'affiliation de l'Eglise mahoraise à des communautés d'Eglises en dehors de Mayotte permettra de faire connaître l'île à travers des échanges entre Eglises. D'ailleurs, cette universalité caractérise la foi chrétienne, il faut partager la foi en Christ avec les autres Eglises dans les différents coins du monde.

Ainsi, plus les fidèles et l'Eglise s'engagent dans la vie publique de la société mahoraise, plus la lumière ou les bienfaits de l'implantation d'Eglise mahoraise au sein d'un contexte musulman sera visible aux yeux de l'Etat et de la population. Les pasteurs pourraient ainsi être reconnus par l'Etat et joueraient le rôle de médiateur social à côté des cadis. Cela apportera même un renouveau à l'islam à Mayotte surtout par rapport au problème lié à sa pratique du syncrétisme avec l'animisme. Encore plus, cela rassure la continuité de la reconnaissance de l'Etat et de la société mahoraise vis-à-vis de l'Eglise mahoraise nouvellement implantée. Cela rejoint au souhait de Dagens (2004) afin que la laïcité se situe sur le terrain éducatif plutôt qu'institutionnel, c'est-à-dire qu'elle oblige les religions à se manifester de

l'intérieur d'elles-mêmes, et non pas comme des instruments de pouvoir et d'influence sociale ou politique. Ce qui veut dire que : les religions acceptent de se présenter sur le terrain de la rationalité humaine, comme porteuses d'une expression de la vie et du monde, et même d'un savoir sur la vie et sur le monde, autrement dit, des expressions de l'esprit en quête de sens ; que les religions ne soient pas réduites à un savoir religieux, mais qu'elles apparaissent aussi comme une forme de vie, une inspiration pour la vie personnelle et communautaire qui passe évidemment par le culte.

7. Conclusion

En guise de conclusion, cet article vise à relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises sur un terrain d'islam sous la laïcité française. Ce défi représente un grand projet pour les Eglises françaises existantes à Mayotte. Ainsi, ce présent article constitue une étude de faisabilité de ce projet. Il apporte des éléments de compréhension sur la complexité de Mayotte dans son ensemble afin de définir des stratégies pour relever ce défi.

Les solutions apportées sont basées sur l'utilisation de la laïcité française ainsi que le phénomène migratoire à Mayotte. Deux éléments qui montrent la complexité de la situation à Mayotte tant sur le plan juridico-politique et religieux que sur le plan socioculturel et économique. Ces deux éléments marquent également l'existence de Mayotte. En effet, le principe de laïcité française a pu changer le système de la société française de la Monarchie à la République. Et le phénomène migratoire a changé aussi le peuplement de Mayotte au cours de son histoire surtout à l'ère de la départementalisation.

La méthode historico-critique et observation sont utilisées pour expliquer cette complexité de Mayotte dans son ensemble. De cela, des différentes stratégies sont élaborées pour relever le défi d'implantation

d'Eglises mahoraises. Des stratégies internes et externes de l'Eglise française et aussi stratégies visant le développement et la protection de l'Eglise mahoraise nouvellement implantée.

Ainsi, grâce à l'appui des Eglises françaises à Mayotte sur la liberté religieuse et la liberté d'expression que leur procure la laïcité française, des bonnes stratégies à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de chaque Eglise française donneront une autre dimension de leur visibilité au sein de la société mahoraise. De l'intérieur de chaque Eglise, il faut à la base garder l'unité des fidèles. Des sujets spécifiques sont à apprendre aux fidèles à savoir l'esprit missionnaire, l'esprit de partage, l'enseignement sur la famille chrétienne comme modèle dans la société, sur la divinité de Jésus ou sur l'authenticité de la Bible. Tout cela afin que l'Eglise à travers ses fidèles puisse sortir à la rencontre de la société mahoraise.

L'engagement des fidèles dans la vie publique de la société mahoraise constitue la stratégie majeure pour apporter la lumière du Christ. Cet engagement se fait dans les différents sphères si bien économique, social que politique et sportif. Dans cet engagement, il faut distinguer l'engagement du pasteur dans la société mahoraise. Comme les cadis, les pasteurs devraient jouer le rôle de médiateur pour la cohésion sociale à Mayotte. Tout cela est basé au droit que donne le principe de laïcité par la liberté d'expression.

Les Eglises françaises pourraient pratiquer l'apologétique chrétienne et renforcer leurs relations avec les différentes entités à savoir les autorités de l'Etat et les élus locaux, les différents établissements comme les écoles, les hôpitaux par l'intermédiaire des aumôneries. Il y a aussi leurs relations avec les différentes associations à Mayotte pour l'aide et la promotion des actions sociales visant en particulier les familles. Ces stratégies sont pour propager la loi de liberté de conscience qui permet aux

Mahorais musulmans de changer librement de religion pour adhérer dans la foi en Christ. Ainsi, si la pratique de la laïcité a pu diminuer le pouvoir des clergés catholique dans la société française, la pratique de ce même principe à travers les stratégies présentées dans cet article pourrait aider les Mahorais musulmans à résister aux pressions qui les empêchent de se convertir au christianisme. Ce changement de religion par les Mahorais aboutira bien sûr à l'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises espérées dans cet article.

L'implantation de cette Eglise mahoraise devrait être conforme à la loi française. Cela constitue sa pérennité et garantit son développement au sein de la société mahoraise sous la laïcité française. Cette Eglise mahoraise mettra aussi en valeur la culture mahoraise. Déjà avec l'utilisation de la langue maternelle pour la célébration du culte, mais aussi par sa doctrine, sa liturgie et l'architecture de son édifice. Cela garantit la reconnaissance de la société mahoraise. Une autre stratégie de protection et de développement de l'Eglise mahoraise à implanter consiste à pratiquer le dialogue interreligieux avec les musulmans par la musique. Il ne faut pas oublier d'entretenir la relation avec les autorités religieuses musulmanes. L'Eglise mahoraise nouvellement implantée devrait être aussi affilié avec des groupements d'Eglises au niveau régional, national et international.

Du fait du phénomène migratoire, les Eglises françaises à Mayotte ont aussi à renforcer leurs relations avec les partenaires ecclésiastiques de l'étranger en particulier avec les Eglises du nord-ouest de Madagascar, les Eglises du Kenya, les Eglises malgaches en France, ainsi que le service de la mission de la FPF et l'Association missionnaire AIM. Ces relations leur permettront d'avoir des missionnaires sur place. Des gens qualifiés ayant un arrière-plan culturel mahorais. Ainsi, les immigrants comoriens, malgaches et africains de différents pays trouveront leur foi en Christ grâce à cette coopération des Eglises françaises à Mayotte avec les Eglises

chrétiennes à l'étranger. Par la suite, c'est à leur tour d'aller vers les Mahorais pour créer l'Eglise mahoraise. Du phénomène migratoire encore, parmi les Mahorais qui ont quitté Mayotte, il y en a qui sont devenus chrétiens loin de leur famille. Une autre stratégie consiste à regrouper par les moyens de la technologie de communication ces Mahorais devenus chrétiens. Ils contribueront ainsi à relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises à travers les réseaux sociaux.

Les partisans de la laïcité ont réussi à diminuer l'influence de l'Eglise catholique dans la société française. Les chrétiens protestants étaient parmi ces partisans de la laïcité auprès des républicains. En France, malheureusement, avec la politique de la libéralisation des mœurs sous le gouvernement français au pouvoir, le principe de la laïcité qui visait à diminuer l'influence de l'Eglise catholique, a aussi diminué la spiritualité des Français pour la foi en Dieu. Mais à Mayotte, les Eglises chrétiennes, catholiques ou protestantes, devraient ensemble promouvoir ce principe par l'intermédiaire de l'Etat. La création du Conseil des Eglises chrétiennes à Mayotte est essentielle pour renforcer la reconnaissance de l'Etat. L'objectif n'est pas de diminuer la spiritualité des Mahorais par la foi en Dieu selon l'enseignement de l'islam, mais de leur donner la liberté de changer de religion en adhérant à la foi à la divinité de Jésus pour une autre dimension de spiritualité avec un Dieu vivant qui entre en communion avec un être humain. En effet, un grand nombre de témoignages de la conversion des musulmans en chrétiens insistent sur l'importance de leur requête d'une relation personnelle avec Dieu qu'ils ont trouvée en Jésus Christ. La création d'école confessionnelle que préconise le principe de laïcité pourrait être une forme d'activité commune à toutes les Eglises à Mayotte avec les différentes associations chrétiennes, en particulier les missionnaires.

Finalement, ce défi aboutit à une conclusion qui prend en compte la relation sur le plan religieux entre Mayotte et la France d'une part et entre Mayotte et les Comores de l'autre. Avec le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises, Mayotte devrait apporter une nouvelle dimension de spiritualité à la France notamment la foi en Christ qui crée une communion intime avec Dieu le Créateur. En plus, c'est à l'Eglise mahoraise implantée de faire sa mission sur l'ensemble de l'Archipel des Comores qui est un Etat islamique. L'Eglise mahoraise implantée apportera à son tour des bienfaits aux îles voisines et son influence dans la société française. Ainsi, avec l'aide de toutes les Eglises françaises à Mayotte, un nouveau défi se présentera à son tour à l'Eglise mahoraise implantée. Une autre étude approfondie du contexte de l'Archipel des Comores semblerait nécessaire. La recherche pourrait alors être intitulée : « Implantation d'Eglises comoriennes en terre musulmane sous la loi d'une république islamique ».

Enfin, ce projet est avant tout un acte de foi et ceci constitue son grand atout, mais c'est aussi un projet qui traduit la foi chrétienne en actes à partir de l'analyse de la réalité existante à Mayotte et de son évolution. D'ailleurs, Bosch rappelle avec force que la mission est d'abord la mission de Dieu: « la *mission Dei* purifie l'Eglise. Elle la place sous la croix, le seul endroit où elle soit en sécurité » (Bosch 1991 : 694). L'amour du Christ vivant dans la vie des chrétiens immigrants à Mayotte devrait se manifester dans leur engagement à relever le défi d'implantation d'Eglises mahoraises. Ils s'associent avec la déclaration de l'apôtre Paul : « évangéliser n'est pas pour moi un sujet de gloire, car la nécessité m'en est imposée ; malheur à moi si je n'évangélise ! » (1 Corinthiens 9 :16). D'ailleurs, l'implantation d'Eglise mahoraise ne vise pas à détruire la société mahoraise, au contraire, elle est là pour apporter l'amour, la paix, la joie pour mieux vivre ensemble dans la complexité du contexte de Mayotte. Et cet article constitue une vision de cette implantation d'Eglises mahoraises.

Cette Eglise mahoraise à implanter sera marquée par l'utilisation des Mahorais de leur langue maternelle *kibushi* ou *shimahore* pour célébrer un culte. Elle renforcera le rôle des femmes dans l'éducation y compris l'éducation spirituelle par la possibilité d'existence de femme mahoraise pasteur. Elle sera marquée également par la mise en valeur de la vie familiale, la vie de couple, contrairement à la polygamie. Mais surtout, ce sera dans cette Eglise mahoraise que l'on vivra la réconciliation entre Comoriens et Mahorais, conflit qui perdure dans le passé et intensifié par le fléau migratoire à la suite de la départementalisation de Mayotte. De plus, l'apparition de cette Eglise mahoraise dans la société mahoraise va renforcer l'appartenance de Mayotte à la République française. Elle témoigne de la mise en pratique du principe de laïcité notamment sur la liberté de conscience qui donne aux Mahorais la liberté de changer de religion. En plus, cette Eglise mahoraise sera un moyen de protéger la culture mahoraise devant l'attrait exercé sur elle par la culture française.

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