

**The South African Baptist  
Journal of Theology**

***Volume 32 2023***



# **The South African Baptist Journal of Theology**

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*William "Bill" Domeris*

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

The 2023 edition of the SABJT focuses on how evangelicals engage with human flourishing and the abundant life that Jesus Christ offers (Psalm 19 (Pennington 2015). A term that has raised concerns, especially in the evangelical church, and thus stands to lose its real meaning. Human flourishing, informally translated as the good life, is further embedded in Pauline theology where salvation is not isolated from citizenship, character, community, and creation (Smith 2020). Additionally, human flourishing represented the ideal life in the New Testament (Wright 2012).

However, human flourishing was never an individualized and personal experience in pursuit of pleasure; as meaning and pleasure cannot be separated from human flourishing (Volf 2017). Human flourishing can only be possible within a community and bears the responsibility of active engagement, care, and love for one's fellow believers and neighbour (Gal. 6:2). It thus stands to reason, that God is the author, the beginning and end of all human flourishing (Ps. 92, James 1, Isa. 35). Any evangelical orthodoxy and orthopraxy must embrace human flourishing as a God-mandate, reality, and mission.

The various scholarly articles of the 2023 SABJT volume showcase how the authors engage and grapple with the concept of human flourishing from the various theological disciplines within the evangelical tradition by focusing on biblical interpretations, practical theological reflection, and missiological endeavours. The articles cover a range of areas within these theological reflections such as the diaspora, theological education, biblical interpretations and applications from both the Old and New Testaments. I wish to express my gratitude to the following academics for their scholarly contributions to the South African Baptist Journal of theology

*Prof. Dr. Godfrey Harold, Research Associate, Stellenbosch University, Principal at Cape Town Baptist Seminary and PhD supervisor South African Theological Seminary*

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*Dr. Connie Con Johnson, South African Theological Seminary*

*Mr. Samuel Davis, Final Year Student, William Carey University, USA*

I also want to record my appreciation for the following peer reviewers. Your scholarly insight and recommendation on articles reviewed enable South African Baptist of Theology to meet the minimum standards of best

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In the service of our Lord,

Prof Garth Aziz  
Co-Editor

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**SECTION A**

## **Flourishing and the Beatitudes: The Nexus of Blessed Life**

*Kelebolige Resane, Research Fellow, Department of Historical and Constructive Theology, University of the Free State*

### **Abstract**

*This paper harmonises human flourishing and the beatitudes referred to by Christ in the famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23). Flourishing is historically examined from philosophical, psychological and evangelical perspectives. In all three perspectives, flourishing is defined and elaborated. Philosophically, flourishing is not a subjective feeling or a mental state but an objective state of affairs of an individual as a member of the species. It is a pattern of living that synchronises to one's totality of living over a longer period. From psychological perspective, flourishing is feeling good or satisfaction that leads to functioning well. A flourishing person embraces engagement, being self-determined, being hopeful, resilience, harmonious relationships, and social connections. This person is a self-starter and will always take initiative because the environment enables him or her to function well and satisfactorily. From the evangelical perspective, flourishing is shalom, which is peace, harmony, and prosperity. It is a well-lived life in motion. It is life lived in right relationship with God, with one's environment, with neighbours, and with self. Flourishing people are blessed people. They experience the inner qualities of divine joy and perfect happiness. They have some divine favour bestowed upon them, therefore, possess a certain character quality or experience peculiar to those belonging to the community of faith. A conclusion is drawn that true flourishing is not for the opulent members of human race, but for the poor and oppressed who are rich only in pity, purity, peace, persecution, and remain perseverant, holding on to the hope of salvation. Flourishing puts believers above negative circumstances. A flourishing person is a person in Christ, which is where blessedness lies.*

### **1. Introduction**

Flourishing has become one theological discourse for some time. It became particularly popular when in 2015, Miroslav Volf released a widely read monograph, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*. This paper focuses on human flourishing from philosophical, psychological, and theological points of view. Human flourishing and beatitudes referred to in Matthew 5:3-11 and Luke 6:20-23 are examined. The relationship between the two is the underlying theme of this paper.

The broader definition of human flourishing is informed by various academic disciplines, therefore a hybrid concept. This means that ‘it is naturalistic, culture-dependent and agent-relative.’ (De Ruyter, Oades & Waghid 2020:2). Objectively a person can develop positive faith and flourish, while subjectively one can align with personal views, desires, or preferences towards one’s potential development. One’s identity and one’s capability gives meaning to life. It will be ideal for one to look at flourishing’s genesis through the ages.

## **2. Aristotelian roots (Philosophical)**

Generally speaking, human flourishing speaks of doing or being well regarding life satisfaction, mental and physical health, purposeful living, character and virtue, and social relationships (Tyler & Van der Weelea 2017). Human flourishing has always been a discourse throughout history. It is found in philosophy, education, and natural sciences in general. The root meaning of flourishing comes from the Greek word *eudaimonia*, commonly meaning happiness or well-being. The *eudaimonia* envisioned by Greek philosophers and some modern philosophers is based on social discrimination, a mismatch against biblical understanding. Aristotle conceived a *polis* characterised by the happiness of life. This concept is promoted by some philosophers in applied ethics to address human concerns and issues of social justice. Those who subscribe to *eudaimonia* speak of happiness at the exclusion of persons based on their race, sex, social status, nationality, and so on. This *eudaimonia* promotes continued misery and oppression as a natural order and breaking from it would deprive society of its intended happiness. A good example is apartheid ideology which promoted the happiness of the volk at the expense of the indigenes. Endeavours to break from it was perceived as the disturbance of ordered happiness of the *volk*. Implicit in this form of *eudaimonia* is ‘visions of human flourishing—that are antithetical to the biblical vision of shalom’ (Smith 2019:17).

The great philosopher, Aristotle analysed human flourishing and concluded that it is not a subjective feeling or a mental state but an objective state of affairs of an individual as a member of the species (Broadie & Rowe 2002). Closer scrutiny of this analysis leads one to perceive flourishing as a pattern of living that synchronises to one’s totality of living over a longer period. It is a continuous action, therefore never static or able to reach a plateau. It encapsulates activities that affirm and confirm one’s

potentialities. Human flourishing is therefore not a visible physical opulence, “but also of intentionality, experience, and culture.” (Kleining & Evans 2013:542). It is exerted and observed in all areas of life, as asserted by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (2020:385) that ‘Human flourishing thus encompasses physical, social, emotional, mental and cognitive dimensions of human life.’ The Aristotelian teleological conception of human flourishing has for centuries offered philosophical anthropology in which metaphysics, psychology, theology, and ethics were intertwined. Human flourishing is, therefore, the final good sought after by humanity to be functionally satisfying in all areas of life.

### **3. Psychological Perspectives**

The modern positive psychologists agree that both hedonic and *eudaimonic* approaches contribute toward understanding of human flourishing psychologically, emotionally, and socially (Henderson & Knight 2012:196). From this perspective, human flourishing emanates from positive institutions, especially if those institutions claim some form of spiritual origin or formation. It is when flourishing becomes the appraisals by humans regarding the quality of their lives as expressed in terms of multidimensional indicators, as attested by scholars such as Keyes & Annas (2009:199), including the likes of Rothmann (2013:125). These psychologists emphasise feeling good (satisfaction) that leads to functioning well (participative). Functioning well embraces engagement, being self-determined, being hopeful, resilience, harmonious relationships, and social connections. The flourishing person visualized here is a self-starter and will always take initiative because the environment (institution, which is a church in this context) enables him or her to function well and satisfactorily. The message of hope or promises of alternate lifestyle achievement articulates a person towards optimism and sense of purpose. Any counter-productive results are shifted to evil intentions to thwart a good plan.

### **4. Evangelical Perspectives**

There are myriads of questions regarding joy, peace and happiness, especially in the world full of corruption, crime, imbalances between the haves and the have-nots. Injustices are growing and seen on every ground of public domain. The rich are becoming richer at the expense of the poor. Those with fingers on a till enrich themselves with bank notes in the drawers (state treasury), and the ‘brown envelope syndrome’ (bribery) engulfs politicians of all ranks. McGrath (2022:80) asks question to the

situation: ‘But what happens if our experience of the world seems chaotic, dark and resistant to interpretation?’ This is also highlighted by Moltmann (2015:1) that ‘The modern world takes its bearings from humanistic and naturalistic concepts of life, and in so doing, what it experiences is a diminished life.’ Ours is the dark world where there are many fundamental questions of life, yet finding answers being like trying to purchase a farm in the Central Business District of the city. Evangelicals are expected to perform well in a high demanding environment of work, home, church, and society at large. The picture of the pumpkin growing and flourishing on the rubbish dump seems impossible for evangelical flourishing in the midst of demanding and decadent cultures. Lusko (2020:17) brings the words of comfort:

Pain can paralyze our vision and shame can stunt our growth. But there’s actually something beautiful hidden beneath the dirt. There is a courage concealed, a strength simmering, and a wisdom waiting to be seen.

This therapeutic declaration is also captured by McGrath (2022:83) that ‘God dwells in darkness, but is really present to us and for us, despite our inability to penetrate that darkness.’ Flourishing from evangelical perspective is intertwined with shalom, which is normally thought of as peace, harmony, and prosperity. It is a life in motion and lived well. According to Sallade (2022:3), it is ‘a life lived in right relationship with God, with one’s environment, with neighbours, and with self.’

Flourishing as a biblical principle is found etymologically in Philippians 4:10. *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.* In this text, the Greek word for flourishing is *anathallō*. Its Hebrew counterpart is *parach*. Both Hebrew and Greek etymologies carry the basic verb meaning to revive, or blossom; to sprout, shoot, become apparent, or to break out. According to A.T. Robertson’s definition, it is ‘to sprout again, to shoot up, to blossom again’ (1931:460). The same notion is expressed by Vine (1952:966) that it is ‘to flourish anew, to revive.’ This agrees with the Setswana translation in this verse using *tsosolositse* which is reviving. This means, according to Bromiley (1985:57), *anathallō*, theologically, means ‘to cause to come forth,’ ‘to spring forth,’ (Heb 7:14 cf. Jr 23:5, ‘to shine forth’ (2 Pt 1:19, Nm 24:17). The prefix *ana* emphasises ‘again’ and together with *thallō*, render the meaning ‘grow

up again, bloom again' (Earle 1986:346). In Setswana we use the word *phophoma* which means to blossom or to possess abundance of leaves or fruits. It conveys an idea of overflow. There are three scholars who wrote about flourishing from the Protestant Reformed view. The first is Jantzen who defined flourishing by connecting it to flowers. She did etymological analysis of the word 'flourish by connecting it to the Middle English *florir* and the Latin *florêre*, which means to 'flower.' She concludes that to flourish is possessing the mass of flowers on a fruit tree, or the bloom of luxuriant, verdant growth. It means 'to blossom, to thrive, to throw out leaves and shoots, growing vigorously and luxuriantly.' In human sphere, to flourish 'denotes abundance, overflowing with vigour and energy and productiveness, prosperity, success and good health' (1996:61).

David Kelsey from Yale University is another scholar on the subject. He avoids associating flourishing with health and wealth like Jantzen does, though he uses blossoming and thriving as components of flourishing. He emphasises the elements of intrinsic dignity and value of human beings (2009:570). Interestingly, Kelsey reiterates that 'to blossom is 'to manifest the type of beauty of which a given life is capable by virtue of God's relating to it' (2009:315).

The third scholar did a doctoral thesis titled, *Imagining Human Flourishing? A Systematic Theological Exploration of Contemporary Soteriological Discourses* (2015). She argues that flourishing is all related to imago Dei, and that it is only when human beings turn towards God, they experience flourishing. She emphasises human dignity and the focus of the glory of God. For instance by appealing to some church traditions (Irenaeus of Loyn and John Calvin), she quips 'the glory of God is situated within the well-being of human beings is core to influential theological traditions...' (2015:23). This ties well with Kärkkäinen's (2015:427) assertion that 'Defining the image of God in terms of being related to God saves theology from anchoring human dignity in the possession of a quality or commodity, such as intelligence or health.' Elsewhere Marais gives a metaphor of the blossoming rose plant that in order to exhibit beauty, it has to possess signs of luxuriant vibrancy (in Van der Westhuizen 2020:83-84). Analysing her thoughts thoroughly, one picks that she is closely associated in thought with Jantzen than with Kelsey. However the bottom line in evangelical thought is flourishing conveys and carries both thriving, joy, and blossoming which is the display of both the fruit and the

gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Flourishing also means maintaining identity and remaining steadfast to what forms one in areas of character, actions, and the sense of fulfilment. That is why Lusko (2020:xix) asserts that:

When God calls us to flourish, it doesn't mean to become something brand new. It means to revive, to bring back to life what and who were meant to be. We weren't created to become something totally different but to become what we were originally designed for.

Examining this citation, one discovers that flourishing is not renewing or reconstructing ourselves but reclaiming who and what we were intended to become by Creator God's design. There are obviously some endeavours and deliberations towards discovering this identity and shaping into this character. We pursue this with exuberance and excitement in order to discover this identity and character, especially seeking their meanings for life purpose. 'We cannot simply eat, sleep, hunt and reproduce – we are meaning-seeking creatures' (McGrath 2022:88). Flourishing is the goal of these endeavours because it carries a sense of fulfilment. Sense of fulfilment comes as one starts to realise that:

God made us beautiful and to be drawn to the beautiful. We were created not only to look for beauty but to live beautifully, to seek inspiration, and to live an inspiring life even when we don't feel like it (Lusko 2020:18).

These deliberations are finding joy in what one was destined for. It gives the grandest sense of fulfilment if one discovers his or her original design and purpose for that design. In regard to this, Brümmer is of a strong opinion that:

We also need to have the physical, intellectual and personal capacities as well as the opportunities to become that which each of us would like to be and thus to realise what we consider to be our own true interests in life.

The evangelical understanding of flourishing is rooted in twentieth century theologian, Karl Barth (1932/1975), who provides understanding of human flourishing as the fulfillment of God's good purposes for humans including the dimensions of the relationship with God, and with others,

resulting in integrated life lived in a particular place and time. In other words, flourishing is the balanced vertical and horizontal relationships, involving the two-way relational links between God, humanity and creation. This is the trinitarian model with highest potential to offer harmony in cosmos. This is portrayed by Volf (2015:171) that flourishing is living in peace with ourselves and one another if our lives are not primarily about food and clothes, but about seeking primarily God's kingdom and God's universal righteousness. Moltmann (2007:69) takes the notion further that 'Creation and the self become free for what they are when God is loved and enjoyed in eternity for his own sake.' It is a mystical union of God, nature and humanity leading to human flourishing of rising out of indolence and joylessness into the life of hope.

The secular world equates flourishing with health, prosperity, fertility and longevity. Volf (2015:171) squashes this notion by promoting flourishing as contentment whereby people obtain happiness, and live responsibly to slow down environmental degradation, and seek the removal of social conflicts. It is the opening of the human spirit in love of God and all neighbours, those close by and those far away. The twentieth century theologian Moltmann published a book in 1989 titled *Creating a Just Future*. Although he does not directly address the issue of human flourishing, he makes some observable allusions to it. Moltmann recognises the reality that the cosmos is faced with global ecological, political and socioeconomic crisis. This *status quo* is due to human distortion of God's image and human misinterpretation of creation. He offers some solution that humans should return to a renewed gaze at the image of the triune God, simultaneously rediscovering an inspired imaging of the divine community of love (1989:54-56). Human flourishing is guaranteed through the return to the image of the triune God. In agreement with Moltmann's proposal, Augustine (2019:14) reinforces the fact that this return is essential for:

the mending of our own humanity as well as our common home, planet earth, as in the Spirit's renewing, socio-transformative work within the redeemed community – the church – the fellowship of the ones whose eyes have been open to see and ears to hear.

Once the humanity is in synchrony with the planet, there will be peace as one cannot uphold the dignity of the planet but exclude doing the same for humanity. Human flourishing is transforming the cosmos paradise. It

encapsulates all endeavours of experiencing heaven on earth, because ‘the theosis of humanity is the condition for the theosis of the rest of creation’ (Augustine 2019:31).

Human flourishing is when humanity immerses itself in the logos – the living Word, because this logos became human and dwelt among humans so that humans can have a free access to him through faith in the power of the Spirit. . Collins (2013:57) in analyzing Ratzinger’s dialogical theology captures the fact that ‘The culmination of this unfolding revelation of God in history is the entrance into the narrative of the figure of Jesus Christ. He is the dialogue, the encounter itself/between God and humanity in one person.’ This is a sacramental commitment whereby humans inhabit the Word as its place of abode. It is how community of believers become vocal through the Spirit. This cohabitation of humans with Christ, the world made by the Word can be restored to its original intention. It is when a Christian life starts to take its bearings from the living God, resulting in experiences of the fullness of life (Moltmann 2015:1)

The symbiosis of earth and humans, together with the *perichoretical* habitation of the trinitarian God in cosmos creates a stupendous opportunity for humans to experience and express flourishing through worship. Worship is both the duty and the pleasure of faith. It is the act of truly loving God and this love exploding out of the babbling heart full of love – flourishing. It is for this reason that Peck, Von Waldner and Kay (1990:89) declare that: ‘Yet it is from this attending and praising, working for a cause and gift-giving, that we human beings can derive our highest pleasures and deepest sense of peace and purpose.’ The flourishing humans are the worshipping beings. Through worship, humans enter the sphere of *theoformation* or *Christoformation*. They become malleable in order to be moulded into the likeness of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who connects the worshiper and the worshipped.

## **5. Flourishing People are the Blessed People**

It is not within the scope of this article to analyse the beatitudes, but to convey the general understanding of them and how they are related to human flourishing. It is pointed out that the blessed people are the flourishing people.

Bible scholars encounter and interact with the ‘blessed sayings’ known

as beatitudes in the opening verses of Mt 5:3-12 and Lk 6:20-23; the commonly known Sermon on the Mount, which ‘stands out as the greatest single sermon of all time, in its penetration, pungency, and power’ (Robertson 1930:40). Although the evangelical scholar, John Stott regards the Sermon on the Mount as a counterculture, he acknowledges that ‘it is probably the best known teaching of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood, and certainly it is the least obeyed’ (1978:15). At the center of its message is the call to repentance and righteousness, which are the two necessities towards flourishing. This sermon ‘describes what human life and human community look like when they come under the gracious rule of God’ (1978:18).

There is an abundance of literature where the beatitudes are theologically and constructively defined and analysed, and are hermeneutically and exegetically etymologized. Etymologically, the phrase ‘blessed are’ implies the state of happiness or well-being. The New Testament Greek word, *makarios*, as applied in the Sermon on the Mount (Mathew 5 and Luke 6) does not refer only to ‘the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is in the highest good’ (Vine 1952:125). It is the gratitude received for fulfilling a certain precondition. This is confirmed by Frederick Hauck (quoted in Vine 1952:3) who claims that *makarios* ‘refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God.’ The word, *makarios*, was first used by Aristotle as a technical term for ‘beatitude’ (Bromiley 1985:548) to describe the blessedness that the gods enjoy and also ‘of men to denote the state of godlike blessedness hereafter in the isles of the blessed’ (TDNT:362).

Fundamentally, the word beatitude comes from the Latin *beatitudo*, meaning “blessedness.” The main or basic term from which Bible study commences is *macarius* which translates as blessed, happy and joyful (Coenen et al. 2012:182). In this context, it means “supreme blessedness” or “exalted happiness” although blessedness is, of course, an infinitely higher and better thing than mere happiness’ (Robertson 1930:39). The beatitudes highlight the amazing promised blessings that come when we develop certain righteous traits due to fellowship with God in the present age. The bottom line is that the beatitudes though they promise the brighter or positive future, are for the present blessedness. Their main objective is to teach a present blessedness rather than to promise

blessing in the consummation (Windisch 1951:175). This is captured also by Ladd (1977:73) that 'The Beatitudes expound both the eschatological salvation and the present blessedness.' Even Stott (1978:34) agrees that 'the promises of Jesus in the beatitudes have both a present and a future fulfilment.' The Beatitudes are not the rudiments into the kingdom of God but are virtues to be associated with a character of those who 'belong to the one who is already "elect of God, holy and beloved"' (Chafer 1978:216). Both Matthew and Luke express that

The Kingdom of Heaven is a reality already acquired, it is current, it is present, it is happening now; this is confirmed in the conjugation of the verb to be (is), found in Verses 3 and 10 of Matthew ... (Vila 2013:184)

The beatitudes are widely understood to be emphasizing the humble state of humans and their relationship with God. The closer scrutiny of 'blessed are' speaks of inner happiness spoken of in the beatitudes (Barnes 1977:43), and this happiness is God's gift of blessing granted to those who choose to be the people of faith. It is true that 'Blessed is a much richer and more inviting concept that describes a deep state of being and as an outworking of the right relationship with God (Francis, Strathie & Ross (2019:4). Pentecost (1980:20) drives this to the point that the Beatitudes are the characteristics of a righteous man and are the foundation of a happy life. By teaching them, Christ 'gave us the basis upon which God's blessing comes upon those who have received Him as a personal Saviour' (1980:20). This happiness is a result of one's acknowledgement or realisation of one's spiritual poverty (Matthew 5:3) and acknowledgement of one's total dependence on God (Matthew 5:5). One who has been blessed by God is a happy person. Happiness and flourishing are inseparable. Ellen Charry a Systematic Theologian from Princeton Theological Seminary is best known for her work on classical theology and a theological engagement with the topic of happiness (Marais 2015b:1). As far as Charry is concerned, theology 'is concerned with human happiness' (2004:19). For her, 'to discount the importance of human flourishing is to misunderstand theology and its purpose', since theology is (1) about life in this world and (2) about the enjoyment of this life in this world (Charry 2004:19). The holiness of God and the happiness of a person combine to make a person to flourish. There are themes that accompany flourishing, and they are captured by Bromiley (1985:548) as material goods, children, a marriage partner, bachelorhood, riches, a

good understanding, fame, righteousness, the release of death, and mystic initiation.’ The conclusion is that etymological declension of *makarios* is the inner qualities of divine joy and perfect happiness.

## **6. Conclusion**

True flourishing is not for the opulent members of human race, but for the poor and oppressed who are rich only in pity, purity, peace, persecution, and remain perseverant, holding on to the hope of salvation. The beatitudes speak of the divine favour bestowed upon a person who possesses a certain character quality or experience peculiar to those belonging to the community of faith. ‘The beatitudes are Christ’s own specification of what every Christian ought to be’ (Stott 1978:31). In other words, they speak of idyllic state of utmost bliss where flourishing people experience abundant spiritual blessings. The beatitudes are not just instructive ‘conformity with human ideals but consist in knowledge of Christ, in hearing His sayings, and in doing them’ (Tenney 1978:147), which brings to conclusion that flourishing is the embodiment of being in Christ. A flourishing person is a person in Christ, which is where blessedness lies. These beatitudes commend spiritual qualities, the glorious promised comprehensive blessings of God’s rule tasted now and consummated later (Stott 1978:38). They become like a cucumber flourishing on top of the rubble heap. The beatitudes are the signs and promises of human flourishing. They are the qualities that are characterised not only by earthly happiness, but also a ‘likeness to God’ which is a participation in God’s self-giving love - the ministry of reconciliation in its deepest meaning (Macquarrie 1971:355). Flourishing puts believers above negative circumstances of life. Flourishing is *fruitio Dei* (enjoyment of God), which in a real sense is the enjoyment of life because of the relationship one has with Christ.

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### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **“For In God We Live and Move and Have Our Being” (Acts 17:28): “Human Flourishing” According to the Speeches of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles**

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### **Abstract**

*This article examines instances and examples of human flourishing in Paul's speeches as they appear in the second half of the Book of Acts. After an initial analysis of the relationship between suffering and human flourishing in the portrayal of Paul in Acts and his speeches from this perspective, the article argues that human flourishing is closely related to people aligning themselves with God the creator and worship him appropriately, with his recent salvific activities in Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, resurrected and exalted, and believe in him, and with the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. People are to live according to these realities. This fulfilment of the promises and purposes of God is the new reality Paul came to understand, accept and align himself with, which he faithfully proclaimed and in which he came to flourish as Christ's emissary. Human flourishing is thus closely linked to discipleship and to faithful fulfilment of one's calling, empowered and guided by the Spirit, in fellowship with others and with the prospect of divine reward. Living faithfully and joyfully in harmony with this reality is essential for human flourishing. In this way, the results add an important Trinitarian perspective to the quest for human flourishing.*

### **1. Introduction**

Jonathan Pennington (2015:1) suggests that the idea or theme of human flourishing, broadly understood, is

one meta-theme or meta-concept that appears with remarkable tenacity and consistency across times and worldviews. This concept has staying power and universal voice because it addresses what is most basic and innate to all of humanity, despite the diversity of race, culture, and values. It is a concept that proves to be the motivating force and end goal of all that humans do and think.

This is the case because, as Pennington (2015: 1–2) claims,

Human flourishing alone is the idea that encompasses all human activity and goals because there is nothing so natural and inescapable as the desire to live, and to live in peace, security, love, health, and happiness. These are not merely cultural values or the desire of a certain people

or time period. The desire for human flourishing motivates everything humans do ... All human behaviour, when analysed deeply enough, will be found to be motivated by the desire for life and flourishing, individually and corporately.

Pennington (2015) and others have brought this concept to Christianity (see, for instance, Volf 2013 and Charry 2010) and also read the Bible afresh from this perspective (see the collection of essays edited by Strawn 2012). To bring such concepts to the Bible, and to assess them in view of the Bible, comes naturally to evangelical Christianity, as it understands itself as a movement in which the Bible plays (and is to play) a prominent role. To read the Bible as a source of guidance on human flourishing might not come to mind as quickly, perhaps due to the understandable unease with the widespread, much-reduced, “gospel” of health and wealth, or other emphases which developed in the history of doctrine (for an analysis, see Charry 2010). However, to search in the Bible for examples of people who buoyantly lived their lives before God, and in alignment with his word and purposes, or for instructions for a blessed, God-pleasing life which at the same time ensures human flourishing, is a fully legitimate and deeply evangelical concern.

The current article undertakes this quest and takes it to a biblical book which has been neglected in this regard. The following examination of human flourishing, according to Paul’s speeches as they appear in the second half of the Book of Acts, supplements Pennington’s (2015:5–15) survey of biblical key terms for human flourishing and takes Joel B. Green’s (2020: 233–247) study of happiness in Luke’s Gospel further, to add to the biblical explorations of the theme in Strawn (2012).

When thinking about human flourishing in the Bible, Paul may not be the first person who comes to mind. One might rather think of King Solomon in all his proverbial splendour (Lk 12:27) or turn to the Beatitudes of Jesus. Does he not describe (and prescribe at the same time) what such flourishing looks like in view of the kingdom of God? When thinking of Paul, the declaration in Acts 9:16, “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name”, indicates an existence which, at first glance, is at odds with human flourishing, as it is commonly understood. In addition, there is the impact of Paul’s own long list of various sufferings in 2Corinthians 11:23–33, which serves to authenticate his apostolic ministry, and other assertions of Paul regarding his own suffering and the suffering of Christ-followers in general.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the Book of Acts reports a number of instances of Paul’s suffering.<sup>2</sup>

Apparently, this suffering was in particular need of explanation. It is, however, less prominent in his biography when put into perspective: although it is impossible to give precise dates, from Paul's conversion/calling to his imprisonment in Rome (Ac 28:31 is most probably to be dated to the year AD 61 or 62), Acts covers, after all, about 25-30 years of his life and there was much more to his life, as we will see. Our focus here is on Paul's speeches, as recorded in Acts, before different audiences, and on the clues which they provide to human flourishing.<sup>3</sup> We do so in order to comprehend how Paul understood (or might have understood) the essential ingredients of such an existence. This quest can assist in seeing which aspects of human flourishing have been neglected, lead us beyond our culturally conditioned notions of human flourishing, or cast some of our notions in a different light.

## **2. Paul's Own Biography: Suffering and Human Flourishing**

Before we look at Paul's speeches, we briefly look at the portrayal of Paul's life in Acts.<sup>4</sup> Portraying Paul's life as an example of human flourishing, readily to be imitated by all other believers, is not the main purpose of Luke-Acts. Rather, Luke briefly sketches Paul's pre-Christian past, his calling/conversion and ensuing faithful ministry over many years, including all the suffering it involved and how Paul set out "to finish his course and the ministry that he received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Ac 20:24). Luke did so in order to provide an apology for Paul's disputed ministry and to provide much-needed certainty to his readers, as he declares in the preface to Luke-Acts (Lk 1:4).

We keep this summary relatively short as, obviously, what people consider human flourishing, depends on their personality, faith, value system, culture, and social and material circumstances, to name but a few of the factors involved (for the cultural conditioning of what people might consider happiness/human flourishing, see the instructive studies discussed by Green 2020: 234–235; for a fuller discussion, see Sahlins 1995). Any assessment from our different perspectives must therefore remain tentative.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Paul's faithful fulfilment of his calling, despite the hardships and suffering which this involved, Luke also offers other perspectives which suggest that Paul's life was a "good life" from a spiritual perspective. Although initially an ardent persecutor of Christ and his followers, Paul was not judged by God (as, for instance, King Herod was, see Ac 12:23), but received grace, was forgiven and restored by God/Jesus. Paul was not only pardoned but received the opportunity to serve the Christ he had

persecuted. During his ensuing ministry, Paul experienced the nearness, comfort, help, guidance and affirmation of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus himself, amidst all turmoil. In his ministry, Paul could see God at work to affirm his message and efforts through astonishing miracles, whether they were wrought by God or by Paul himself.

Also, on a human level, Paul’s life contained several elements which many today would consider to be important aspects of human flourishing. Paul was accepted by the believers in Damascus (despite his problematic past), found Christian fellowship, and attracted adherents there who saved his life by helping him to escape. Barnabas was ready to trust him and introduce him to the community in Jerusalem. Paul’s fellow believers cared for him, were concerned about his safety, and ushered him off. There and later on in Antioch, Paul experienced fellowship and co-operation with others (Barnabas) and was trusted by others. In his missionary enterprise, others joined Paul as his co-workers and travel companions. He received hospitality on many occasions. Although there were trials and set-backs, Paul’s witness to Jesus was accepted eagerly by many people, Jews and non-Jews alike (Ac 13:42–44). Paul could see the fruits of his endeavours and start Christ-following congregations in major cities in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world, which were to continue his mission in their vicinities. Other Christ-followers took an interest in what Paul was doing. He received some recognition for his achievements from the believers in Antioch and Jerusalem (although some Jewish Christ-followers remained suspicious of him). Paul had faithful friends during his long imprisonment who cared for him, including on his journey to Rome as a prisoner.<sup>6</sup> On several occasions, all kind of people helped Paul when in need – from the Asiarchs of Ephesus, to relatives in Jerusalem, to friends in Sidon, to a Roman officer who wished to save his life, to the barbarous islanders on Malta who met Paul’s physical needs. While often hindered by circumstances (various forms of resistance) or other “interference” (16:6–7; see also 27:9–11, 21), and later on for several years as a Roman prisoner, Paul had the privilege of experiencing a certain measure of self-efficacy, often associated today with human flourishing.

In addition, Paul enjoyed many of the prerequisites of human flourishing. He had the privilege of receiving a comprehensive Jewish education, including excellent knowledge of the Scriptures and early Jewish sources as well as familiarity with their interpretation, and also some knowledge of the Hellenistic cultural tradition. Paul knew how to use these assets in his ministry (see the many quotations) and for receiving guidance as to

his own course of action. He could communicate in at least two languages (Greek and Aramaic; and he had knowledge of ancient Hebrew). Paul had skills with which he could earn a living whenever it became necessary. It also seems that he was not poor, but had access to considerable financial means. Since his birth Paul was a Roman citizen (and a citizen of Tarsus, Ac 21:39), with all the privileges which this implied and which he knew to employ wisely. In his personality, Paul displayed zeal and determination and was not one to be discouraged or dismayed easily. Last but not least, he must have been in a fairly robust physical condition.

After these reflections on the portrayal of Paul's life in Acts, we now survey his speeches to find clues to human flourishing.<sup>7</sup> How do these speeches reflect on human existence in general, and on the life of Christ-followers? What clues do they provide to human flourishing? Unsurprisingly these speeches focus on human flourishing due to, and before, God.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Addressing Jewish Audiences**

Acts contains one major speech of Paul to his fellow non-Christ-believing Jews, and a number of summary reports of his message and ministry in Jewish contexts (preaching Jesus as God's Messiah in fulfilment of Scripture in various synagogues). Here the focus is on this speech, reported in Acts 13:16–41. Paul begins with a summary of the history of Israel and focuses on God's faithfulness. God chose, multiplied and liberated Israel (17), patiently put up with this people in the wilderness (18), and gave them Canaan as an inheritance (19). Later, God provided leaders (20, the judges, the prophet Samuel, King Saul), removed Saul and elevated David (22). From David's offspring God brought to Israel as saviour Jesus, as he had promised (23). Through the ministry of John, the Baptist, God prepared the people for this saviour (24–25). God sent this message of salvation to his people (26). Although the people rejected Jesus, God raised him from the dead, affirmed him, and instituted witnesses to this key event (27–31). In all of this, God fulfilled his promises (32–35). Through the risen Jesus, forgiveness is possible and proclaimed (38); liberation is available to all: "By him, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (39). In all of this, God is doing a marvellous work in the present time of fulfilment (see Lk 1:1), which must be recognised, not rejected (41).<sup>9</sup>

While far from a description of human flourishing, there are several clues as to what such flourishing would have looked like for Paul: due to God's faithfulness to his promises and many provisions, humans can flourish. Being able to rely on these promises and God's provision will

give them security and space to live in. Human flourishing depends on God’s manifold provisions. He is the one who can undo human mistakes. God’s salvation – that is, forgiveness of sins and liberation – is crucial for human flourishing. Life is good because God’s reliable promises of old have been fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ. The privilege of living in the age of the fulfilment of divine promises, and recognising and acknowledging what God is doing in the present time and living accordingly, are crucial ingredients for human flourishing.

#### **4. Addressing Non-Jews**

Acts contains only two relatively short speeches of Paul before non-Jewish audiences (Ac 14:14–17; 17:22–32).<sup>10</sup> What clues to human flourishing do they provide?

Before the crowds of Lystra, ready to venerate Paul and Barnabas after their impressive healing miracle, the missionaries insist that they bring the good news, that these polytheists should turn from their vain idols and deities, towards the living God, “who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Ac 14:15). While in the past, he allowed the nations to walk in their own ways (14:16), God nevertheless did not leave himself without witness to his existence and nature. He did so through his charitable acts of giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons. It was this gracious and faithful, living creator God who, in this way, satisfied their hearts with food and gladness (14:17). The nature of God, his grace, patience and friendliness, become apparent in that God provides faithfully even for those who ascribe his gifts to their own idols and venerate them.

Human flourishing is intimately related to existing in harmony with the living God. This means knowing and worshiping the creator and true provider of all things. God’s revelation in his creation is to be recognised and appreciated, and he is to be acknowledged accordingly. Human flourishing is dependent on divine care and the provision of sustenance for the body and, in this way also, gladness of heart (14:15–17).

In Athens, Paul proclaims the God unknown to the audience (Acts 17:23). This creator God does not live in temples or need anything humans could provide him with. He is the one who gives life and breath and everything (25). The people he created are to seek him, perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. God is actually not far from every person (27). In God, all people live and have their being (28). Despite their massive idolatry (as evident in a plethora of idols in Athens, 16), God patiently and graciously

overlooked the past times of ignorance, and now calls on all people everywhere to repent (30): the opportunity and call to repentance, rather than judgement, is God's response to human ignorance and failure. One appointed day, God will judge the world in righteousness. Of this he has provided assurance through the resurrection of Jesus (31).

This speech indicates that, for the Paul of Acts, a crucial ingredient of human flourishing is being attuned to what is and can be known about God. It is a life which recognises that God is the one who gives this life and everything else which people need, a life characterised by seeking God and in appreciation of His nearness, a life lived in God and in dependence on him, a life defined by the knowledge of God and in response to his prompting to turn to him, a life oriented towards God's righteousness and, finally, a life under the promise of the sure resurrection from the dead, as God has demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead. In contrast to much human experience, divine judgement will be just, and lead to the establishment of God's righteousness. While the divine ability and power to resurrect the dead is cited with reference to Jesus (referring back to the earlier misunderstanding of Paul's initial proclamation in Athens, 17:17–20), the prospect of being resurrected one day also contributes to human flourishing in the present.

## **5. Addressing Christ-followers**

Acts contains only one major speech by Paul to a Christian audience. His farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus, consists of a statement of account for his past ministry, and his charge to the elders on how they are to conduct themselves as leaders and continue Paul's ministry (Acts 20:18–35).

In the report of his ministry (Ac 20:18–27, 33–35), Paul recounts how he served with all humility, tears and trials (19). He declared in public and private all that was profitable, “testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (20–21; see also 27). Paul now travels to Jerusalem, “constrained by the Holy Spirit” (22–23), awaiting imprisonment and afflictions. Paul's determined goal is to finish at any cost (“I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself”) his course and the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus, that is, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (24). Paul testifies to his faithful fulfilment of this commission. For three years, Paul did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears (31). Later, he emphasises that the purpose of his ministry was not to enrich himself materially. Rather than coveting what belongs to others (fellow Christ-

followers), Paul provided for himself and others around him. He did so to demonstrate that “by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (33–35).

In the charge to the elders, Paul emphasises that they must look after each other and the entire congregation. Having been called by the Holy Spirit to their ministry, they must carefully and responsibly care for the Church of God, which He obtained with the blood of his own [Son Jesus] (28). They must be careful as there will be threats from outside and temptations from within (29–30). In all this, they have Paul’s example of faithful ministry to follow (31), and divine provisions: God and the word of his grace (the Gospel of Christ Jesus), which is able to build them up and sustain them in their ministry and the prospect of an inheritance, a heavenly reward, among all those who are sanctified (32, recalling 14:22: “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”).

What clues for human flourishing does this speech provide? Paul’s summary of his own ministry indicates that, for him, a good life is characterised as a life of humility, faithful service to God and people, and passing on to others what one was entrusted with, by God. A good life is attuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and is one of experiencing and passing on the grace of God. Human flourishing is closely connected to fulfilling the will of God, despite (or in) all adversity. A good life is a life devoted to others and their well-being, including all the emotions which this might involve. Human flourishing does not come from enriching oneself at the expense of others, but from taking responsibility for one’s own material needs, and providing for others. Human flourishing is built on remembering and following the words of Jesus. It increases when people understand and practise that it is more blessed to give than to receive (time, material means, concern, interest). Paul and Jesus represent the insight expressed by Pennington (2015:3) as “our flourishing is tied to the flourishing of others”. Paul’s Miletus speech is an antidote to the loss of solidarity, rightly identified and bemoaned by Pennington (2015:3) and others as a recent development.

Paul’s charge to the elders suggests that human flourishing needs some binding fellowship and relations (“Pay attention to yourselves”, each individually but also among the group of elders), the willingness to take responsibility for others, and the clear acknowledgement of limits (the church is and remains the flock of God, not the possession of the elders, to be exploited by them at their will). A good life means refraining from

lording it over others and misusing them to serve our interests as if those people belonged to us, but respecting that they belong to (the flock of) God. Human flourishing thrives when people respect this, and treat others accordingly. Foresight and care are needed to prevent dangers and avoid temptations. Human flourishing needs good human examples to follow (people who live transparently for others, to observe and emulate them) and, above all, the example and teaching of Jesus. Human flourishing depends on divine provisions: God and his word, with all the benefits it offers (“Man shall not live by bread alone ...”, Matt 4:4), such as building up and orienting us. Human flourishing is closely tied to the prospect of a divine inheritance, that is, his approval and reward for faithful service in this life. While pursued (and to be pursued) in the present, human flourishing needs this future reference point: a life that will win God’s approval and ensure this inheritance, both now and in the future, will also be a “good” life in the present. This life is not an end in itself, but a means of serving God and others. Without this orientation towards God, human flourishing is limited.

## **6. Defence speeches before Jewish and non-Jewish audiences**

We cannot offer a detailed analysis of the several defence speeches Paul gave in Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome, before Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.<sup>11</sup> In these apologies, Paul explains his pre-Christian past, his rather unexpected encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and its implications, that is, his calling to be an apostle to the non-Jews, kings and his fellow Jews (Acts 26:16–18), his deep loyalty to the Jewish people, his initial reluctance to accept this calling and ministry to non-Jews, and how he had fulfilled this commission to the present day: “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (26:19). As a statement of account, Paul ensures: “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (22–23). In certain speeches, Paul also defends in some detail his motives for coming to Jerusalem and his behaviour since he arrived there at the end of the third missionary phase (for instance, in Ac 24:11–21). He is not guilty of profaning the temple, as some of his opponents had claimed, but came as a devout Jew with pious and fully legitimate intentions to Jerusalem

and its temple. He did nothing which would warrant an arrest; he is not guilty of the charges levelled against him.

These speeches suggest that human flourishing is linked to loyalty to ancestral traditions (“a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees”, Ac 23:6; “and to present offerings”, 24:17–18) and to the Jewish people (“I came to bring alms to my nation”, 24:17), the worship of God (24:14), faith in divine revelation (the Law and the prophets, 24:14), a hope in God with regard to the resurrection (24:15) – all essential ingredients of revelation-based Jewish identity. In addition, there is the faithful fulfilment of a divine commission, despite adversities of various kinds, and a life conducted in view of the resurrection of Jesus and of the dead in general (23:6; “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man”, 24:16, 21: “It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial today”) and behaviour characterised by a clear conscience (24:16).

Green (2020: 247) concludes that, according to Luke’s Gospel, “Luke sees happiness not as the goal of living but as the outcome or by-product of living in harmony with the way things are” (*italics mine*).<sup>12</sup> The narrative articulation of the larger context within which human flourishing is possible, is “defined by God’s eschatological intervention to bring salvation in all its fullness to all and, then, by the invitation to persons to order their lives accordingly” (Green 2020: 247). According to Paul’s defence speeches in Luke’s second volume, Paul claims to have done precisely that: with all of his existence, he fully aligned himself for many years with the way things are now in view of God’s salvific intervention in Jesus the Christ, for Jews and non-Jews alike, and with the role which he had been commissioned by the risen and exalted Jesus to play in testifying to these events before Jewish audiences, and in being a light for the non-Jews and, in this way, bringing God’s salvation to the ends of the earth (Ac 13:47). For Paul, such existence and ministry in harmony “with the way things are” meant a good life, and provided the conditions for human flourishing despite adversities and suffering.

## **7. Summary and implications**

The Book of Acts combines a selective portrayal of large periods of Paul’s life and ministry, and summaries of some of his speeches to different audiences. Although Paul suffered considerably as Christ’s emissary to Jews and non-Jews, the account also indicates several factors that are or can be conducive to human flourishing. As we have seen, Paul was blessed and affirmed by God in many ways, surrounded by people who provided fellowship, followed and assisted him in many ways, and he also

had many assets associated with human flourishing on his side. We cannot know whether Paul was “happy”, as we might understand this ambivalent term. What Green (2020: 234) observes with regard to the apostles – that is, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name” (Ac 5:41) – would probably also apply to Paul. The happiness which he experiences “was a by-product of their faithful service”. This portrayal in Acts has to be compared with Paul’s own assertions in his extant letters regarding his own life and the believers’ existence in general (see Shantz 2012). Although there are different nuances, there is much which agrees with the portrayal in Acts.

In his speeches to Jews, non-Jews and Christ-followers, and his various defences, Paul calls people to align themselves a) with God the creator and worship him appropriately, b) with, in particular, his recent salvific activities in Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, resurrected and exalted, and believe in him, and c) with the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. People are to live according to these realities. “With Jesus’s advent, death, and exaltation the times have changed; those who orient their lives to the divine purpose disclosed in Jesus will experience the pleasure and meaningfulness associated with human flourishing within this eschatologically determined world” (Green 2020: 247). According to Green (2020: 235),

Luke’s contribution lies particularly in the context within which happiness thus understood might be cultivated, modulated, and experienced. This context is defined by God’s eschatological intervention to bring salvation in all its fullness to all and, then, by the invitation to persons to order their lives accordingly. ... [This] does not mean that Luke’s narrative is bereft of interest in what we might call the psychological and relational aspects of happiness. It is, rather, that with the advent, death, and exaltation of the Messiah the times have changed, and that humans who orient their lives to the divine purpose disclosed in the Messiah will experience the pleasure and meaningfulness associated with human flourishing within this eschatologically determined world.

This new orientation to God’s salvific purposes is what Paul himself experienced dramatically on the Damascus-road and in the ensuing divine commissions (Ac 9:3–19; 22:3–21; 26:4–23). This fulfilment of the promises and purposes of God is the way things are now; this is the new reality Paul came to understand, accept and align himself with, and in which he came to flourish as Christ’s emissary. Our examination of the portrayal of human flourishing in the “Paul-chapters” of Acts affirms

Green’s (2020: 247) analysis of the Lukan beatitudes: “God describes as happy those who fully align themselves with God’s royal rule revealed in the mission and message of Jesus”. Human flourishing is closely linked to discipleship and to faithful fulfilment of one’s calling, empowered and guided by the Spirit, in fellowship with others and with the prospect of divine reward. Living faithfully and joyfully in harmony with this reality is essential for human flourishing. Far from being a fatalistic acceptance of one’s circumstances, it is a God-centred, joyous acceptance of how God brought about salvation in fulfilment of his promises (for the Lukan motif of joy, see Wenkel 2015). The picture in Acts affirms Pennington’s (2015:3) short summary of Volf’s (2013) analysis that, according to Augustine (and much of the Christian tradition), “human happiness and flourishing come about through the harmonious fellowship of enjoying God and others”. Luke (and Paul) would perhaps have added serving and obeying to enjoying God and serving others.

What we have seen of human flourishing with regard to Paul and his speeches in the Book of Acts presents a much-needed challenge and correction to many developments in our day and age, as summarised by Pennington (2015:3–4). In the end, human flourishing is impossible apart from the faithful God and his salvific purposes, and a genuine concern for the flourishing of other people.

## **8. Notes**

1. For recent studies on the indications for Paul’s own view of the good life, see Shantz (2012: 187–202) and Smith (2020).
2. It is impossible to ascertain whether Luke reports all instances of Paul’s suffering during the ministry periods which Acts reports, and whether what is reported is indeed representative. For the motives of suffering and joy in Acts, see Cunningham (1997).
3. Obviously, our focus on Paul’s speeches determines the results. Focusing on the speeches of Peter in Acts, or all the missionary speeches or other aspects would lead to different results. Our examination of human flourishing in Acts has to be supplemented by other aspects, to secure a comprehensive picture and assess whether (and to what extent) our selection is representative of the entire book. For detailed treatments of the passages under consideration, see the recent commentaries by Schnabel (2012) and Holladay (2016).
4. For Acts and Paul, see Keener (2012: 221–257). Prior to Paul coming on the scene of Acts, there are other instances of a good life/human flourishing. For instance, there are the descriptions of the earliest community in Acts 2 and 4, including its sharing of goods (often idealised), but also other aspects.
5. To guess how ancient people might have considered Paul’s life, is difficult to assess. According to the New Testament evidence, Paul had a number of

disciples and people around him who readily co-operated with him (some over longer periods of time), and must have found his life and calling persuasive and attractive, but he also faced critics and staunch adversaries who were irritated by his message and ministry. Whether and how they would have considered the “quality” of Paul’s life can hardly be known from the sources available to us.

6. We do not know what Paul (and Luke) made of the (from our perspective!) fascinating opportunities which this particular calling provided to Paul, such as the chance to travel, seeing significant parts and places of the ancient Mediterranean world, and cross-cultural boundaries. Could and did Paul appreciate these aspects of his ministry as opportunities for human flourishing, or were they more of a burden to him? Some of these opportunities, what they entailed and what might have excited others (see the widespread ancient appreciation of travelling, Casson 1994), seems to have irritated him (Acts 17:16). Due to the circumstances of his travels (far from comfortable!) it seems to have been a burden, if only due to the frequency and dangers involved (see 2Cor 11:23–33).

7. Obviously, these speeches are also part of the Lukan portrayal of Paul. For a detailed assessment of the speeches of Acts, see Keener (2012: 258–319).

8. Readers need to keep this focus in mind. It is one major aspect of a good life, but not the only one to consider.

9. Later on, the missionaries indicate that the word of God had to be spoken first to the Jews, respecting the salvation-historical priority of Israel. In their mission, Paul and Barnabas see the command in Isa 49:6, of being a light to the non-Jews, fulfilled (Acts 13:46–48). They are called to bring salvation to the end of the earth. A good life lies in fulfilling this call, and in offering God’s salvation to others.

10. For a detailed treatment see Stenschke (1999: 185–190, 210–221).

11. In analogy to the missionary speeches earlier in Acts, there are also shorter summaries of Paul’s defences before various officials (e.g., Acts 25:8, 10–11).

12. Green (2020: 234) notes: “With the Stoics and against the Epicureans, Luke sees happiness as the effect or by-product of living in harmony with the way things are. ... Luke has a particular perspective on ‘the way things are’, and thus what it might mean to live, as the Stoics might put it, in harmony with the natural order of things”.

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### **Author’s Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **Seminary Training Going Beyond Church Shepherds**

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### **Abstract**

*The topic of training leaders who are not pastors or workers within the local church has not received much attention from various contributors. However, the current state of the church in Africa and the requirements of the Great Commission, as outlined by the Lord Jesus Christ, necessitate that seminaries and pastors' schools should cultivate a diverse leadership that can effectively address the numerous challenges faced by Christian communities and African society. In this article, the researcher contends that in addition to the conventional training provided to pastors or shepherds of local churches, theological and biblical training institutions must now place particular emphasis on equipping missionaries, evangelists, individuals with multiple vocations serving God, and other valuable workers who will help address the needs of our environment and African society at large. The progress of the church and society in Africa demonstrates that this need has become a calling for Christian training institutions operating on the continent today.*

### **1. Introduction**

The role or place of seminaries and Bible schools in training God's servants has been and continues to be the subject of much debate. On this subject, Vance C. Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick, 1998) once wrote that "The Lord will be back before experts agree on the exact nature and approved methods of theological education."<sup>i</sup> Many Christian leaders and scholars on the continent have even devoted large volumes of books to reflecting on the quality of the impact that theological and biblical training institutions have on the life of the local church and the African community in all its socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions. At this level, quick scrutiny of the table of contents of the book *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*<sup>ii</sup> shows us that rich and profound reflections on the effectiveness of theological and pastoral training institutions on the African continent are already being undertaken by African leaders themselves. Many relevant topics are addressed with rigor and an open mind. Contributors to the 2013 series emphasized the need for training that is theologically rich for the African man in an extremely pluralistic context; however, despite the richness of this volume of self-assessment by African theological

educators, <sup>iii</sup> we have to admit that the subject of training beyond the classic and traditional targets is not addressed properly.

Indeed, training leaders other than pastors or workers within the local church has not attracted the attention of the various contributors. Yet, the current situation of the church in Africa, and the very requirements of the Great Commission as given by the Lord Jesus Christ, demand that seminaries and pastors' schools should develop a sufficiently varied leadership, that is a varied leadership that will be able to respond to the multiple demands facing Christian communities and the African society in which they live and share life.

In this article, it is argued that beyond the classic training offered to pastors or shepherds of local churches, our theological and biblical training institutions must now give special attention to the training of missionaries, evangelists, multiple-vocation servants of God and many other useful workers that will help meet the need of our environment and our African society in general. The development of the church and the society in Africa shows that this need is becoming a mission for Christian training institutions operating on the continent today (Harold and Ronnie 2021).

To do justice to such a subject, several issues need to be addressed, but, for the limited scope of this article, I shall consider the following: What is the role of theological seminaries, Bible schools, and pastoral training institutions in equipping professional leaders other than local church pastors? Can today's theological training institutions deliver respectable credentials for missionaries, evangelists, church planters, chaplains, counselors, and others? How can pastoral training itself be reframed to produce mission-minded pastors, shepherds who see the Great Commission as the *raison d'être* of their mission in the church, and who mobilize their communities to invade the nations so that they (the nations) become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ?

## **2. A Historical Overview of the Role of Theological Training**

Reading Matthew 28:20b, we understand that the Lord Jesus Christ's order included training all those who believed. Indeed, the expression, "...teach them to observe all that I have commanded you," <sup>iv</sup> applies to all disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ from every nation. Theological and biblical training must necessarily target the whole body of Christ. To

accomplish this task of equipping the body of Christ, Paul affirmed, “And he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry and the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). This statement by Paul teaches us many truths, including the following two:

**-Truth #1:** Many workers carry out the ministry. The whole body of Christ must be involved in ministry. One person, regardless of his giftedness cannot do it alone and he pastoral ministry in a local church will not be enough to fulfill the Great Commission.

**-Truth #2:** The leaders involved in the mission of training or equipping the saints are multiple: Paul identified apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as people God makes available to the church for the training of the saints and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. If the above two points are true, we can ask ourselves why our seminaries and training schools in Africa focus solely on training pastors. What about the others?

Another valuable argument is the one that the history of theological education reveals to us. Providing a historical overview of the creation of theological training institutions, Andrew Walls (Walls, 2013) <sup>v</sup> argues that it is possible to demonstrate that classical theological institutions as we know them today arose primarily “out of the Church’s need to nurture, strengthen and instruct its members, and to explain the Christian faith to the outside world in terms of contemporary globalizing culture.” <sup>vi</sup> In summary, Walls asserts that from the very beginning, Christian theological institutions were created for two main purposes:

- **Purpose #1:** To train, equip, and edify local church members, but also
- **Purpose #2:** To help equip all local church members to minister to non-Christians to win them to Christ.

Walls argues that the same truth is well perceptible in the age of radical Christianity and its monasteries. He argues that the theological and biblical training of that period of church history was not aimed solely at doctrinal and moral purity alone. Some monasteries were training men and women for evangelism and direct ministry to people outside the faith community.

Yet, according to Walls, these two objectives for which theological training

institutions were created have never been faithfully preserved. During its expansion and growth, the Church and its training institution lost its concept of Christ-centered leadership. The Church developed a universal organisational strategy to maintain orthodoxy in its struggle against heretical groups such as Simon Magus' Gnostics, Marcion's Marcionites, and the Montanist movement. From Irenaeus of Lyons onwards, the idea of apostolic succession developed. Church leaders bore distinctive titles such as bishops, presbyters, deacons, readers, and janitors. Commenting on the origin of the development of hierarchical leadership in the Church, Kenneth Scott Latourette (Latourette 1997) wrote:

From the beginning of the second century, a distinct division began to appear between clergy and laity, despite the fact that every Christian was considered a priest to God in the first century. By the end of the second century, the clergy had clearly become a distinct "order", a designation probably derived from that given to Roman magistrates in a tightly stratified society. <sup>vii</sup>

The adverse consequences of this hierarchical structure affected the whole body of Christ, even the theological education system. Fulfilling the Great Commission became the burden of a select few Christians. Relegating most of the Church to the rank of laity, some men and women were trained in rigorous monastic schools. Christianity, which had begun as a movement of ordinary people, became the work of a few professionals. Although the reformers were instrumental in reforming doctrines, there was no substantial change in their understanding of leadership. Four types of leadership emerged during the Protestant reform movement. They were the educated and ordained clergymen, the rule of the elders or the council of the Pietists and the Anabaptists, and the leadership of the renewal movements such as the Methodists and Baptists. According to Douglas McConnell (McConnell, 2000), the latest style of leadership existing in contemporary ecclesiology and missionary endeavors is the charismatic style. <sup>viii</sup> This type of leadership involves strong charismatic personalities who have attracted many followers, creating an interdenominational movement.

In Africa, specifically, Christian leadership has developed under various influences. African culture, colonialism, and the Western missionary agencies that penetrated the continent have had an indelible mark on the type of leadership found on the continent today. First and foremost,

colonial masters and early missionary organizations introduced the concept of reading and writing in many parts of Africa. Literacy and the language of the colonial masters became the distinguishing factors of civility and social integration. Work opportunities and social status depend on one's level of education. In churches or at the local justice or police station, the important role of those who knew how to write and read English, French, or Portuguese became inescapable. In the French colonies, the problem was even more complex because of France's system of direct administration. The first churches planted on the continent received leaders who were trained according to the Western model. The language of instruction belonged to the colonial masters. Peter Falk (Falk, 1979) assessed the educational efforts of the early missionaries as the cause of the emergence of the independent African Church. He observed that Church members were uneducated, and the clergy were thoroughly trained in a style disconnected from their culture. <sup>ix</sup>

In short, without exaggeration, we can say that the elitist clergy leadership syndrome of the medieval period in Western Europe negatively impacted the theological training system in Africa. Indeed, we must remember that our theological and biblical training seminaries have inherited a very complex tradition. First, they are influenced by errors originating from the church of the medieval period, which the churches of the Reformation did not sufficiently correct up to the period of the colonial churches. Colonial times' theological and pastoral training institutions did not find it necessary to train people from outside the clerical body.

Their focus was on training pastors, the leaders of the local churches, because they envisioned the idea that these (the shepherds of the local churches) would train and equip the members of their community to carry out the mission in society. Unfortunately, this strategy did not work. Therefore, we believe that our leadership training and equipping institutions need to extend their efforts towards training people other than the shepherds of local churches.

Secondly, we can also conclude that African culture has something to do with the necessary changes in the training structure. African culture is not sufficiently democratic when it comes to sharing knowledge. We do not have the culture of sharing knowledge by writing; worse, we reserve knowledge for a closed circle of initiated people. For example, blacksmiths will share their knowledge with their family members alone.

We can therefore state with some ease and certainty that theological and pastoral training institutions were and continue to be seen as sacred forests reserved for the training of “sacred men” called pastors, reverends, or bishops. This article is a call to openness. Our pastoral and theological training institutions must target people other than pastors who work within the local church. Our training institutions must add another that is more missional to their pastoral vocation. Training leaders capable of serving God directly in society is a requirement from which our training institutions cannot evade. Such a responsibility is a role reserved exclusively for our seminaries and schools of pastoral training.

### **3. The Role of Seminaries and School of Biblical Formation in Training of Workers other than Pastors**

Some Reasons for Training Workers other than Local Church Pastors

We affirm that seminaries and schools of biblical, theological, or pastoral formation on the African continent must widen or open their doors to training leaders and workers other than the pastors-shepherds of local churches. There are several reasons for this, including the following eleven:

1. **Reason #1:** The Great Commission requires everyone’s contribution. As clarified above, the Great Commission has not been entrusted to religious specialists and professionals. It has been entrusted to all disciples—to the church without exception.

2. **Reason #2:** The fall of man has had harmful consequences whose ramifications extend to all aspects of human life. This being the case, we must understand that the consequences of the fall are not limited to the spiritual dimension of human life alone. It has a detrimental impact on work, government, the environment, communication, and life. Many Christians are involved in these different areas of life. It is therefore normal, even urgent, for Christian training institutions to seek to involve themselves in training brothers and sisters working in non-ecclesiastical professional environments. At this point, we can parallel Paul’s argument by posing a series of rhetorical questions that follow:

How will they defend and testify to the faith they are not certain and convinced of? And how will they be convinced of it if they have not been educated? And how will they be educated in it, if no seminaries and biblical institutions make it a priority in their training program?

And how will there be Christian workers and leaders other than pastors and shepherds in local churches if they are not also seen as people to be sent out to positively impact this world? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who announce peace and bring good news! <sup>x</sup>

To take up Walter Rauschenbush's well-known message, theological and pastoral training institutions in Africa need to go beyond the traditional training of pastors and engage in the training of leaders who can be directly involved in the "Christianization of the social order". This means training people who will help end child abuse, who will care for "street children," and other marginalized people in today's rapidly urbanizing cities.

**3. Reason #3:** Historically speaking, seminaries or Christian training schools were created to help churches solve problems their faithful in society faced. Today, these problems are diverse, complex, and multiple. Training Christians directly from seminaries and Bible schools is not a competition against local churches. Such an initiative would be welcomed by local churches, who would be relieved and helped in their task of equipping community members to serve God in society more effectively.

**4. Reason #4:** A monastic, inward-looking faith always weakens and loses the battle. Suppose formation institutions remain closed and do not seek to address the needs that society presents to Christians. In that case, they will end up distancing themselves from reality by shutting themselves away in the classrooms of their schools.

**5. Reason #5:** The survival of seminaries and training schools requires variation and innovation in the types of training they offer people. For example, the rate at which churches are being planted on the continent does not match how Christians respond to the call to serve God in full-time pastoral ministry. Today, many Christians prefer to serve God without giving up their professional activity. Training institutions need to respond to the needs of this new generation of the gospel ministry workers.

**6. Reason #6:** Churches in Africa need to prepare the leaders necessary to face the multiple challenges imposed on them by development, urbanism, globalization, and even the progress of the Gospel on the

continent. Christians must be present on the political stage and in the public and private sectors. We believe that our theological training seminaries can influence these new generations of Africans at an early stage if they accept to diversify their training program.

**7. Reason #7:** Seminaries and traditional training schools have human and material resources unavailable in local churches, vocational training centers, and government schools. For example, spiritual, moral, and ethical biblical training is increasingly rare in public training institutions, which are increasingly liberal and anti-God.

**8. Reason #8:** For local denominations or church associations, training in a seminary or Bible school ensures good follow-up, making it easier for everyone to be responsible and accountable. It will be very difficult to track the doctrinal and ethical quality given by each local church if we have to leave them in charge of training workers without the involvement of the denomination to which they belong.

**9. Reason #9:** The financial burdens of training leaders can be minimized and well amortized when several churches agree to contribute to support seminaries or Bible training schools.

**10. Reason #10:** Seminaries and theological training schools are not constrained to serve the local church alone. They must serve man in his socio-economic, political, and cultural environment. Without competing with local churches, we believe that theological training institutions must become more involved in educating society. Consequently, they must diversify their training programs to include professional and liberal education. Pastoral and theological training schools can combine ethics, morality, and *savoir être* with competence or know-how.

**11. Reason #11:** Finally, seminaries and pastoral training schools not directly involved in missionary work will eventually disappear or become extremely liberal institutions. Indeed, Yemi Ladipo's maxim (Ladipo, 1989) that "A church that is not involved in mission will always remain a mission field" <sup>xi</sup> should apply to training structures where the church's pastor has been trained. When the training structure is not missional, the leaders trained there will not be nor will the churches they lead.

#### A. The Role of Seminaries and Bible Schools in the Training of Workers and Leaders Other than Pastors or Shepherds of Local Churches

The role of theological and pastoral training institutions in Africa is manifold. To enrich our reflection, we have drawn up a list below, which is far from being exhaustive.

1. Developing academic curricula that meets the needs of the training sought is an inescapable duty for our institutions.
2. Recruiting the right teachers or trainers for the training required is a major challenge that may seem insurmountable, but it must be faced.
3. The use of training methods that motivates and facilitates the commitment of the target audience is paramount. As an example of innovation, training institutions can use the decentralized training method with new technology.
4. Offering sufficiently competitive costs for the type of training sought can reduce competition with public and private schools.
5. Developing partnerships with appropriate structures interested in the vision and objectives of the seminary or pastoral or biblical training school for the type of training sought is a strength that our training institutions must explore.
6. Seeking government accreditation is a responsibility that falls to our training institutions. Suppose the diplomas awarded by our theological and pastoral training institutions are to be accepted by our governments. In that case, they must satisfy, as far as possible, the requirements laid down by the state. Still, suppose the requirements contradict the ethical and moral values of theological and biblical training institutions, including those of partner churches. In that case, we believe they (the training institutions in question) must remain faithful to God by preserving their doctrinal integrity.
7. Communication with local churches and Christian denominations is a key responsibility. It is up to training institutions to communicate their vision and new training programs to the churches.
8. The development of appropriate didactic and pedagogical resources

will highlight the serious nature of the project. The major challenge to be met is the development of teaching resources. Partnerships with Christian universities elsewhere in Africa and the world can help to meet this challenge.

9. Understanding the needs or challenges presented by African societies today is a task not to be neglected. Training programs must take account of African realities. There's no point in offering students degrees and skills that will not be useful in the field.

10. Creativity in training non-literate people is also a challenge. Literacy remains a major problem for African peoples. Our theological and pastoral training schools and seminaries would gain enormously by developing appropriate methods for training this large part of the African population.

11. Preserving the spiritual and sacred atmosphere within African theological and pastoral training institutions remains a focus. Offering training programs to students other than pastors can lead to moral and ethical laxity within the institution. The challenge of maintaining rigor in conduct and ethics falls to the leaders and teachers who work there.

#### **4. What Solutions can be found for Diplomas?**

Diplomas remain a major challenge in education in Africa and elsewhere. We are living in the age of diplomas. The situation is worrying in that some people prefer to buy diplomas and titles without any skills in the given field of knowledge. Another diploma-related challenge is that of specialization. Very often, our theological diplomas, such as bachelor's or master's degrees in theology, are general. For example, someone with a university education in mathematics up to a master's level is more specialized in his or her field than someone with a master's degree in divinity. To deal with the problems of diplomas that need to be issued to recipients of the new open training program for lay people and workers other than shepherds in local churches, we suggest a few solutions, including the following:

1. **Solution #1:** What should we choose between competence and diploma? The first solution can be called competence plus attestation. In other words, training institutions must not allow themselves to be limited and paralyzed by the psychosis of accredited

diplomas. Competence must take precedence over diplomas and their accreditation. Indeed, skills in fields such as environmental management, rural health, inter-community conflict management, and others can be acquired without a high level of literacy. For example, mechanics and other workers in the informal sector do not necessarily have diplomas, yet they are very useful and efficient in their field.

**2. A solution to accreditation problem #2:** A second solution to the degree problem is collaboration or partnership with existing Christian universities. There are Christian universities on the continent today. For example, Baptist seminaries and theological and pastoral education schools in Nigeria can easily be accredited by Bowen University in Iwo, Nigeria. At this level, I believe that Baptist conventions in French-speaking countries can do the same.

**3. A solution to accreditation problem #3:** The third possible solution is to meet the state's requirements for the degrees offered to be recognized in the country. The University of the Christian Alliance of Abidjan (UACA de la FATEAC) in Côte d'Ivoire is an example of this possibility. This university, the fruit of the work of the Christian Alliance Church, fortifies the work done by FATEAC (the Faculty of the Christian Alliance Church).<sup>xii</sup>

**4. A solution to the accreditation problem #4:** A fourth solution to the diploma problem is regionalizing our training efforts. For French-speaking African countries, theological and pastoral training institutions need to standardize their curricula and training programs to offer sufficiently credible diplomas.

**5. A Solution as we give priority to specialized degrees in a field of practical knowledge #5:** To avoid confusion between degrees obtained for pastoral ministry and other non-pastoral ministries, we believe it is necessary to find appropriate titles to the field of training offered to students who are not interested in pastoral ministry. For example, a bachelor's or master's degree in social relationship management or in marriage counseling will be very specific and would be of more interest to any Christian who does not necessarily want to become a full-time pastor. Degrees in apologetics, evangelism, cross-cultural communications, Bible translation, leadership and

administration, crisis management and reconciliation, rural and urban ministry, church planting, and many others are well suited to people who look forward to working outside local churches.

The five examples of solutions given above are not an exhaustive list of the difficulties our seminaries and Bible schools may encounter if they agree to broaden their scope to include workers or Christians other than church pastors or shepherds. The five examples above show that where there is a will, there will always be a solution to the difficulties we may encounter if we accept the flexibility of making the necessary changes that yield results.

### **5. Developing a Missional Theological Institution**

A careful reading of Michael McCoy's contribution (*Handbook of Theological Education in Africa: 523-9*) shows that our theological, biblical, and pastoral African institutions must make radical decisions to develop a transformational training policy. For example, courses such as biblical hermeneutics, preaching, church history, or even the Christian doctrine of salvation or man can be taught well by considering missiology as the common thread in every class presentation. Such an approach is possible when the teacher keeps missiology at the center of his or her teaching. Yet, missiology is considered a separate discipline from the other disciplines taught at the seminary.

Secondly, it is important that all teachers, whatever their academic discipline, are missiology-initiated. They must practice missions by having a practical personal ministry in the community. Seminaries and theological training institutions must insist that all teachers, whatever their academic field, have a personal and practical ministry in the community.

Better still, as we wrote earlier, theological and pastoral training institutions in Africa would do well to diversify their academic credentials. Like theological institutions in the USA and Canada, Seminaries and Bible schools in Africa need to offer degrees in evangelism, church planting, and sustainable development. When we talk about training leaders in the field of sustainable development, we are talking about people who can work in the social, economic, and environmental sectors. We believe that these community activity areas need Christian ethics and the message of redemption that only the Great Commission can offer.

Other than changes in the subjects offered in our seminaries, our training institutions will be able to achieve their goal of training leaders other than local church pastors if they agree to enroll non-residential students. The residential training system is increasingly showing its limitations. It is very expensive for the training institutions and the students, who are obliged to work and care for their families.

Another radical change that needs to be made if our theological and pastoral training seminaries are to develop a missionary mentality and culture, in my opinion, is to require that all the teachers and workers who work in our seminaries or pastoral training schools are engaged in practical ministry that requires them to have regular personal contact with the community. The reason is simple. One cannot teach effectively and zealously what has not been personally experienced. To have a global mission and action, you need a global vision.

## **6. Conclusion**

At this stage of our discussion, what should we retain? Let's remember that our training institutions in Africa have reached a critical point where they need to examine themselves and ask the following question: Are we fulfilling the mission entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ by limiting our field of action to the training of local church pastors or shepherds only? Did the Lord Jesus Christ not have all believers in view when he gave the Great Commission? Must we continue to make the same mistakes handed down to us by our elders? This article is a direct and unequivocal response to the fact that the time has come to broaden our fields of action for the formation of the body of Christ. Such a decision will not only contribute to the progress of the Gospel, but it will also help revitalize our seminaries and pastoral training schools. By deciding to widen the circle of people to be trained and equipped for the work, our training institutions will free themselves from the prison in which many monasteries imprisoned themselves in the past.

Indeed, such innovation will not happen without our formation institutions facing major challenges and difficulties. But is this not where God's promises become a source of encouragement for us? For He says, and let's quote it well, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all simply and without reproach, and it will be given to him." <sup>xiii</sup>

## **7. Notes**

- i. Vance C. Kirkpatrick, “Theological Education and Missions: An African Case Study” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* edited by John Mark Terry and Co (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 526.
- ii. Handbook of Theological Education in Africa is published by Regnum Studies in Global Christianity (formerly Global Theological Voices Series). The main aim of the editors of this 1000+ page book is to explore and discuss the challenges facing “global Christianity”, with a special focus on churches in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. Isabel Apawo and Dietrich Werner are the main editors for the 2013 series, which gave special attention to theological training institutions in Africa.
- iii. Readers of this article will be able to appreciate the quality and relevance of the various topics covered on theological education in Africa by consulting the table of contents of the electronic copy of the Handbook of Theological Education in Africa available on the net at <https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Handbook-of-Theological-Education-in-Africa.pdf>.
- iv. The Great Commission described in Matthew 28:19-20 was not entrusted to scribes, Pharisees, priests, in a word, it was not given to temple professionals. He entrusted the mission of making disciples of all nations to ordinary men and women, workers, sinners, simple folk, some of whom had no formal academic training.
- v. Andrew Walls, “Theological Education from its earliest Jewish and African Beginnings” in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, 47-8.
- vi. Idem.
- vii. Kenneth Scott LaTourette. *A History of Christianity : Beginnings to 1500*, ed. 123-34.
- viii. Douglas McConnell, “Leadership”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, edited by A. Scott Moreau 566.
- ix. Peter Falk. *La Croissance de l’Église en Afrique* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1979), 483-90.
- x. Romans 10: 14-15. Paul was thinking of all those who had received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. He was not referring to a limited group of professional churchgoers in the leadership of a local church.

xi. Yemi Ladipo, “Developing an African Mission Structure,” *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 8: 19-24.

xii. L’UACA de FATEAC L’UACA de FATEAC pour plus d’information voir <https://www.uacafateac.org/de-la-fateac-aluaca/>.

xiii. James 1:5.

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## **Author’s Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **The Moral Regeneration Initiative and Human Flourishing: A Theological Analysis of the Morality of Some Sections of the “Rainbow Nation”**

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### **Abstract**

*This article posits that the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (known as the CRL Commission) and the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (known as the Zondo Commission) provide a plausible theological basis to analyse the morality of some sections of the post-apartheid South African nation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu called the post-apartheid South African nation the “Rainbow People of God,” hereafter called the “Rainbow Nation.” More so, the ANC-led government adopted to advocate for the “RDP of the soul” through the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) to address the new nation’s moral challenges as it was embarking on the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) to address the socio-economic-political conditions of the “Rainbow Nation.” The article uses literature analysis as a framework to provide an analysis of how the moral regeneration initiative placed alongside the quest to attain human flourishing permeated some sections of the “Rainbow Nation.” The analysis points out that the Moral Regeneration Initiative did not aim to stir some sections of the “Rainbow Nation” to internalise the moral values the Moral Regeneration Movement promotes.*

### **1. Introduction**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu enthusiastically promoted the spirituality of the new democratic nation and christened it the “Rainbow People of God” (Tutu 1994; Tutu & Allen 1999). As a Christian leader, it seemed natural for him to place God at the centre of the new democratic state and make God the moral compass of the “Rainbow Nation.” All sections of the new nation seemingly embraced the idea that God was their moral compass, as they used the name “Rainbow Nation” to describe the new democratic dispensation. Efforts to place God as the moral compass culminated in the establishment of a multi-sectoral body called the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM), which aims at promoting the “RDP of the soul” (Mandela 1999; Mkhathshwa 2005:5). West (n.d.:4) mentions

that the “RDP of the soul” is a national moral initiative that begins with an individual. Hence, this article argues that it is plausible to use the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL commission) and the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (known as the Zondo commission) as a basis to analyse the morality of some sections of the “Rainbow Nation.” The article applies literature analysis to achieve the intended objective (Cooper 1998). It is thus divided into six main sections, namely, (1) human flourishing, morality and Ubuntu; (2) the moral regeneration initiative and human flourishing; (3) the poor, black elite and human flourishing; (4) the CRL commission, morality and human flourishing; (5) the Zondo commission, morality and human flourishing; and (6) the church and human flourishing.

## **2. Human Flourishing, Morality and Ubuntu**

Rasmussen (1999:1,2,3) states that “human flourishing” is associated with Aristotle’s worldview and mentions a neo-Aristotle version that “offers a view of the human good that is (1) objective, (2) inclusive, (3) individualised, (4) agent-relative, (5) self-directed, and (6) social.” Thus, human flourishing elevates the idea that human beings seek to flourish in all aspects of human life. Hence, this article analyses the quest for human flourishing in the “Rainbow Nation.” Two South African Christian leaders and theologians helped to view morality and human flourishing in the “Rainbow Nation,” namely, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and a Professor of Philosophy, Augustine Shutte. They both argue that God should be the moral compass of the “Rainbow Nation” for it to flourish. Archbishop Desmond Tutu epitomised making God the moral compass of the “Rainbow Nation” through his unwavering commitment to Ubuntu to achieve the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) objective. This is so as he had opted to ground his theology on the notion of Ubuntu by advocating for forgiveness and reconciliation (Tutu 1999; cf Meiring 2015:2) to attain human flourishing for the “Rainbow People of God” (Tutu & Allen 1999). His position flowed from his commitment to answer people’s existential questions and helping the poor and suffering to experience God within the Ubuntu worldview rather than answering theoretical theological questions (Maluleke 2019).

Shutte (2001:204) also introduces the metaphysical in his advocacy for Ubuntu and maintains that:

in a religion with Ubuntu the unlimited transcendent power that is the ground of my being is present in all I am or do, in my life as a whole and each particular part of it

He also (2001:30) links Ubuntu with human flourishing by saying that:

[t]he morality of Ubuntu is intrinsically related to human happiness and fulfilment. It derives from our nature as human persons, not merely conventional or simple obedience to society’s arbitrary norms. Our most profound moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So, although the goal is personal, selfishness is excluded.

Interestingly, Banda later echoed the same sentiments, arguing that Ubuntu promotes human flourishing. He (2019:218) writes:

ubuntu should be conceptualised as human flourishing can also be discerned from the fact that at an individual personal level, the African quest for ubuntu is often a quest for dignified human existence.

To this end, it is noticed that one cannot talk about morality without addressing the quest to attain a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” in the context of Ubuntu.

### **3. The Moral Regeneration Initiative and Human Flourishing**

The ANC’s quest to seek a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” is noticed in connecting its spirituality with the socio-economic-political spheres of the country. This connection occurred when Nelson Mandela visited the grave of the first president of the African National Congress, Langalibalele Dube, on 27 April 1994, before casting his first democratic vote in Ohlange Institute in Inanda, northern KwaZulu-Natal. Mandela is reported to have said “Mr President, I have come to report to you that South Africa is free today” (Khumalo 2015). As the first democratically elected president of a new democratic government, he instituted the process of the “RDP of the soul” (Mandela 1999) and later created space for the establishment of the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) to address the nation’s moral issues. The Moral Regeneration Movement “is a networking platform that facilitates and coordinates all processes and initiatives to combat moral degeneration.” (MRM n.d.). A few years later, the founding leader and patron of the MRM, Fr Smagalis Mkhatswha, described Shutte’s book “Ubuntu: An ethic for a New South Africa” as “a contribution for

overcoming what our President (then Thabo Mbeki) has called the ‘moral vacuum’ that presently threatens South Africa” (Shutte, 2001).

Mandela’s successor, the former president Thabo Mbeki, later requested the church to be part of efforts to assist the ANC in attaining a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” (Battersby 2015). Following the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2002), he allowed a project that would invoke the presence of the ancestors in the “Rainbow Nation.” The Department of Arts and Culture led by former minister, Pallo Jordan, was tasked to build the Freedom Park Memorial in Salvokop, Tshwane. Ngaka Wali wa Serote oversaw the construction of the first phase of the memorial precinct called “isivivane” (Young & Prinsloo 2020:96) in 2003 and its opening in 2004. The precinct is a resting place for the spirits of those who died during the struggle for freedom in South Africa. Completing the first phase coincided with celebrating a decade of political freedom and democracy. The park also fulfils Nelson Mandela’s 1999 dream that:

the day should not be far off, when we shall have a people’s shrine, a freedom park, where we shall honour those who endured pain with all the dignity they deserve, so we should experience the joy of freedom (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2009).

Nelson Mandela’s desire to have a shrine and the appointment of ngaka Wally wa Serote to oversee the “isivivane” phase directly reflects the influence of the aspect of appealing to the supernatural for intervention to attain a flourishing “Rainbow Nation.” This development echoes Banda’s (2019:218) view that Ubuntu promotes human flourishing. Hence, Mothibe and Sibanda (2019: section 8, par 4) summarise the spirituality of the park as follows:

[i]n SA, the government has erected a memorial, the Freedom Park in Pretoria [sic] (current Tshwane) in recognition of the role of ancestors to the living. Within the park, several sacred sites are assigned the meaning and importance of the park

#### **4. The Poor, Black Elite and Human Flourishing**

The “Rainbow Nation” is a new non-racial, non-sexist and secular democratic country founded on the new 1996 constitution (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This country is in a socio-economic-religious transition that aims to disassociate itself from

apartheid South Africa. One of its challenges is that STATS SA has rated the “Rainbow Nation” as one of the most unequal societies in the world (STATS SA 2017; 2018, 2020) with a huge rich-poor gap with a high youth unemployment rate accompanied by a shrinking economy (STATS SA 2023).

Living in a country with the world’s highest gap between the rich and the poor, challenges the internalisation of the moral values, the Moral Regeneration Movement promotes among the poor. The poor find promises of a better life elusive and opt to seek to attain human flourishing in the religious practices of the New Prophetic Movement leaders (Banda 2019a:35,37).

A different picture emerges among the middle class, the elite, the rich, and politicians as several moral scandals also point out that they also need to show an attempt to internalise the moral values promoted by the Moral Regeneration Movement. An example is Schwella’s (2013: 78) work identifying corruption in sports and political circles. Additionally, several commissions were established to investigate some of these scandals. Scandals associated with the black elite caused Boesak (2004:69) to lament that:

The gap between the new black elite and the poor black masses is as wide as any gap that ever existed, only more pain-filled. And in the impoverished rural areas and the teeming squatter camps, where the pain was always greatest, they still hear that they must ‘tighten their belts’ while parliamentarians voted in by the loyalty and hopes of the poor, vote themselves two salary increases in one year.

The black elite were also mentioned in allegations of corrupt practices and actions mentioned at the Zondo commission. The recent Special Investigating Unit’s (SIU) revelation of disturbing and extremely shocking corruption identified in some PPE COVID-19 tenders (Sedimba 2021) depicts how corruption scandals are eating away at the moral fibre of the “Rainbow Nation.” Voster (2012) correctly states:

While South Africa is in the nation-building process, the corruption culture endangers society’s social fibre and inhibits moral renewal. Corruption promotes a general lack of trust in institutions and leadership and stimulates a perpetual culture of corruption that invades all spheres of life.

Sadly, this trend has also found its way among some section of African township Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (Banda 2019a; CRL 2017; Kgatle 2017).

Accordingly, the author opts to focus only on two commissions, namely, the CRL commission and the Zondo commission because they suit the intended theological moral analysis of some sections of the “Rainbow Nation” as its citizens attempt to attain human flourishing. This attempt is placed alongside the initiatives to internalise the moral values the Moral Regeneration Movement promotes. The first commission involves the conduct of some leaders of a section of the Christian faith, the New Prophetic Movement. The second commission involves the conduct of some leaders of the private and public sectors.

### **5. The CRL Commission, Morality and Human Flourishing**

Padayachy (2014:53) mentions moral decay as one of the scourges that face the South African church, and says:

Today’s church in South Africa is characterised by modernity and post-modernity, the scourge of unemployment, a young and fragile democracy, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, moral decay and poverty.

The church is expected to reflect ideal moral standards and practises by being the salt and light of the earth (Matthew 5:14) and seek to promote the prosperity of its members. Instead, between 2010 and 2022, the South African media reported disturbing praxis of some Pentecostal-Charismatic Church leaders that ended in the CRL commission conducting a formal investigation into the commercialisation of religion (CRL 2017; Kgatle 2017:1). These leaders are criticised for promoting their interest instead of those of church members (Mashau & Kgatle 2019:6-8). Kgatle (2020:26-27) classifies them into a group he calls New Prophetic Movement and explains that they:

idolise the miraculous, healing, deliverance, success and the enactment of bizarre church performances often performed by charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders.” (Kgatle 2021:1)

Resane (2018:348) lists some Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders outside Kgatle’s category.

These leaders include South Africans and foreign nationals (Mashau

& Kgatle 2019:3, 8; Kgatle 2017:6) whom Ramatshwana (2019:6-8) argues that they are preying on people. Resane (2021) critique them for promoting a celebrity cult, lacking basic theological training, displaying poor management abilities and not complying with the Non-Profit Organisation Act (Resane 2018:356–357).

The moral behaviour of some New Prophetic Movement leaders caused Resane (2020:4) to lament that “secular culture” has affected the church instead of the church affecting “secular culture.” He further argues that they do not demonstrate accountability (Resane 2018:349–350). Although professing to be prophetic, these leaders do not come near the praxis of anti-apartheid church leaders who challenged the injustices and oppression the apartheid regime perpetuated. For them, being prophetic mainly involves predicting the future, ministering healing and deliverance to church members (cf Resane 2017:8-9), and ignoring the socio-economic plight of church members (Mashau & Kgatle 2019). In their work, “The abuse of the Spirit in some New Prophetic Churches in South African Pentecostalism,” Kgatle and Anderson (2020), details how these leaders abuse their religious standing to exploit and abuse church members. These developments in these churches show that some of the leaders seem not to have a moral compass as they opt to pursue financial gain and popularity by any available means; instead of making God their moral compass and ensuring their members flourish. These developments led Mashau and Kgatle (2019:6) to point out that “[o]ne of the causalities of the prosperity gospel is economic justice. Instead of fighting the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality, prosperity gospel perpetrates such challenges.” because only the pastor benefits (Mashau & Kgatle 2019: 5). Banda (2020:3) laments the commercialisation of religion by pointing that some of these leaders promote strange practices to syphon money from church members and non-members attending these churches; practice tax evasion, flout banking laws and using the names of church members to acquire property (cf. CRL 2017). Some of these leaders reflect poor marriage moral standing (Resane 2018: 348,358-359). Others are accused of sexual violation (Maviya 2018), others have displayed a share lack of adherence to basic human rights (Mokhoathi & Rembe 2017:7) and basic health practice by convincing congregants to eat grass, drink petrol and detergents as well as eating rodents (Resane 2017:6-7). Some fake miracles to prove their unique spiritual abilities so that church members return to the church (Ramatshwana 2019:7).

The praxis of some New Prophetic Movement leaders reflects that church members (poor and middle class) do not engage in a critical reflection and application of the Scriptures (cf Mashau & Kgatle 2019:8) and are willing to pay for the perceived spiritual service the leaders provide (Ramatshwana 2019:6). What matters is attaining personal human flourishing even in dubious and life-threatening environments. They deliberately follow some New Prophetic Movement leaders who seem not to care about the ethics of their actions (Kgatle 2020:137-145). Above all, the poor trust them and are desperate to find solutions to unemployment, poverty and hunger (Banda 2019a:8); and view them as mediators between them and God (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:236–237).

In his work, Maluleke (2015:36-39) paints a picture of the questionable actions of some Christian leaders Christ would find should he have returned a few years ago. He mentions the ordination of Jacob Zuma as a pastor by a group of some leaders from the New Prophetic Movement and further questions Paseka Motsoeneng's ethics of one of the leaders from New Prophetic Movement.

On the contrary Banda (2020: 3) construes some of Motsoeneng's actions to pray for God's intervention in a married couple experiencing sexual problems as attempts to assist church members to flourish. Banda (2019a:10) also introduces the quest for human flourishing among people experiencing poverty by saying the poor live in:

context riddled with high economic inequality and powerlessness, religion is a powerful tool for the poor and powerless. The high levels of poverty, corruption, crime and violence, high costs of living and medical care and poor service delivery mean that many poor people turn to religion as a strategy of survival and existence.

Arguably, the actions of some leaders of the New Prophetic Movement are blatant corruption. Hence, the author presents Voster's (2012:140-144) three steps to fight corruption in all spheres including the church. These are to: raise awareness of the problem and its effects, deal with self-interest, and call for social justice. The first step builds on the view that the church is a moral agent, the second step advocates that the interest of others comes first, and the third step reiterates the view that the church must be the voice of the poor, marginalised and the oppressed. The above steps show that Voster's approach promotes the quest to assist the poor to

attain human flourishing.

Additionally, Mashau and Kgatle (2019:6-8) show the efforts of some theologians who advocate for promoting human flourishing among the New Prophetic Movement. They apply Ubuntu to propose a practical antithesis to malpractices identified among some New Prophetic Movement leaders; and list five key practices, they called theologies: (a) theology of life, (b) theology of care, (c) theology of solidarity, (d) theology of economic justice, and (e) theology of hope and accompaniment. The first encapsulates the promotion of good human life (human flourishing in this article), the second emphasises the promotion of care of the church members to enable other to reach a state of happiness, the third elevates the notion of promoting community so that church members benefit instead of the only pastor benefiting, the fourth advocate for the promotion of seeking economic emancipation and justice that benefit the church members and the fifth underscore the promotion of hope and flourishing of church members by pastors considering the need of church members.

## **6.The Zondo Commission, Morality and Human Flourishing**

The ANC’s wish to improve the lives and conditions of the poor is emphasised in the resolution of its Mangaung 2012 conference that states:

We are boldly entering the second phase of the transition from apartheid colonialism to a national democratic society. This phase will be characterised by decisive action to effect economic transformation and democratic consolidation, critical to improving all South Africans’ quality of life and promoting nation-building and social cohesion.

The objective to improve all South Africans’ quality of life and promote nation-building and social cohesion implies the desire to attain a flourishing “Rainbow Nation.” This resolution formed the basis to conceptualise and development state that promotes an inclusive economic growth (ANC 2017) as expressed in the National Development Plan (NDP), that set to reduce poverty and inequality by 2030 (NDP 2011:14). To achieve this objective, the ANC introduced and used a preferential system through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) initiatives to fast track a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” (cf Madonsela 2018:118). Later, the black elite and political elite, consisting of connected politicians and senior managers at State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), became part of a complex network

that ensured procurement processes at SOEs like SAA, Eskom, Denel, Transnet and Prasa benefited those connected to them instead of the intended target groups (Khambule 2021:6). Freidman (2019:12) explains that this development set the stage for the political elite and black elite and business to control access to the resources of SOEs and from the business sector; thus, resulting patronage between these two groups of elites and business (Khambule 2021:8).

The manifestation of this patronage ended in members of the civil society beginning to question the ethics of the former president of the country and the ANC, Jacob Zuma; further pressed that he be held accountable and demanded that he be removed as the president of the ANC and the country (Khambule 2021:8-9). Subsequently, a formal complaint was made to the Public Protector (PP) to investigate irregularities in Jacob Zuma's administration (Madonsela 2016; Public Protector 2016). The PP found violations of the Code of Ethics and recommended establishing a formal judicial inquiry to investigate the allegations (Public Protector 2016). Accordingly, the Zondo commission was established in 2018 to investigate allegations of state occupation during the administration of former president and African National Congress (ANC), Jacob Zuma (Bohler-Muller *et al.*, 2022: ii).

State capture occurs where an individual or family exerts influence on running the state and its economy through a complex network (Martins & Solomon 2016, 21). Corruptions benefit a few connected individuals who want to flourish by any means and rob the poor to attain human flourishing. It manifests through nepotism, bribery, and fraud among others (Webb 2009:9).

The Zondo commission unearthed sophisticated forms of corruption in the private and public sectors. A senior official at the national Treasury testified at the Zondo commission that signs of state capture emerged at Eskom (Van Niekerk, Valiquette L'Heureux & Holtzhausen 2022:5). The first politicians, Barbara Horgan and Pravin Gordan, testified and explained at the Zondo commission that the emergence of an illegal procurement process was used to weaken state institutions and to loot state funds (Van Niekerk, Valiquette L'Heureux & Holtzhausen 2022:5).

The findings of the Zondo commission established that:

The evidence shows that goods and services were often procured

when they were not needed, and often in duplication of work already done (Bohler-Muller *et al.*, 2022 :165).

The evidence received by the Commission demonstrates that in many cases, and fundamental respects, the Boards of many SOEs have shirked their responsibilities, or worse, used their powers to corrupt the SOEs that they have been appointed to protect. (Bohler-Muller, et al., 2022:173

The abuse of centralised procurement processes often evidenced this collective misconduct, so the approval authority for high-value tenders became concentrated in the hands of a small group of top executives and Board members. (Bohler-Muller *et al.*, 2022:173).

The conduct of the black elites, black politicians, and business cited by the Zondo Commission demonstrates that all three groups have lost their moral compass, depriving the poor of the opportunity for the prosperity that the NDP wants. They (a) are an antithesis to Desmond Tutu’s and Augustine Shutte’s flourishing “Rainbow Nation” influenced by Ubuntu; and (b) display self-interest.

Worse, they display no sign of internalising the moral values of the Moral Regeneration Movement. They stooped too low to amass large sums of money.

## **7. The Church and Human Flourishing**

The Zondo commission’s final report presents an opportunity for the church to challenge corruption (Theron & Lotter 2012:98) and to collaborate with civil society to fight it so that the poor may attain human flourishing. This view implies that the church should embrace a hermeneutic that advocates for transforming human lives in contemporary contexts of the “Rainbow nation” (*cf* Nürnberger 2004:7).

Such collaboration will enable local churches to promote leadership centred on people instead of self-interest (Koegelenberg 1992:343). Manila (2010:524) adds that such leadership “needs to manifest God’s will in the world, and the Church must warn authorities and government officials against corruption.” While Vorster (2012:139) avers and states that local churches should support the government’s efforts to combat corruption and provide alternative measures to fight in the public and private sectors. Finally, this collaboration requires that church leaders and

congregants to be role models (Kruger and de Klerk 2016:156) and to commit to Myers's (2000:65) concept of transformational development that promotes just and peaceful relationships within the community and with God, reconciliation, sharing and embracing others as well caring for creation.

Embracing collaboration, transformation development and challenging corruption is noticed in du Plessis and Breed's (2013:1-6) work investigating corruption in the Aurora Group of Mines and developing the "Touching Africa" model based on I Corinthians. The model proposes five principles to address corruption in the private and public sectors: changing minute settings, unifying vision, integrating roles, and focusing on the ultimate user and identity as a starting point (du Plessis & Breed 2013: 7-8). In addition, they recommend establishing a well-coordinated programme to combat corruption in the country (2013:9).

## **8. Conclusion**

As noticed in this article, Desmond Tutu and Augustine Shutte envisaged a flourishing "Rainbow Nation" grounded on God as its moral campus and promoting Ubuntu. The new administration of the ANC wished to assist the "Rainbow Nation" to flourish by promoting the "RDP of the soul" project with the Moral Regeneration Movement leading the initiative to stir citizens of the "Rainbow Nation" to internalise its moral values. However, the CRL and the Zondo Commission show that some sections of the church, the public and private sectors have not been influenced to internalise the moral values of the Moral Regeneration Movement. Thus, reflecting that these sections of the "Rainbow Nation" are morally deficient as their actions promoted self interest instead of promoting that the poor attain human flourishing. Furthermore, the Zondo commission report creates an opportunity for the church to challenge corruption in the public and private sectors and to work with civil society to fight it so that the poor may attain human flourishing instead of a section of the nation.

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### **Author’s Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **Revisioning a Missional Curriculum to Aid Churches in the Fulfilment of the Great Commission**

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### ***Abstract***

*While the church takes the lead in sending out missionaries to a world needing to hear the Gospel message, theological educational institutions (TEIs) are not absolved of any responsibility in this task. TEIs are positioned to provide significant influence in the life and practice of the local church as biblical, practical theological education that is first and foremost ‘training’ will impact the local church’s disposition toward missions and the sending of missionaries. To be good stewards of this opportunity—and imperative—every TEI must take seriously the development of a curriculum that will encourage and support the local church in this task. Before one can develop a curriculum, however, one must have a clear vision of what such a curriculum must be to achieve the task of missional transformation of the local church. Moving from this foundation, the authors seek to unpack the challenge of gaining a visionary perspective of the challenge for TEIs to create a curriculum designed to provide a missional direction for local church leaders. Such a task requires that any theological institution not only takes the biblical mandates of mission seriously but also asks the “Why” of the missionary mandate. Furthermore, gleaning insight from mission-sending agencies, TEIs need to understand the work of the missionary to address the skills and education [training] required for the missionary to fulfil this mandate successfully. Finally, such revision to a more missional curriculum must have an eye on the role of the local church in the mission-sending commission.*

### **1. Introduction**

*“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Ac 13:1-3) <sup>1</sup>*

The church at Antioch provides a paradigmatic example of the role of the local church in sending out missionaries. The elements of worship, prayer,

and fasting saturate the narrative. Further, listening to the Holy Spirit and acting in obedience provides critical foundational actions. Finally, the church acknowledges the task given to Barnabas and Saul as divinely administered yet understands their role and connection as demonstrated through the laying of hands upon them as a part of the sending celebration. Throughout church history, the local church has continued as the primary sending institution—more recently in partnership with other organizations; nevertheless, even in such partnerships the local church bears witness to the evidence of the missionary calling of those being sent out. This relationship between local churches, mission agencies, and the missionary has become a norm in the modern era of missions. What can be lost in the paradigm is the role of TEIs. While most mission-sending agencies express expectations or requirements of theological education, TEIs can often sit in a more reactive role providing a service in response to these requirements of a church or agency. But can TEIs have a greater role? A more proactive role? A clearer partnership with the local church in the mission-sending task?

TEIs can—and should—have a significant impact on the ministry of the local church because of the privilege granted to train those called by God for ministry. The important distinction is that the role of such institutions is never simply education but more emphatically ‘training’ provides a critical understanding.<sup>2</sup> This truth has been evident in the impact of the Cape Town Baptist Seminary (CTBS) ministry over the past decades in the life and ministry of local churches. While many examples can be noted, two specific examples are considered as a brief means of illustration. The first is the elevation of children’s ministry in the local church. In the late 90s and early 2000s, the local churches struggled to engage with children despite the need as evidenced by the sheer number of people under 13 in society. This gap in ministry was particularly evident in rural and township churches. In response to this need, CTBS instituted a “children’s ministry tract” as a part of the BTh/BMin degrees. This tract was in addition to a “youth tract” and dealt more specifically with the initiating and sustaining of ministry to children. The tract was particularly geared toward helping the pastor who would not have multiple staff—which is the reality for most of the churches in this demographic. The impact of this programme is seen as one considers the state of children’s ministry in these churches twenty years later in which one not only finds the existence of such ministries but there is an expectation for the need to reach children with the gospel. The

seminary became the primary catalyst through the training of ministers who came to study.

A second example can be seen in evangelism and church planting. In 2008, CTBS revamped the evangelism courses taught to focus not only on evangelism skills but also on the expectation of evangelism as a norm. As a result, all evangelism courses carried practical requirements of weekly conversations. Such a simple change began to impact the “DNA” of the institution and, thus, the local church. The request for evangelism training from local churches has surged and is a regular part of CTBS engagement. From the elevation of gospel witness as normative, the challenge of church planting became a natural progression in the seminary curriculum. With a restructuring of the curriculum, church planting methodology became a core subject. Over the past several years, the students at CTBS have been directly involved in more church plants than the local association.

Further, several graduates have implemented the “DNA” of church planting into their local congregations—one church in the Eastern Cape has placed in their church constitution that the church is to strive to plant a new church every year which they have been doing for several years. These examples are given to raise the point that TEIs should be influencing the local church’s ministry. One can assert that any TEI that is not catalysing kingdom growth and ministry in the local church is doing theological training incorrectly. In other words, “something’s wrong”! When the topic of equipping churches in sending missionaries is raised, one understands that the role of the TEI is critical. While TEIs should never seek to replace the local church in either the identification of missionary candidates or the sending of missionaries, they **must** take seriously the opportunity to equip the next missionary force and encourage the local church to send missionaries more faithfully. Since the primary avenue for the institution to navigate these challenges is through the training given, this reality demands thoughtful engagement with the curriculum offered.

The development of a missional curriculum should not be taken casually; rather, the institution must be very intentional in engaging the task. This challenge, however, requires “a catching of the biblical vision of missions” by the faculty and leadership before one can develop an effective curriculum. The goal cannot be simply to provide as many mission-sounding courses; rather, a greater understanding of the task to be engaged and the training needed is necessary. A more complete “revisioning” of the curriculum

is required to reflect the missional position of the institution—and the students. To cast the vision of a more missional curriculum, the institution must understand the biblical foundation for missions—the “why” of missions rather than simply the “what” of missions, the elements of the missionary task for which one must be trained, and the types of courses which will be addressing such training needs.

## **2. Casting the Missional Vision**

Smith and Kai define Vision Casting in terms of “being” and “doing” calling it “a lifestyle of continually helping brothers and sisters see the potential of who they are and can become in Christ (BEING) and what God wants to do through them (DOING)” (2011: Location 2769 of 5120). While they are speaking of discipleship—more specifically, making disciples that make disciples, the core idea is relevant to the task at hand: challenging leadership and faculty to engage in the missional task within theological education. While one can focus on the tasks and the identity of the missionary, a critical third component is the motivation or the why of a missional perspective that must undergird the entire process: “Vision casting is simply trying to keep God’s heart in front of the trainees to encourage their faith. Therefore, keep it biblically focused.” (Smith and Kai: 2011, location 2208 of 5120). Let us briefly consider the biblical mandate for the doing, being, and motivating of a missional curriculum. Logically, one can begin with the commands of Christ. Whether one looks at the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 or the call to be witnesses throughout the world in Acts 1:8, the authority of the commissioning resides in the divine person. Our Lord and Saviour declares the purpose for his disciples—the proclamation of the gospel and making of disciples worldwide—and obedience is an assumed response for the faithful. This declared task is relevant for theological training as it provides a necessary focus for the institution’s equipping of the student—the ability to make disciples and the challenge to bear witness worldwide. Historically, most TEIs focus on the first element—and have engaged the idea of preparing and equipping the student to be a disciple-maker well. One must move beyond this singular focus if one is to fully equip the student to obey the broader commands of our Lord. The focal point of casting vision for action—the “doing” component—is the expectation of obedience. One of the more humorous illustrations of this dynamic came from Francis Chan (2012) who described a hypothetical conversation with his daughter in which he instructs her to clean her room. He would not be pleased if his

daughter returns to tell him that she had memorized what he told her—“go and clean your room”—or that she was going to have a group of friends come over every week to discuss what it would look like if she cleaned her room. She knows he would only be pleased if she cleaned her room. Yet, the church often treats Jesus the same when considering his command to go and make disciples. Jesus was blunt when he declared, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say” (Luke 6:46). TE must consistently envision the larger mission and its role in global witness—not simply to create a niche programme, but out of a response of obedience. TEIs must broaden the training of “Doing” to bring repeatedly into focus the missional direction of the great commission. Curriculum, therefore, must never simply be the task to complete, but equipping to obey.

In keeping with Smith and Kai, vision casting also addresses the very identity of the follower of Jesus. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in terms of missional thinking and missional curriculum for the TE? A popular way of considering the reality of our identity in Christ about our mission as a follower of Jesus is to consider Jesus’ invitation to the first disciples in the Gospel of Mark: “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (1:17). Rather than seeing the invitation to follow and the becoming of fishers of men as two distinctive actions or roles that are to be fulfilled in some linear sequential framework, the invitation and promise are to be viewed as two sides of the same coin.<sup>3</sup> One could argue that a Christian cannot be a faithful follower of Jesus without some “fishing”. One of the faculty at CTBS related the story of two of his children when they were younger. The grade three son was explaining to the grade one daughter aspects of the return of Jesus, namely that Jesus would not return until all peoples had heard the gospel. His sister replied without hesitation, “Then, I guess we should be telling people.” A few minutes later she was in the dining room with Sunday School material, preparing to start a Jesus Club at her primary school. To bear witness to Jesus is the normal setting for the disciple. Theological training, therefore, must normalize a missional approach to ministry. Such missional focus should express the intentional element of being to the student as a natural expression of following Jesus.

Finally, the desire of God must be reflected in the life not only of the individual Christian but also the philosophy of the TEI. The Holy Spirit declares that God “...wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:3). Throughout the biblical narrative, God

clearly demonstrates his commitment to this desire and reveals himself as the one who rescues. Interestingly, throughout the Old Testament, God identifies himself to Israel as the “one who brought you out of Egypt” over 40 times! The primary revelation of God to Israel is as the one who rescues (Davis and Mulenga 2022:111). The redemptive activity of this God who rescues is seen fully in the passion of Jesus. When casting a vision for a more missional curriculum, this passion of God needs to be a driving passion for the TEI!

Revising a curriculum for a missional focus requires the commitment of the leadership and faculty of any institution. A means of maintaining such a commitment is the regular casting of vision that focuses on the call to obedience, the character of being, and the compassion of the Father.

### **3. Clarifying the Missionary Task**

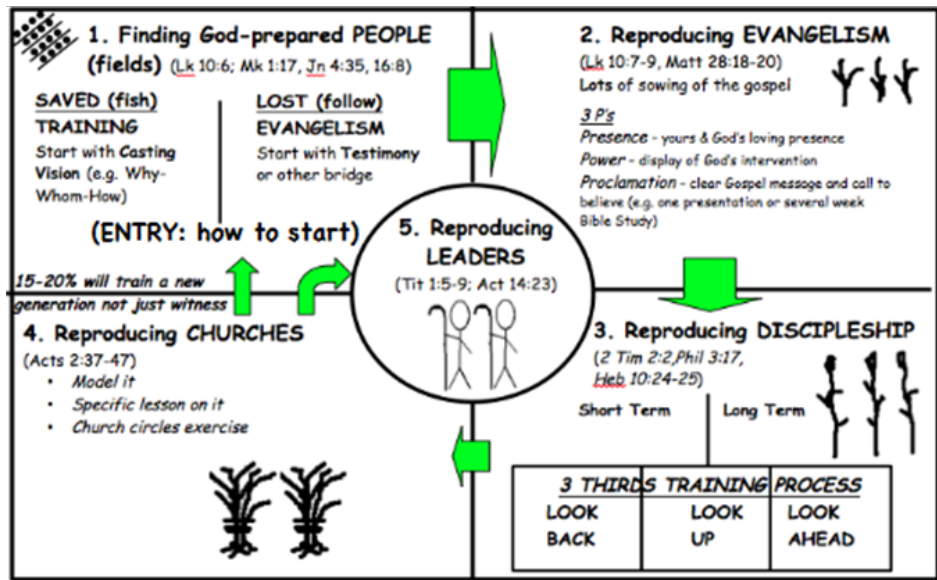
Vision requires direction before it can be applied to any given context. A misstep for any TEI regarding curriculum is the assumption that a target number of mission courses can be equated to a missional curriculum. While individual courses can be useful, there is a need for a more coordinated and cohesive whole. This reality requires the institution’s leadership and faculty to understand the “flow” of missions for the missionary. The “big picture” of necessary actions and tasks for the missionary, as one progresses from the first steps of cross-cultural engagement to the latter stages of a developed ministry, must be clearly understood by a TEI before it can be translated into a missional curriculum.

Over the years, CTBS has enjoyed varying degrees of partnership with mission agencies from promotion to participation. As a by-product of such an association, CTBS has been impacted by the missiological approaches of such mission organizations. Over the last decade, as the faculty has approached the challenge of developing a missional curriculum, two approaches have proven particularly useful: the Four Fields and the Mission Task.

CTBS utilized the first missiological framework (Four Fields ) to address the challenges of developing an effective evangelism and church planting curriculum. While not traditionally identified as “missions,” church planting involves many similar components of cross-cultural engagement. To this end, the Four Fields framework has been utilized successfully over the last decade.<sup>4</sup> The greatest initial value was providing a “plotline” for

the curriculum. In other words, a natural progression in the task of church planting provided an essential structure for the order of courses resulting in a greater interconnection of courses allowing students to build upon skills learned as they moved through the years of study.

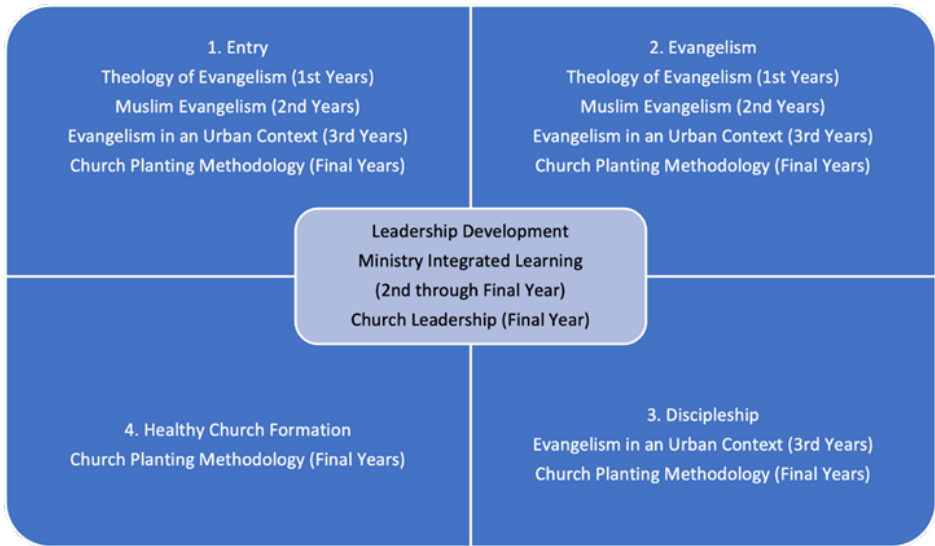
The Four Fields highlight the tasks of Entry, Evangelism, Reproducing Discipleship, and Healthy Church Formation. A central hub for these four “fields” is the ongoing leadership development task (see Figure 1 below—for an expanded representation see Appendix 1).



*Figure 1 Four Fields Component of the Church Planting Framework*

In adapting the Four Fields at CTBS, the “fields” were streamlined to keep church planting in focus — primarily in the local urban context of Cape Town. As the first two fields — Entry and Reproducing Evangelism — are primarily concerned with approaching individuals and leading conversations toward evangelism, the foundational courses needed to provide an understanding of the rationale and basic components of evangelism (Intro to Evangelism). Further, training in evangelism with the Muslim community is imperative given that 15% of the population of Cape Town are followers of Islam. The third and fourth fields — reproducing discipleship and reproducing churches — address the desire to disciple groups of believers with the goal of establishing healthy churches. Curriculum, therefore, needed to address the challenges of analysing and exegeting communities within an urban setting — what

church planting looks like in a city of millions. The flow of the structure maintains the cycle of new entry and reproduction so that the fields remain connected. The need for developed leaders to maintain the momentum becomes addressed in leadership and administration. Additionally, Ministry Integrated Learning which begins in a student’s second year is a formal mentoring and internship designed to develop the student as a leader as well as teach the student how to develop leaders. The value of the form was the clear progression that required new skills and development at every stage. Thus, the faculty of CTBS had a framework to which they could attach the progression of courses (see Figure 2 below):

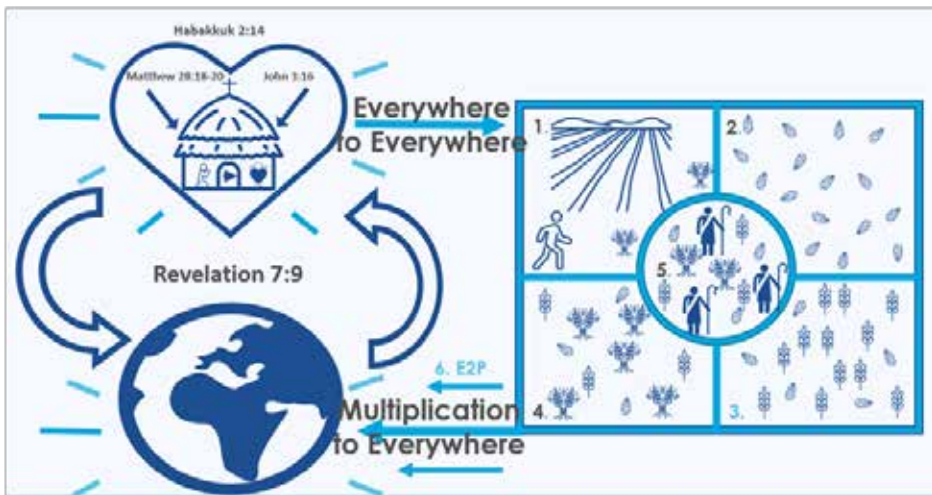


*Figure 2 Ev/CP Courses as Four Fields*

The conviction to broaden the missional focus of CTBS to a more cross-cultural and global engagement has resulted in a return to missionary sending agencies’ work to define the flow and process of missions. While the Four Fields does continue to give insight, a more complete image of missions is needed. The Missionary Task defined by the IMB has proven particularly useful. While all the “four fields” are represented within the six stages of the Missionary Task, some useful additions/clarifications are included.

Initially, the task of entry has been clarified specifically for cross-cultural engagement which is a prominent feature of missions. More importantly, the role of the church in sending out missionaries is given proper emphasis as mission sending is a function of the local church “missionaries can be

sent from everywhere to everywhere” (IMB 2023:8). As any missional training must have within its broad focus the equipping of the church for identifying, setting apart, and supporting missionaries, TEIs can incorporate consultations by missionary-sending agencies to equip further students and pastors in the local community. Recently, CTBS hosted such a consultation; the response was greater than the available space. Due to the need an additional consultation is planned; furthermore, a follow-up meeting is being developed to help the attendees follow through with the action plans designed at this event.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, a component of any missional curriculum involves the engagement of church leadership and pastoral roles in such tasks! The Missionary Task also places particular emphasis on the health of new churches. Not that it was lacking in the Four Fields; rather, it was understated. Finally, a healthy exit for the missionary is considered a key component of the missionary task. This broader, more developed model maintains the flow and “big picture” of the four fields while engaging intentionally with the local church in its role of mission sending in cross-cultural ministry (see Figure 3, see an alternate representation in Appendix B).



The understanding of the missionary’s task is vital for any theological training institution that seeks to equip both missionaries who will serve cross-culturally and pastors who serve in the local church to think globally and participate in sending out missionaries. TEIs, therefore, need to see the plotline of the mission’s curriculum as an organic whole rather than isolated courses.

#### **4. Creating the Missional Curriculum**

Having caught the vision of the call to missional thinking not only as tasks to do but as a normal expression of our Christianity walking in step with the desires of God and having investigated the plotline of the work of the missionary, one is better positioned to engage with the challenge of creating a missional curriculum (or missiocentric curriculum). Before starting the critical task of creating a missiocentric curriculum, however, one must be clear about the meaning of the concept of curriculum in TE. In other words, what precisely is meant by the term curriculum? Curriculum can be defined as “all of life’s experience or happenings” (Ford 2003:33) meaning that curriculum is more than a track of learning but everything that happens in the environment and circumstances of learning. Ford (2003:34) further elaborates that the curriculum is “a running or ‘race course’ which exists only where true learning experiences take place.” Therefore, a curriculum is “the sum of all learning experiences resulting from a curriculum plan directed toward achieving” (Ford 2003:34) a TEI’s objectives. In other words, curriculum should not separate proclamation from demonstration. Simply put, a missional focus must pervade all curriculum courses, not only mission classes.

Beyond the definition of curriculum, one must ask what curriculum means in one’s context. One is encouraged “not to impose on their culture or subculture a curriculum design imported from another culture” (cf. Ford 2003:49; Hendriks 2012). When designing and delivering a missional curriculum, attention must be given to contextual realities. Shaw (2022, Conclusion section) similarly asserts, “The curriculum must always remain a servant to our missional vision, and consequently, we should not merely mimic, what others have done.” A TEI must avoid the temptation of compartmentalizing the mission courses from the larger curriculum. This goal can be achieved through two actions. First, just as the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town 2010 challenged churches in intentional missional engagement, TEIs need to develop integrative, normative, contextual, and missional curricula. A mission-conscious element should undergird the entire training experience. In other words, is the TEI equipping the student to be able to contextualize their theological training cross-culturally? Keller provides a useful definition of contextualization (2012: 89).:

(Contextualization) is not giving people what they want to hear... it is giving people the *Bible’s answers*, which they may not want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and

place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them.

Keller highlights several elements critical for the challenge at hand. The Bible is the authoritative source for any training, so the TEI always seeks to offer “the Bible’s answers”. Just as important, however, is the realization that one needs to answer the questions about life that are being asked—rather than what one assumes ought to be asked—in a *real* context. Such answers must be comprehensible and have genuine weight and force. Regarding traditional theological education, a Homiletics course, for example, could incorporate communicating the Gospel clearly in cross-cultural situations. A Systematic Theology course should address the theological milieu in which the student converses. TEIs in sub-Saharan Africa must provide bridges and barriers to the gospel while engaging the teaching of major competing worldviews such as African Traditional Religions, Roman Catholics (as it has been syncretised in some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa), Prosperity Gospel, and Islam.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, TEIs must intentionally integrate the entire curriculum into holistic training. For CTBS, the MIL (mentioned above) continually integrates the student into the local church. The experience of an extended internship for the student provides the opportunity for theological training to be integrated effectively into genuine ministry. The warp and woof of training in practice is experienced by the student while being guided by both the teachers and the local pastor in the context of ministry in all of its expressions. Therefore, the scope of an effective curriculum must succeed in the development of the spiritual formation student, impart a general understanding needed to function in any ministry, and address specific skills needed to minister faithfully and fruitfully cross-culturally.

Spiritual formation is addressed in most theological curricula in specific courses such as prayer, worship, or hermeneutics and ongoing engagement such as chapel or small groups. Wang *et al.* (2023) noted well, “spiritual formation... is a Spirit-initiated process that forms ‘the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.’” While the institution does not assume the work of the Holy Spirit, it must intentionally equip the students with the understanding and tools to cultivate healthy spiritual discipline in their lives. From a missional perspective, however, the institution needs to equip the student

further on intentionally maintaining and developing their spiritual life in isolation or the grips of culture shock since intercultural life and ministry often bring specific challenges for the minister. The curriculum content must consider such a need. In truth, the pastoral role in any context can bring isolation therefore all students would benefit.

As with spiritual formation, general training may not require special courses only for the “missions” students; rather, all students can benefit from a more missional dimension to all courses. Nevertheless, the training focus should reflect a renewed emphasis on mission to “keep the main thing the main thing.” As mentioned above in the discussion of contextualization any subject can incorporate the element of mission focus. Since mission reflects God’s command, character, and compassion, it is reasonable to expect courses to reinforce this commitment. Just as the redemptive theme of God’s salvation history provides the unifying theme of the entire biblical narrative, the unifying theme of a commitment to God’s mission must be evident in the entire theological training curriculum from exegesis to systematic theology to practical theology. “‘Church’ and ‘mission’ do not connote two mutually exclusive spheres of divine activity, but rather the former is called to and formed for the latter” (Howles 2023:4).

The TEI, however, must provide skills specific to the missionary task at some point. While the advice and input of outside organizations and institutions are welcome, the final product must reflect the context of the training. One should not enrol in a program at CTBS only to be presented with a curriculum imported from the US, Europe, or Asia without being adapted for the African context. As Womack, Duncan & Pillay (2020) note well;

Theology is never performed in a vacuum. One’s context impacts ...theology and life. Local peculiarities have a huge impact on the needs and expectations of individuals and society at large. Ignoring the local context can have a detrimental impact on the development of ministerial formation.

The curriculum must enable the student to navigate confidently the tasks of the missionary. From entry into a new context to explaining the gospel in a contextually effective manner to training disciples who can disciple others. Finally, the student must be able to lead disciples into the formation of a healthy church while developing the leaders of that church.

## **5. Cape Town Baptist Seminary, A Case Study**

CTBS currently offers two Bachelor's degrees—a BTh and a BMin. The only real difference is the requirement of biblical languages for the BTh degree. The Seminary principal realized that the repetition of these degrees was a waste of money (each degree costs the school to maintain the accreditation) and proposed a radical change to the current Bachelor of Ministry degree. The South African Department of Education and Council on Higher Education allow for an accredited degree to be modified with up to fifty per cent new material without needing to be re-accredited. In January 2024, CTBS will launch a new Bachelor of Ministry degree—a BMin in Intercultural Studies, a “Missions” degree. Such a degree will be the first undergraduate missions degree in South Africa. Over the past few months, the faculty have been working together to unpack this new degree. The steps taken reflect the suggestions proposed in this presentation.

The critical first step was a time of vision casting. The Seminary Principal challenged each faculty member with this possibility, requested each to pray, and asked for feedback at the following faculty meeting. This first step of prayer and reflection on the school's mission and the missional purposes of God preceded a scheduled day of brainstorming and collaboration. Every faculty member caught the vision and endorsed the idea.

The next step was one of collaboration—a day to discuss and consider what a missions degree would entail in a South African context. After an initial disjointed discussion of ideas, the focus shifted to the necessary elements of the missionary task. The discussion began with a time of discussing the elements of the missionary task. As CTBS has had the privilege of faculty members who have worked with mission agencies in and outside Africa, a clear understanding of the logic and flow of the missionary task was readily available. Initially, all current courses which met missionary tasks were identified. As a result, areas of need were easily discerned. The next step of the process was to suggest courses to meet the areas of need and to reinforce areas already engaged. CTBS had the freedom to add 20 new courses without reaccreditation. The final step was to assign these courses to year groups so that a clear progression of effective training was evident.<sup>7</sup> The overall strategy is summarised in Appendix C with the suggested courses highlighted.

The final step in preparation for the launch of the new degree is developing

the course outlines and curriculum content. Each faculty member has been assigned various courses and has been given three months to develop the course content. The faculty member is expected to have a course outline, textbook recommendations or suggested readings, testing methods, and final recommendations from this content. Once the curriculum has been finalized, faculty will be assigned courses for instruction and adjunct faculty secured as needed.

## **6. Conclusion**

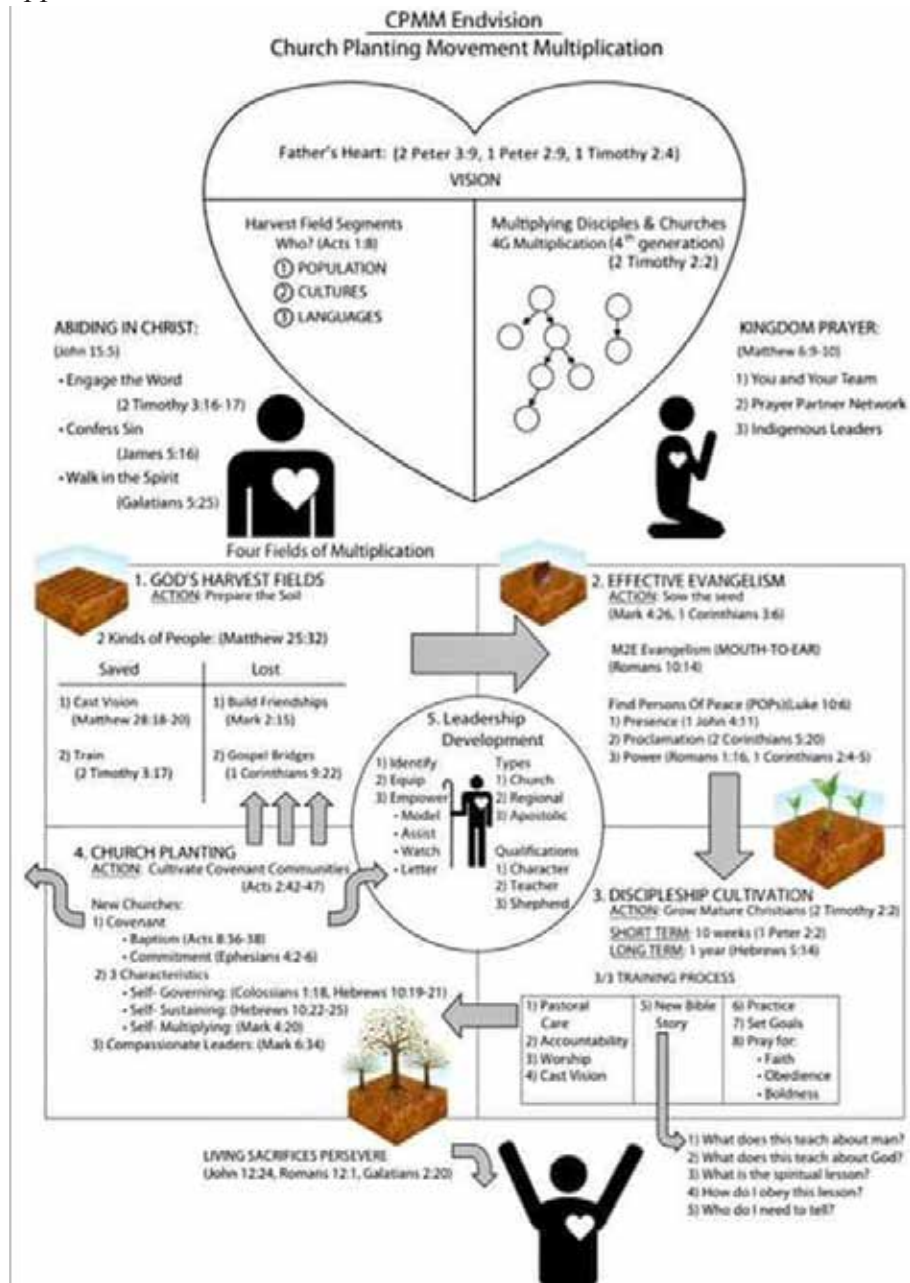
The revisioning of the curriculum to reflect a missional mindset—a mindset that reflects God’s command, character, and compassion for the lost—is meaningless if it has no reach beyond the institution’s walls. Therefore, a challenge for any TEI is to so impact the DNA of its students with a heart for the redemptive work of God in the world that this missiocentric disposition is transferred to their local church. For CTBS, training missiocentric leaders falls within the institutional objective of “Training Christian leaders to transform society biblically” (CTBS 2023). What then is the process for connecting the dots from the classroom to the student to the church to the mission field? Truly, it is the local pastor who will most effectively mobilize the local church to engage in meaningful local ministries (IMB *Workbook* 2023: 15-20). Often, one’s engagement in ministry through the church to the community outside of its walls is the first note of the clarion call to the mission field. A primary task of the TEI, therefore, is equipping the pastor to lead their church in missional ministry not only to see the lost engaged but to see missionaries raised up. A secondary task of the TEI is to equip those called to missionary, cross-cultural ministry. The TEI must take up this challenge. The responsibility to effectively catalyse missionary movement among local churches, associations, and denominations cannot be ignored.

One can rightly ask, “Where do we begin?” For CTBS, the process began with catching the vision for a more mission-driven curriculum. Vision can be stated as the challenge of applying one’s mission in one’s context. For TEI, catching a vision to train a missionary force for the local context supplies a passion to engage in such a task. However, the TEI is moving blindly without an understanding of what the missionary task entails. It is critical to initiate conversations with mission-sending agencies to understand the type of skills and training required for successful entry and ministry into mission fields. A missiocentric curriculum must be seen as an integrative, holistic training that incorporates missionary skills into the

broader theological training and infuses the broader theological training with a missional focus. Though the task may seem daunting, one can be encouraged that such a task is walking in step with the heartbeat of the Father.

## 7. Appendices

### Appendix A



Father’s Heart and Four Fields Graphic developed by Fred Naude, missionary to Pretoria.

Appendix B

The following representation of the Missionary Task highlights the flow of the continuum and the central need of any missionary—or follower of Jesus—which is to abide in Christ.



Image is copyright by IMB. This image was taken from:

*Missions Consultation Workbook: Eight Steps of the Missions Continuum. For His Glory, Through the Church, To All Peoples. (International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention: Richmond, VA, 2023), p. 6).*

Appendix C

CTBS INTEGRATED MISSOCENTRIC CURRICULUM

| Year one                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Semester 1                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Semester 2                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Greek 1A/1B (2,3) <sup>1</sup> [MT: 3, 5] <sup>2</sup><br>Theology of Evangelism (2, 3) [MT 1,2,3]<br>Biblical Background & Canon (2,3) [MT 3]<br>Research Methodology (2,3)<br>Introduction to Theology (1,2,3) [MT 3] | Greek 1B (2,3) [MT 3, 5]<br>Intro to Missions ( 2, 3) [MT 1-4]<br>Intro to Formational Theology & CE (1,2,3) [MT 3]<br>Hermeneutics (1,2,3) [MT 3]<br>Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (2,3) [MT 1-4] |

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| <b>Year 2 + [MIL] <sup>3</sup></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Semester 1</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Semester 2</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Greek 2A (2,3) [MT 3,5]<br>OT Introduction A&B (1,2,3) [MT 3]<br>Muslim Evangelism (2,3) [MT 1,2]<br>Introduction to Biblical Theology (1,2,3) [MT 2, 3]<br>Overview of Church History (1,2,3) [MT 3]<br>Homiletics (Training Type: 2,3) [MT 3, 5]<br>Family Ministries (2,3)                     | Greek 2B (2,3) [MT 3, 5]<br>OT Intro 2B (1,2,3) [MT 3]<br>Church Administration (2,3) [MT, 4, 5]<br>Missional Hermeneutics (2,3) [MT 2-5]<br>Reformation Church History (2,3)<br>Intercultural Ministries (2,3) [MT 1-5]<br>Ecclesiology/Eschatology (1,2,3)                    |
| <b>Year 3 + [MIL]</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Hebrew 1A/1B (2,3) [MT 3,5]<br>Christology/Soteriology (1,2,3) [MT 3,5]<br>OT Exegesis (1, 2,3) [MT 3]<br>Evangelism in an Urban Context (2, 3) [MT 1-3]<br>Comparative Religions (2,3) [MT 1-3]<br>Diaspora Missions (Training Type: 2,3) [MT 1-5]<br>Church Planting Methodology (2,3) [MT 1-5] | Hebrew 1B (2,3) [MT 3,5]<br>Modern Church History (1,2) [MT 3]<br>Baptist Principles (2,3) [MT 3-5]<br>Community Development (2,3) [MT 1]<br>Intercultural Communication (2,3) [MT 1-3]<br>Demon, Angels & Theodicy (2,3) [MT 3]<br>African Traditional Religion (2,3) [MT 1-2] |
| <b>Year 4 + [MIL]</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Biblical Justice (2,3) [MT 1, 3-5]<br>Pastoral Care (2,3) [MT 3-5]<br>Biblical Peacemaking (1,2) [MT1, 3-5]<br>Christian Leadership (2,3) [MT 5]                                                                                                                                                  | MiniThesis (2,3)<br>Missional Leadership (2,3) [MT 3-6]                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

<sup>1</sup> (1,2,3) after course name is **Training Types** integrated in the course offering:

**1. Spiritual Formation (Training designed for all Ministry Students)**

While a specific “Spiritual Formation” class is no longer offered, Spiritual Formation Disciplines are incorporated into most classes. Furthermore, the role of chapel, prayer groups, and faculty/student progress meetings and mentoring are designed to foster the student’s spiritual growth as well as create healthy accountability for the student’s

ongoing discipleship.

## **2. General Knowledge (Training designed for all Ministry Students)**

The bulk of the courses offered at CTBS are designed to equip all students for ministry regardless of the context of ministry. These courses are seen as valuable and necessary components of well-rounded training.

## **3. Mission-Specific Skills (Training designed for Missionary Students)**

Some courses are designed specifically for the student who will be engaging in cross-cultural ministry. Most often, those called to some expression of missionary work—whether in a local setting, country-wide setting, or outside of the country setting.

<sup>2</sup> [MT] is an abbreviation for Missionary Task. The numbers correspond to the six tasks identified in the presentation: 1. Entry 2. Evangelism 3. Discipleship 4. Healthy Church Formation 5. Leadership Development 6. Exit & Partnership. The inclusion of numbers indicates the primary points of connection for the curriculum and the Missionary Task.

## **3 + [MIL] stands for Ministry Integrated Learning**

The Internship Programme is a practical, hands-on experience of ministry under the guidance of a senior pastor/minister, with some input from a Seminary faculty member (Year-Group-Leader). The intention is for the student to be involved in ministry as much as possible, under the direction and with the help of a senior minister. This will help the student to apply ministry lessons and principles learned at Seminary in a practical situation. Much of the actual learning takes place in the environment of the local church, while the discussions during supervision meetings will also focus primarily on ministry in the local church. This is done purposefully since CTBS believes that any person in any form of ministry should have a firm understanding of how the local church operates and functions. The integration of a mission focus in this extracurricular engagement (MIL), over the last three years of the student's tenure at studies, will facilitate the achievement of the Six Components of the Missionary Task: viz Entry, Evangelism, Disciple Making, Health Church Formation, Leadership Development, and Exit & Partnership (see Appendix 2—IMB, 2023).

## **8. Notes**

<sup>1</sup>. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New International Version

<sup>2</sup>. For a discussion on this distinction in relationship to the calling of students, see G Harold and R Davis “The Importance/Precondition of Calling for Ministerial Training in Private Higher Education Theological Institutions in South Africa,” in JJ KNoetze and AR Brunsdon (eds) *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective* (Reformed Theology in Africa Series Volume 7) (AOSIS publishing: Cape Town, 2021) pp.103 -115. For the relevant discussion on Training versus Education see pp. 104-105.

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3. This idea of following and fishing as two sides of the same coin is widely used in evangelism, discipleship, and church planting training. The authors have encountered the illustration in both T4T/Four Fields discipleship training (2016: Nairobi) and Four Questions Evangelism (2019: Cape Town) as two examples.
4. This framework was brought to CTBS after one of the authors participated in a two-week Four Fields training led by Steve Smith in Nairobi 2016.
5. June 14-16, 2023, CTBS hosted an IMB led missions consultation- “Eight Steps of the Missions Continuum: for his glory, through the church to all peoples”. The participants were not only from Cape Town but travelled from other areas of South Africa.
6. A particularly helpful resource is the Africa Theology Series which has sought to engage these worldviews specifically. Rodgers lays out the rationale for these particular worldviews in the introduction to the series (2021). The Introduction to Biblical Theology, (Davis and Mulenga (2022) provides not only a clear explanation of the biblical narrative, but also gives a concise summary of teachings from these four worldviews regarding their understanding of Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation. Further, bridges and barriers for gospel conversation conclude each summary.
7. One aid to this step was a familiarity with Blooms taxonomy. A clear understanding of the expectation of student progress and abilities provided useful guides in creating a logical and practical flow to the proposed degree. For reference, the following tables are used by CTBS as guidelines for every class:

| <b>Table 1</b> | <b>Bloom’s Taxonomy</b> |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| Level 1        | Knowledge               |
| Level 2        | Comprehension           |
| Level 3        | Application             |
| Level 4        | Analysis                |
| Level 5        | Synthesis               |
| Level 6        | Evaluation/ Create      |

| <b>Table 2</b>                        |                                                  |                                                    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Course Level:<br/>BTh and BMin</b> | <b>Bloom’s Taxonomy<br/>Levels 1-3 Knowledge</b> | <b>Bloom’s Taxonomy<br/>Levels 4-6 Application</b> |
| Year 1                                | 80%                                              | 20%                                                |
| Year 2                                | 60%                                              | 40%                                                |
| Year 3                                | 40%                                              | 60%                                                |
| Year 4/5                              | 20%                                              | 80%                                                |

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### **Authors' Declaration**

The authors declare that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced them in the writing of this article.

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## **Definitive Sanctification Within Paul's Indicative-Imperative: Proposing an Evangelical Moral Transformational Framework for Human Flourishing**

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### ***Abstract***

*At its core, sanctification is an act of the trinitarian God by which the believer and the believing community have been made the sole possession of God, to do his bidding in his presence according to his glorious purpose. Having been separate to God, the believer has been made holy. This status is conferred upon all believers at the point of their conversion. God, the Father chose us for salvation through sanctification. It is God's will that we should be sanctified (1Th.4:3) through Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God; that means our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1Co.1:30). The Gentiles are an offering acceptable to God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (Rm.15:16). Our dependency upon the Trinity for sanctification is prompted by our dependency on God for salvation. The reverse is also true. Thus, in this paper we are positing that sanctification is a soteriological reality and definitive.*

*How do we as Evangelicals, approach the concept of human flourishing in terms of moral transformation when we hold a definitive view of sanctification? How do we hold our eschatological and mystical realities of salvation in tension by applying the Pauline Indicative-Imperative? The Indicative-Imperative relevance must demonstrate the interplay of Dependency-Responsibility in the application of grace and faith. It must also demonstrate an ecclesiology of Identity-Responsibility because human flourishing is corporate, and which becomes meaningful to us as God's possession, workmanship, and dwelling. This is especially true when we align ourselves relationally and vocationally with God's agenda for his people. We are asking for imperative relevance. The imperative relevance must translate into a moral transformational framework that is truly evangelical, not a legalistic works-righteousness endeavour. Our responsibility is then really one of obedient dependency on the glorious grace of God. Human flourishing in the community will be a natural and logical outcome of sanctification.*

## **1. Introduction**

With human flourishing in mind, the purpose of this paper is to propose a moral transformational framework for evangelical communities. Since human flourishing is only possible in the context of community, its first task must be to create a like-minded community with common beliefs and values. Thus, our consideration is for an evangelical community or communities, who already operate within a common identity with common core values. Yes, as evangelicals we would not need to create a like-minded community, because it already exists and has a strongly defined common identity in Christ. Not only so, but as evangelicals we understand that any and every human endeavour that seeks flourishing must first identify such flourishing as a divinely mandated responsibility. Such a mandate will orient us in obedience to God, rather than to upholding an implemented system or program which is purely a human construct.

Moral transformation as a human endeavour will always risk legalistic imposition within the community. Legalistic praxis often engenders burdensome programs which have nothing to do with pleasing God or having abundant life. Legalism always lacks love. The launching pad of our approach is more about who we are than about what we must do. It is more about our identity in the trinitarian God and our dependency on him, than on some set of rules. This is the reason why I am linking my discussion with the matter of sanctification, and imperative as a natural (supernatural) orientation of who we are (Pereira 2019:4). A sense of wholeness is built on our inner contentment of being a new creation in Christ.

Moreover, human flourishing should never exclude the possibility of external hostilities; for our Lord told us that we will suffer persecution. We should still flourish, even in the face of hostility because we have embraced a relational and vocational community mindset. Let us first consider our common identity.

## **2. Evangelicalism as an Identity**

The Evangelical Movement is very broad and diversified. Yet, it provides an important and unifying identity for many Christians. The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is central to its theological conviction. König (1998:83-86) points out that Evangelicals are often better known for a specific spirituality, namely, 1. That Jesus Christ is the only means to provide salvation; 2. That they are Christians who have had a personal experience of Jesus Christ as Savior; 3. That they have a very high view

of the Bible; 4. That they want to share their faith with others; and 5. That they believe good works were a fundamental outcome of the Christian faith. These five pillars provide evangelicals with their core identity as a community. The fifth pillar is the natural outworking of the other four and is the one we wish to apply to human flourishing.

Bloesch (1983:17ff) also articulates his view of evangelical identity. He says, that to be evangelical means to be evangelistic. They have an eschatological hope for the second coming of Christ. Their high view of the Scripture affirms its divine authority since it is God-breathed (2 Tm.3:16). They have a high view of God, affirming his sovereignty and our absolute dependence on him. They also have a high view of human beings, which drives their evangelistic effort and social involvement.

Evangelicals also have several presuppositions that influence their interpretations or hermeneutics. The divine inspiration accepts the Bible as a supernatural document, God's self-revelation (Klein 1998:320). The Bible is taken as authoritative and true. They interpret the Bible on its own terms and are open to all methods that open the biblical text's meaning. The application of the interpreted text is, as always, challenged by the "then" and "now" contexts, known as Lessing's "ugly ditch" (Pereira 2015:310). The theological relevance is the basis for contemporary application. The evangelical call is to take the Bible seriously, not subverting its intentionality. So, if we wish to propose an evangelical moral transformational framework for human flourishing, then it must be true to the biblical intention and doctrine.

Finally, we are interested in applying this discussion to evangelical communities because we admit that our focus is more oriented to right-believing at the expense of community-building or human flourishing. With our focus on sanctification, it should also express itself in the community with relational and vocational aims.

### **3. The Pauline Understanding of Sanctification**

The basic sense of sanctification is being set apart. The sense of being set apart underlies references to holiness or sanctification in terms of position, status, relationship, where its words are translated as 'cut off', separated', 'dedicated' or 'consecrated' (Walters 1988:1068). The big issue about sanctification today is whether it is *definitive* or *progressive*. Either way, at least the doctrine allows us to recognize the difference between morality and sanctity, or holiness (Russell 2010:135), and that only God can be

the source of true sanctification. The words 'sanctification' and 'holiness' translate the same Greek word group, which carries the idea of being separated from the service of the world to the service of God; it is derived from the word 'saint' (Edwards 2011:215). In most cases, Paul uses the idea as a status conferred upon believers in Christ for sanctification and justification; in other words, it is a soteriological act of God, and placed at the beginning of the Christian life. This is also understood as *definitive* or *positional* sanctification.

A second meaning of Paul concerns the moral and spiritual transformation of the regenerated Christian, who is to be conformed to the image of Christ and, thus, in the image of God. Walters (1988:1068) sees that process in the New Testament has the thought of an inward transformation gradually taking place, resulting in purity, moral rectitude, and holy, spiritual thoughts expressing themselves in an outward life of goodness and godliness. Those who think of sanctification as transformation, think of it as progressive. Nevertheless, importantly, Walters understands that Christ is the content and norm of the sanctified life: his risen life is reproduced in the believer (1988:1069).

For us sanctification is not progressive, but it is definitive. In our quest to support that view, let us first consider the sanctification words in Paul's writings, also stating the occurrences as they relate to the Christian. By sanctification we have been set apart for God's own holy purposes (Fee 2009:627).

### *3.1. Sanctification Words Used in Paul*

#### *3.1.1. ἅγιος (hagios)*

Strong's *G40*, sacred, pure (phys.), blameless or religious (mor.), consecrated (*cer.*) holy (most), saint.

Zodhiates (1996:1572) defines the word as holy, sacred, separated from ordinary or common usage and devoted to God. It is being brought into a relationship with God. It is used: 1. Formally, outwardly holy, identified or marked as holy, classified as belonging to God, and 2. Materially, sanctified inwardly, holy in nature and disposition, godly, devout, and pious. It describes one whose moral and spiritual character bears the image of God. Those who are sanctified materially are certainly also sanctified formally or outwardly.

Ben C. Dunson (2019:77) comments on this word, which is most

fundamentally used in the Old Testament as God is the “holy one”. The believer is to be a “holy one”, one set apart to belong to God for his special use. He sees it as the result of union with Christ. Story (2009:76) adds that the adjective is used in a cultic sense. He says that it is difficult to find references where the adjective is used to the endeavours or aspirations of Christians.

Occurrences in Paul’s Letters: Rm 1:7; 8:27; 12:1; 12:13; 15:25; 15:26; 15:31; 16:2; 16:15; 1 Cor 1:2; 3:17; 6:1; 6:2; 7:14; 7:34; 14:33; 16:1; 16:15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1; 9:12; 13:13; Eph 1:1; 1:4; 1:15; 1:18; 2:19; 2:21; 3:5; 3:8; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; 5:27; 6:18; Phlp 1:1; 4:22; Col 1:2; 1:4; 1:12; 1:22; 1:28; 3:12; 1 Th 3:13; 5:27; 2 Th 1:10; 1 Tm 1:9; 5:10; Phlm 5; 7.

**3.1.2. ἁγιάζω (*hagiazō*)** Strong’s *G37*, to make holy, i.e. (*cer.*) purify or consecrate; (mentally) venerate – hallow, be holy, and sanctify. Zodhiates (1996:1572) defines this word as holy, sacred, and devoted to God. To cause to be holy, make holy, treat as holy. The fundamental idea is devotion to divine service. God alone can sanctify since only he is holy (1 Th 5:23). An object is sanctified only when God himself designates it as belonging to him. The power to sanctify is proof of deity. Again, the formal and material usage from ἅγιος *hagios* can apply. He adds that Christ’s blood sanctifies permanently, qualifying one for ministry.

Ben C. Dunson (2019:74) comments on this word: the participle form conveys the idea of ritual consecration. This act of consecrating is not a process. It is something that happens at the very inception of believing life, with salvation, e.g., “... those who are sanctified by faith” (Ac 26:18). Story (2009:77) says, “Paul never uses the verb to refer to human endeavour: the Trinitarian-fellowship is always the subject of the verb.”

Occurrences in Paul’s Letters: Rm 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Cor 7:14; Eph 5:26; 1 Th 5:23; 1 Tm 4:5; 2 Tm 2:21.

### **3.1.3. ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*)**

Strong’s *G38*, prop. Purification, i.e. (the state) purify; a purifier; -holiness, sanctification. Zodhiates (1996:1572) sees this word as from *hagiazō*, to sanctify, make holy, treat as holy. Sanctification, the process [sic] or work of making something holy, sanctified behavior, holy living. The os-ending indicates an action rather than a quality or attribute as with *hagiotēs* and *hagiōsunē*. Meanings: The making of something holy; Christ accomplished this (1 Cor 1:30); the expression in 2 Th 2:13 explains what salvation consists of – the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and

faith in the truth. Holiness is necessary for salvation (1Tm.2:15) Dunson (2019:78) says that it is the nominal form to the state of existence which believers enter when they are converted, a status they maintain throughout their lives. This is the state verbally indicated using *hagiazō*.

Occurrences in Paul's Letters: Rm 6:19; Rm 6:22; 1Cor 1:30; 1 Th 4:3; 1 Th 4:4; 1 Th 4:7; 2Th 2:13; 1 Tm 2:15.

#### **3.1.4. ἁγιωσύνη (*hagiōsunē*)**

Strong's *G42*, sacredness (*i.e.*, prop. The quality); holiness. Zodhiates (1996:1573) gives the meaning holy, sanctity, holiness, the characteristic of being holy. It signifies the tendency or quality of being holy, the manifestation or display of holy character. Used of the Holy Spirit. "Perfecting holiness" means leading to holiness, bringing it to realization, not improving it.

According to Dunson (2019:78) this word appears only three times in the New Testament and two refer to believers; as the temple of the living God (2 Cor 6:16), and as maintaining one's holy status in 2 Cor 7:1. This dimension of holiness is described in 1 Th 3:13 where Paul's prayer is for the hearts of believers to be established blameless in holiness on the day of Christ's return. The increase is in love. Story (2009:77) sees this word as holiness given as a quality or state, formed as a qualitative abstract. Occurrences in Paul's Letters: 2 Cor 6:16; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Th 3:13.

#### **3.1.5. Other words are seldom used:**

**Ὁσιος (*hōsiōs*)** Strong's *G3741*, formal consecration, purity, hallowed, holy. Zodhiates (1996:2099) gives the meaning simply as an adjective, holy. Tt 1:8.

**Ὁσιότης (*hosiatēs*)** Strong's *G3742*, piety, holiness. Zodhiates (1996:2099) gives the meaning simply as the noun, holiness. Ephesians 4:24.

**Ἱεροπρεπής (*hierōprepēs*)** Strong's *G2412*, represents 'as becometh holiness', reverent. Zodhiates (1996:2082) interprets the word as reverent, pertaining to proper reverence, worthy of reverence. Tt 2:3.

### **3.2. Definitive Sanctification, a Soteriological Act of God**

Our salvation is an act of God. The Father has called us; we have been justified through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit has sanctified us. Salvation comes to us by God's grace through faith in

the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, that, “It is because of him (God, who chose the foolish, weak, and lowly things) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” Some versions translate “holiness” here as “sanctification.” Morris states that the initiative in salvation is with God: “God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit ...” (2 Th 2:13) (1993:859). Our sanctification is in Christ through the Spirit. Paul, in his address to the saints in Corinth, says, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours” (1 Cor 1:2). Believers have been sanctified so that they might be holy. Put differently, believers are sanctified at salvation to be holy in their daily living. We are called to holiness at salvation. Holiness in life is the expression of our sanctification.

Kyle Strobel (2019:262) demonstrates this point well by saying, “If a theology of sanctification functions properly for spiritual formation, it will always recall people to the truth of who they are in Christ by the Spirit, and how that reality shapes what it means to ‘walk in the Spirit’.” One sees the mystical reality of salvation and sanctification by the believer being in Christ and walking in the Spirit. Our mystical union with Christ and the Holy Spirit is a big indicative reality from which the imperative is applied. More often in Paul’s writings, sanctification is given. It advances along theological lines, after it has been located in salvation, and then applied practically. Ladd agrees that the idea of sanctification is soteriological before it is a moral concept. He says that sanctification is not a synonym for moral growth. He continues to say that Christian sanctification denotes a soteriological truth that Christians belong to God. (1993:519).

Stanley E. Porter (1993:397) aptly provides what is the crux of Pauline thinking on this matter, when he says that holiness or sanctification includes soteriological status, and more importantly, ethical and eschatological perfection. Sanctification as a soteriological reality is called *definitive* sanctification. He reminds us of the context that addresses believers after his soteriological categories. Paul focuses on the ethical consequences of salvation. In these, we see Paul insists upon holy and pure behaviour and conduct in the lives of believers in anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ, even though he never envisioned the attainment of complete perfection in this life. God’s provision of sanctification goes with his commitment

and engagement in bringing sanctification to consummation at the time of the *Parousia* (Story 2009:69). Sanctification is a divine provision which embraces the past, present, and future experience of believers in Christ. As salvation is eschatological, sanctification is eschatological too. The outcome of salvation and sanctification is assured because “God himself will sanctify you through and through and will keep you blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th 5:23). The very next verse gives us double assurance, “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (verse 24). The doctrine of sanctification must be considered with serious reflection on God in himself. Humans do not make themselves holy, because holiness and wholeness reside in the holiness of God who lives in trinitarian communion and wholeness (Koopman 2008:167).

The Old Testament concept of consecration is the root concept of Paul's understanding of sanctification and holiness. Payne (2020:50-56) sees two main features of divine consecration: first, God *decisively consecrates* the people of Israel by setting them apart to himself and for his purposes, which is a dynamic and relational reality. Second, in *responsive consecration*, the people of Israel set themselves apart to God in preparation for his presence through cultic acts. Payne believes that God's decisive consecration of Israel preceded and defined their responsive practice of consecration. He also believes that the New Testament's understanding of sanctification should be aligned with this Old Testament understanding. We believe that Paul's understanding follows this Old Testament pattern, and that most of his references are to accomplished sanctification, functioning as the controlling framework for imperatival terms (*cf.* Porter 2020:288).

Now, as for the weight of definitive sanctification in Paul's writings, we know that Paul frequently addressed the Christian community as “the holy” or “saints” (e.g., Rm 1:7; 16:2; 1 Cor 1:2; 16:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; 6:18; Php 1:1; 4:22; Col 1:2; 1 Th 3:13; 2 Th 1:10; 1 Tm 5:10; Phlm 5; etc.) as *already* sanctified. The sheer number of references here emphasises the fact that we were sanctified at the point of salvation. They were called to be saints. Dunson (2019:76) agrees, “A saint is someone who has been sanctified. One does not become a saint through a long travail in personal faithfulness.” In this sense the moral fiber of the believer's personal and communal life is almost non-existent (Story 2009:78). Payne agrees with us that by far the quantity of evidence for sanctification resides in the accomplished category (2020:57). Biblical sanctification does not happen progressively or by degrees.

In Paul's understanding holiness and sanctification were always a work of the trinitarian God, a work of the divine community. To sanctify always linked with a member of the Godhead as the primary agent (Porter 1993:398). In relation to the first person of the Trinity, Paul's prayer reflects in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "May God himself ... sanctify you through and through ...". In relation to the second person of the Trinity, we interestingly see what Porter calls a *semantic overlap* between justification and sanctification. An example is found in 1 Cor 1:30, "... in Christ Jesus ... our righteousness, sanctification and redemption". Even though Dunson refers to the letter to the Hebrews (10:10), it must be mentioned that the cross of Christ is applied to the believer's sanctification in a definitive way; a once-for-all action (2019:75). He also asserts (page 77) that Paul, in most instances, also places sanctification at the beginning of the Christian life because of union with Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; 1 Cor 7:14).

There is nothing in us or done by us at any stage of our earthly development because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ's sake, or we cannot ever be accepted at all (Bridges 2012:57). Our need of Christ does not cease with our believing nor does the nature of our relation to him or to God through him ever alter no matter what our attainments in Christian behaviour may be. The believer depends on Christ's grace, always pleading his blood and righteousness. Every spiritual blessing comes to us through Christ. Torrance (1966:101) argues that sanctification is the continued unfolding, development, and maintenance of justification. In relation to the third person of the Trinity, an example is found in Rm 15:16, "... proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit". Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us. That imputed righteousness and sanctification are in the package of redemption (Bridges 2012:63). Living out our sanctification does not make sanctification progressive. The few so-called progressive sense that the hagios word groups include, according to Porter (2020:292), can be demonstrated to be imperatival rather than progressive (see below, under 3.3.2).

Sanctification is primarily another way of describing what it means to be saved or brought to God in Christ. It is a status entered into at the time of conversion, and a status that must be preserved or demonstrated (Dunson 2019:80). Dunson's (2019:82) logic states: "... if sanctification

is a definitive event, and our participating in the death and resurrection of Christ is a definitive event, and both of these events occur simultaneously at conversion, then it makes sense to say that believers are definitively sanctified at conversion.” Sanctification is the position of believers before God, created by God, and it forms the basis of their initial call (Story 2009:78). Johnson (2013:116) correctly observes, “Whereas justification is often equated with salvation itself, sanctification is sometimes pushed to the periphery of our understanding of soteriology ... it is easy to neglect or overlook the fact that God is also making us holy in Christ, that the gospel of our salvation is incomplete without God’s glorious work of sanctification.” Johnson clearly argues for *definitive* sanctification as the dominant biblical motif (2013:115-133).

It is important that Christians understand what has been accomplished in sanctification. Payne reminds us that comprehending the nature of what has occurred in sanctification will directly and significantly impact the nature of one’s inclination toward those realities and the nature of one’s dependence on God for what those realities involve (2020:303). He is correct in saying that the accomplished nature of sanctification has been underdeveloped (p.304). Payne asks a valid question, “... why is there this felt need to maintain the notion of progression in sanctification when Scripture more directly and clearly conveys the concept of growth in Christ with the language of transformation, and inextricably connects transformation to accomplished sanctification?” (2020:306). Sanctification has qualified us for the life-changing presence of God through the finished and sanctifying work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Scripture presents sanctification as a reality to be lived out, not something that increases as would be the connotation of progressive sanctification. Increasing sanctity is not the biblical understanding of sanctification.

Holiness is the declarative work of the trinitarian God. To be sure, ethical behaviour that is grounded in the call of God must follow. So, sanctification includes having the status of divine ownership, the status of privilege, the status of position, and the status of authenticity. The tension in one being sanctified and the call to be sanctified is answered by the Pauline indicative/imperative. Ladd (1993:520) is convinced that sanctification is a factual past event (indicative); therefore, it is to be experienced here and now (imperative). It is appropriate for us to now consider the Pauline tension between the indicative and the imperative.

### *3.3. Indicative and Imperative*

There has been widespread scholarly agreement that Paul's ethic can be summed up under the rubric indicative and imperative. Believers live in this temporal tension between the "already" and the "not yet," and between the indicative (what they are) and the imperative (what they should do or become). Life for the "new humanity" is living out, by the Spirit's empowerment, what believers are because of Christ (Dockery 1993:629). First, we will consider a definition of Paul's ethic under the description of indicative and imperative. Second, we will demonstrate the imperatival Pauline sanctification texts, which are often taken as 'progressive', and make a case for the definitive nature of the doctrine of sanctification.

#### *3.3.1. A Description of Indicative and Imperative*

Thomas Schreiner (2001:253) recognizes the difficult, yet profound area of Paul's thought: the tension between the indicative and the imperative. The indicative refers to what God has done for those who are in Christ, while the imperative calls on them to live in a way that directly complements what God has done for them. Ladd speaks of the indicatives as the motivations for Christian living (1993:524). Dunn (1998:626-7) states it differently by saying that Paul's theological outlook was dynamic in its application; his theology had immediate practical consequences. Stanley Porter (1993:401) gives Bultmann's understanding as that the imperative (ethical command) proceeds out of the indicative (statement of theological truth), with the idea that Christians should "become what they are." He correctly states that "the indicative-imperative construct is a theological paradigm ...."

Ladd's observation is fundamental to understanding Paul on this matter of ethics; that the Christian lives between the two ages, as a citizen of the new age while he still lives in the context of the old age. For Ladd, the indicative involves the affirmation of what God has done to inaugurate the new age; the imperative involves the exhortation to live out this new life in the setting of the old world. The main point is that the imperative is the believer's response to God's deeds (1993:524). It is God's will that the believer should put his whole being at God's disposal. This is particularly true of sanctification. God has sanctified us, so our whole being must be put at the disposal of the one who made us his property. This has eschatological implications. Schreiner correctly states, "If eschatological tension did not characterize Christian existence, no imperative would be needed ... the eschatological tension between the indicative and the

imperative must be maintained” (2001:254). The imperative is always the outflow from the indicative. “Be what you already are” is the saying that is around. The indicative is the necessary presupposition and starting point for the imperative. I like Dunn’s quote of Schnackenburg: “Work out what God has worked in you” (Dunn 1998:631).

Dunn (1998:629-30) makes an important observation concerning sanctification:

Thus, the indicative has two key moments. The first is the Christ-event, that is, Christ’s life, but particularly the death and resurrection. The second, the beginning of salvation ... Both moments are nicely caught in Rm 6.4 ... Correspondingly, the imperative can now be seen as one of two matching emphases, the two sets of present continuous tenses which match the once-for-all aorists of the beginning. The first emphasizes the sustaining grace (righteousness) of God, classically expressed in terms of sanctification, not to mention charism and sacrament. The second emphasizes the correlated human responsibility, the imperative ... The beginning of salvation is the beginning of the new way of living. The “new creation” is what makes possible a walk “in newness of life.” Without the indicative the imperative would be an impossible ideal, a source of despair rather than of resolution and hope. The imperative must be the outworking of the indicative.

Finally, the indicative guarantees the actualization of the imperative. Our obedience to the imperative is our responsibility, but never without God’s enabling power. Bridges perfectly expresses our own thinking when he says, “Thus, through every moment of his life, the believer is absolutely dependent on the grace of Christ, and when life is over, he still has nothing to plead but Christ’s blood and righteousness” (2012:57). Bridges continues by stating that, to operate on the highest level of gratitude commensurate with the grace of God, is this level of gratitude that will motivate us to obey Christ as Lord and serve him as Master (p.66). The Pauline letters are filled with imperatives to pursue holiness, to put on Christlike character, and to present our bodies as living sacrifices. He commands them to strive to put into practice what is true of them in Christ.

### *3.3.2. A Demonstration of the Imperative Sanctification Texts in Paul*

Most of the sanctification texts have a definitive meaning; they are soteriological. However, some texts are not easily apparent as

soteriological. These can be understood imperatively.

*Romans 6:17-22.* Paul opens with a sense of gratitude. He thanks God for setting believers free from the dominion of sin by making them slaves of righteousness (indicative). The indicative is God's act. A human responsibility (imperative) is to offer their bodies to righteousness displaying holiness. Practical holiness is an expression of righteousness and must necessarily be the outcome if one is set free from sin's rule. We belong to God and thus are God's slaves (indicative). God's slaves are such with the imperative of us reaping holiness. Eternal life is the eschatological gift of God. Putting it differently, our sanctification is the indicative, with practical holiness as the imperative and the eschatological outcome of eternal life.

*Romans 12:1.* Ladd (1993:524) says that the mercies of God (indicative) mean all that has been accomplished in the revelation of the righteousness of God (Rm.1:17, indicative). Based on what God has done, Paul summons Christians to the ultimate act of worship by offering themselves as holy to God (imperative). Schreiner (2001:253-4) and Dunn (1998:626) offer the same explanation of this text. We shall again look at this text under the transformation discussion below.

*2 Corinthians 7:1.* The pericope (2 Cor 6:14 – 7:1) gives the context of this verse. The promises are "I will dwell in their midst, and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." "I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters." Again, the idea of them belonging to God (indicative) cannot be avoided. Also, where God dwells, the temple is a holy place (indicative). The fear (reverence) of God compels them to cleanse themselves (imperative). Perfecting holiness is not cultic but ethical, practical, and speculative piety (Barrett 1990:203).

*Ephesians 4:24.* We observe in the context of this verse the threefold tension between the formerly-now, put off-put on; and old self-new self. The purpose is that [we are a new creation] having been created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (indicative). The life of God is created in the new self. Thus, we are to shed or put off the former, and the old self (imperative) to conform to our new creation.

*1 Thessalonians 3:13.* Here, in the prayer of the Apostle, he desires the believers to increase and overflow in love for each other (imperative), for the purpose of God (blameless and holy - indicative) to be accomplished

at the coming of our Lord Jesus (eschatological) (cf. Col.1:21-22).

*1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.* The will of God and the call of God are uppermost in Paul's mind. The will of God is that believers be sanctified. Being sanctified is an act of God in the Christian's life. Sanctification is the indicative; thus, to avoid sexual immorality and passionate lust (imperative). We should avoid wronging or taking advantage of a brother (imperative). Similarly, we are called by God with a holy calling (indicative), therefore we should not live an impure life, but a holy life (imperative). Otherwise, one who rejects the instruction of God (imperative) rejects the gift of the Holy Spirit (indicative).

Therefore, we conclude that our sanctification requires our responsibility to live according to its tenets. Living according to our sanctification is expressed as positive and negative imperatives. We must avoid or embrace according to the nature of sanctification. We must understand the importance of belonging to God, and whatever is his, is holy. Let us briefly explore the matter of divine ownership.

### *3.4. Sanctification, Believers the Property of God*

The threefold Pauline imagery of the Church, namely, the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, in relation to Trinity must be kept foremost in our minds at this point. We do not mean to segregate Trinity in these Church imagery, because the Father, Son, and Spirit are involved in all the images. An instance is the Church as the Temple (Holy of Holies) of God in which he dwells by his Spirit (Eph 2:22). Thus, in all instances Paul's main concern is with Christ's body; the individual is secondary, at best. Adewuya's insight (2004:108) is valuable, "Each may be sanctified separately, but they are sanctified for community". It must be understood that we are holy even before we do holy deeds (Pereira 2013:247). We are holy simply because we belong to a holy God.

#### *3.4.1. As the People of God*

Israel was holy because it belonged to God by virtue of a covenant relationship. This was a real foundational idea which has shaped Paul's thinking about the church as the People of God. The church was in a covenant relation with God through Christ (Adewuya 2004:95). The church as the people of God, is to live out what God has prescribed for it according to his cosmic plan in Christ (Eph 1:10). Pereira (2013:243) states that the question of the identity of the church is more about who it

is, than about what it does. They need to know who they are in relation to God and themselves and the world. They are to act in a way which characterizes their identity. As God's people, they must live like God's people. The church is identified as a people whom God has set aside for himself. Sands (2010:31) perceptively states, "Human beings participate in the divine image only as they become disciples of Christ ... to the extent that their lives conform to Christ. The *imago Dei* is an *eschatological* reality ... a *dynamic* and *communal* reality rooted in redemption." This is a dynamic reality for us because Christ, who is the image of the invisible God (Col.1:15), is the last Adam and head of a new humanity through his resurrection from the dead (1Co.15:45).

#### *3.4.2. As the Body of Christ*

In relation to Christ, Paul predominantly speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ. Schreiner (2001:335) correctly admits that as the body of Christ, Christ, not the church, has priority. Two qualities of the Body become apparent, namely, that of unity and diversity. We are all one in Christ, and as a diversity of members, we are members of one another (Rm.12:5). We were all baptized with one Spirit into one body (1Cor 12:13). Galatians 3:27 says that we have all been baptized into Christ. Christ is the head of the body, and the body is his. The one body is identified with Christ (1Cor 12:12). Our identity is obtained by faith in Christ. The Body of Christ is a living organism, able to build itself and bring glory to God through Christ, our Lord. Human flourishing can best be practised within this twofold function of the Body of Christ of edifying its members, and glorifying its sustainer. Pereira (2013:246) says that the church exists as the launching pad for the cosmic agenda of God, bringing all things under the headship of Christ (Eph 1:10). Our identity prescribes our responsibility. This responsibility has *kingdom* overtones.

#### *3.4.3. As the Temple of the Holy Spirit*

"... your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1Cor 6:19). We are the temple of the living God (2 Cor 6:16), a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:22). Here, more than anywhere, we are reminded of us housing the holy presence of God, individually and corporately. Most importantly, this is the church in its corporate reality, in which the Holy Spirit plays the leading role (Fee 2009:113). Fee also says that the church as God's temple is pregnant imagery ... because Paul refers to the actual sanctuary (Gk. *ναός*), the place of a deity's dwelling (2009:114). Paul calls the Corinthians' attention to the fact that the living

God has only one temple in Corinth, and they are it!

God's temple is holy because God is holy. God's people have always been distinguished by the fact that God is present with them. God's holy presence characterizes the temple. We are invited to become what we are by God's grace. The divine presence is for all who are in Christ. They are the eschatological holy dwelling of God. We must become God's holy temple where he has placed us. Our fellowship with the present God must be the framework of the fellowship of the saints, for we participate in the divine presence. The community is the locale for experiencing the holiness and sanctifying benefits of God's person. Where God is personally present, there it is holy. Payne (2020:300) reminds us that God's presence can be seen implicitly and explicitly across the biblical canon as the reality that changes or transforms people. The one Spirit of God is simultaneously indwelling the various members and uniting them for communal indwelling.

#### *3.4.4. As God's Possession and Workmanship*

While we are *God's possession* by individual soteriology, it is more about our communal existence in the church of Jesus Christ. So, instead of a 'person', we should speak about the 'people' of God. The church is God's property; all believers, Jews and Gentiles are included (Pereira 2013:246). This whole new eschatological community has become the possession of God in Christ. Acosta (2010:67) reminds us that we are a multi-ethnic possession of God, not by anthropological but theological construct. It is a divine endowment. The whole new eschatological community, consisting of all nations and cultural backgrounds, is God's possession, so ordained by a God-ordained history or salvation-history, until *the redemption of those who are God's possession* (Eph 1:14). Andrew Lincoln speaks of this final deliverance by God as meaning his taking full and complete possession of those who have already become his (1990:41).

One of my favourite descriptions of the church is our divine relationship as God's workmanship (Eph 2:10). We are divinely endowed with this gift of redemption according to God's good pleasure in Christ. The salvation of believers is God's workmanship. The sanctification of them is God's workmanship. Schreiner is correct in saying that our good works are ordained for us; they are the fruit of God's creative work (2001:247). Snodgrass puts it, "In God's planning, choosing, and acting, the aim was not only to save, but also to mark out the way we should live" (1996:107).

Dunn profoundly states that Christ Jesus is the sphere of God's creative work with an age to come as his aim (1998:412). Levison (1993:189) reminds us that this creation is the new creation or new humanity as a communal reality. He continues to say that every believer who participates in the new humanity must put away conduct that characterizes the "old humanity"...and put on the new humanity, "which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator"... Ethical behaviour is to correspond to what God has enabled them to be in Christ. This ethical appeal has been called the "indicative and imperative", that is, "become in your character and conduct what God's action in Christ has made you to be" (Mott 1993:269).

#### *3.4.5. In Christ and In the Spirit Ethics*

The expression "in Christ" conveys the Apostle Paul's belief that God benefits the believer according to the saving purposes decisively effected through Christ. Every benefit of Christ is accorded to those who are in Christ. Seifrid (1993:433) remarks that this concentration of the expression in the Pauline letters has suggested to many interpreters that some or all its occurrences represent a Pauline formula, generally exhibited in the three ideas of locality, instrumentality, and modality. Being "in Christ" leads to being "in the Spirit," not the reverse. In Christ we participate with him in his death and resurrection (Rm.6:1ff; Gal.3:26f.), thus the ethical injunctions to die to sin on the one hand, and to live in newness of life on the other. Dockery (1993:629) believes that everything associated with distorted humanity is to be put to death because it has been transformed according to the perfect model, Christ himself.

The newness in life is chiefly connected to living in the Spirit. We have been placed in Christ and in the Holy Spirit at salvation. Seifrid says that it simultaneously communicates the gift of salvation and the accompanying divine demand to act in Christ and the Spirit (1993:436). Snodgrass' comment (1996:107) is profound, "In God's planning, choosing, and acting, the aim was not only to save, but also to mark out the way we should live." Equally profound is Schreiner (2001:247) saying that good works are not commanded but ordained, and that it is the fruit of God's creative work in us, who have been created in Christ. Jesus Christ is the sphere of God's creative work (Dunn 1998:412). Onesti and Brauch (1993:834) remind us that Calvin associated sanctification with justification and described sanctification as being in Christ. This shows that Calvin thought of sanctification in soteriological terms. We shall now consider the topic of transformation.

#### **4. Transformation Towards Human Flourishing**

We have defined sanctification as definitive, accomplished, or soteriological. In short, sanctification should not be seen as progressive. It is a once-for-all act of God in the life of the believer. Every believer has a holy status or position because they are in Christ. We are stating this emphatically because of the confusion that sanctification can be used for a doctrine of moral transformation. A valid understanding is that transformation rests on the established and accomplished fact of sanctification. Dunson articulates the essence of this debate: it is not over whether God in fact transforms believers throughout their lives, but rather whether this process should be called sanctification (2019:71). For many systematic theological practitioners 'sanctification' typically refers to progressive sanctification, that is, the process of increasing holiness. We would rather refer to it as the obedient living out of our sanctification, that is, the practice of sanctification imperatives. Sanctification is consecration for the purpose of transformation (Dunson 2019:87).

As for transformation, it is a predestined goal, namely that we are to be "conformed into the image of God's Son, and so that he is acknowledged as the firstborn among many brothers" (Rm.8:29). So, Christlikeness is the goal, both for every believer and for God's cosmic purpose, that all things be placed under one head, even Christ (Eph.1:10). This is the essence of recognizing Christ as 'firstborn'. In Christ, God is creating something new. In Schreiner's words, "A new world has arrived" (2001:82). Believers in Christ have received new life with a new nature. They are born of the Spirit, not under the old order of the law, but according to what matters, namely, a new creation in Christ (Gal.6:15). They are a new people of God consisting of Jews and Gentiles. They are a new humanity (2Cor 5:17) created in Christ, the 'last Adam' (1Cor 15:45) and head of this new humanity. The "last Adam" will serve as the template for a new humanity (Cantu 2019:253). So, they who are in Christ have received the image of Christ at new birth. We must grow into Christlike maturity until finally we will be completely in his likeness (1Jn 3:2). So, sanctification is what has been accomplished at salvation, and what is yet to be completed in the Christian life, namely transformation into the eschatological perfect Christlikeness. Transformation is ongoing growth into the likeness of Christ. Cantu (2019:258) agrees with our view, that the end goal of the Christian life is to be transformed and resurrected in the pattern of Christ into his new creation and kingdom.

The word transformation (Gk. *μεταμορφόω*, *metamorphoō*) occurs only four times in the New Testament. Twice it refers to the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, and the other two occurrences are found in Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. The transfiguration story in Matthew and Mark is about the revelation of Christ's glory and Christ's unique approval by the Father. Both the glory and the unique approval of Christ have significance for the believer. The glory of Christ is revealed for the believer's sake, particularly if we are to be changed into his glory because we are saved to become like Christ. The unique approval of Christ underscores the cosmic purpose mentioned in Ephesians 1:10 as an eschatological kingdom reality. The transfiguration of our Lord must become the paradigm of glory and approval in our transformation. The Pauline use of *metamorphoō* demonstrates this idea further.

About the increasing glory of the believer: in 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul reveals something of the process of transformation into Christ's glory. *And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.* In this text, Paul has just shown that the glory of the law of Moses is being abolished (Barrett 1990:121). The fading glory of the law contrasts with the increasing glory of the New Covenant in Christ. When Moses saw the glory of God (Ex.34), he received a visible, yet fading glory. When we behold Christ's glory, we receive a 'visibly' increasing glory. The glory of the Lord Jesus is visible to the believer only with a disciplined gaze (Gk. *κατοπτρίζω*) at his glory. Such a gaze is also to receive knowledge of the Lord that remains distinct from him. The glory of Jesus is the means by which the glory of the invisible God becomes visible (Barrett 1986:125). Transformation takes place through the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit is the agent of transformation into Christ's glory. Transformation into Christ's glory is progressive because it is from "one degree of glory to another"; simply from glory to glory. It is an increasing glory. This glory will have reached perfection at the *Parousia* (1 Jn 3:2). Upon this understanding, I see glorification, and not sanctification, as *progressive*. However, sanctification is the basis for transformation, and transformation is the basis for glorification.

An important fact that Paul highlights in Romans 12:2 is God's approval. But let us look at Romans 12:1-2 – *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed*

to this world, but be transformed by renewing your minds, so that you may discern God's will – what is good and acceptable and perfect. Paul places our transformation in contrast to conformity to the world. We are not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by renewing the mind (Dunn 1998:647). At the same time conformity to the world is also contrasted with presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. The cultic overtones cannot be missed. The renewing of the mind is to discern God's will and to have the desire to do what is good, acceptable, and perfect. At this point I am reminded of Philippians 2:12-13, "... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you to **will** and to **do*** according to his good purpose" (the emphasis is mine). We agree with Stan Chu Ilo (2012:200) saying, "attempts to show that God's will is made available signifies the presence of God's kingdom." This ability to discern "what is really important" is a gift or enabling of the Spirit (Dunn 1998:648). Transformation of the mind into knowing and doing the will of God will result in life-transformation which is according to God's good purpose. The Spirit also renews our mind through the Scriptures which are God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, equipping the believer for every good work (2 Tm 3:16). Living according to the Spirit is contrasted with living in the flesh (sinful nature), and it is the moral driving force for daily living (Adewuya 2001:83).

Therefore, transformation into the image of *Christ*, is to receive his glory; and transformation by renewing the mind is to find God's approval in the way that the Father approved Christ at transfiguration. This idea corresponds with the understanding of Paul's in Christ motif. The mystical concepts of *Christ* and *in the Spirit* have relevance to this two-fold transformational application in the life of the believer. It demonstrates the efficacy of the mystical union in our relationship to God and our openness to be transformed (Strobel 2019:264). *In Christ* we are provided with the glory of our new being, and *in the Spirit* opens us to the process "from glory to glory." The "renewed mind" is the Spirit's means to enable us to know and do what God approves. *In Christ* provides the motive, and *in the Spirit* provides the means. Thus, *in Christ* is the indicative (of who we are), and *in the Spirit* is the enabling power to do according to what we are. The Holy Spirit helps us be obedient and true to our calling and goal. For Paul, the Christian life is not to be lived by one's own efforts and strength, but by the Holy Spirit's provision, person, presence, and power (Adewuya 2001:74).

### **5. Conclusion: Human Flourishing within Evangelical Communities**

Finally, let us summarize the aspects of sanctification as they relate to transformation through the imperative application. In this way, we propose a moral transformational framework aimed at human flourishing within evangelical communities. The imperative relevance to moral transformation must be something other than a works righteousness endeavour. Our responsibility is still to be honoured by a dependency on God's grace. Transformation prompted by who we are will not be burdensome because it comes 'naturally' and in dependence upon God. You are supposed to do what is according to your nature. The nature of sanctification is holiness. Holy living is the expression of sanctification. If we belong to God through sanctification, then we will do what pleases God.

If the indicative-imperative is the tension between the new and old life, then the imperative is living the new life in this sinful environment. Our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, makes our new life the resurrection life. It means that we have died to the old life and have been raised to live in the newness of life. Living in the newness of life is living by the norms of sanctification. To walk in the newness of life is to walk in the Spirit because it is the Holy Spirit who makes the resurrection possible, and it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies believers. So, sanctification is life in the Spirit. Thus, living a sanctified life is both ethical and eschatological. Salvation, which is eschatological, has ethical consequences. Holy and pure behavior is lived in anticipation of the Parousia.

To be sanctified means putting our whole being at the disposal of God because we are God's possession. We should present our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. Negatively, that means we should avoid immorality, passionate lusts, impurity, exploiting others for personal benefit, etc. Positively, we should embrace love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, meekness, faithfulness, goodness, self-control, fairness, etc. We should put away the old man and embrace the new man. We are to act as our identity in Christ characterizes. We must live like God's people, becoming God's holy presence. The presence of God is the true framework of fellowship among the saints. We must keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We must allow the presence of God to transform us. We are to do the God-ordained deeds we were created for in Christ. These principles proceed from a sanctified life and are the moral transformation framework for human flourishing. Let us discuss what impact it would have for human flourishing.

We must strive for wholeness in our communities. Koopman (2008:171) puts it poetically when he says, “The community of believers must be transformed into people who participate in God’s work of healing the broken, uniting the divided, accepting the rejected, announcing forgiveness and liberation for those who are judged and stigmatized, condemned and victimized.” Our community wholeness must reflect what the trinitarian community demonstrates within the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. People chosen and called by God, must be reflected ethically, both individually and collectively as proof of their calling and chosenness (Adewuya 2004:105). We must remember that a sense of group identity supersedes a sense of individualism for wholeness. Each might be sanctified as an individual, but they are also sanctified for the community of God’s people, Christ’s body, and the Holy Spirit’s temple. Believers are reminded repeatedly that sanctification must be for the whole community.

That we must be a community is the basis upon which we are to be accountable to each other and because we are members of one another in the Body of Christ. Accountability is very edifying in matters of spiritual disciplines. There are three levels of spiritual disciplines according to Richard Foster (1989), namely *inward* disciplines; *outward* disciplines; and *corporate* disciplines. The *inward* disciplines include, meditation, prayer, and fasting. We should constantly encourage one another and make ourselves accountable in these private disciplines. The *outward* disciplines, at least, are visible - namely study of the Word, simplicity (preventing materialism), solitude, submission, and service. The *corporate* disciplines include confession, worship, fellowship, and celebration. As evangelicals we might be cautious about the level of solitude and confession. Nevertheless, openness to be accountable to the brethren can only encourage moral transformation and human flourishing.

God, whose holiness we reflect in our community is himself a trinitarian community. Thus, any unjust or unholy society will not mirror trinitarian wholeness. This is particularly relevant for our African context. As Nweke (2020:312) reminds us, the visible relevance of transformation is its moral strength. So, morals must occupy central place, particularly in African society. Adewuya (2004:97) believes that Africans tenaciously believe that moral values are based upon recognising the divine will and that sin in the community must be expelled if perfect peace is to be enjoyed. Koopman (2008:174) echoes this sentiment: “On the continent of Africa with its prominent worldviews of wholeness and unity, instead of dualism

and segregation, the idea of holiness as wholeness enjoys spontaneous acceptance.”

Webster (2006:60) articulates what could serve as a good summary: “Only God is properly holy; only God may elect the church; only an elect church is sanctified; the church’s holiness is thus grounded in the election of God the Father.” Those reconciled to God are sanctified by Christ’s Spirit so that we may cultivate a new life in conformity with Christ, whose image we bear. Koopman (2008:178) says that holiness in action embodies holiness as embrace, holiness as justice, and holiness as living from the work of the triune God of calling, justification, and sanctification. It must be our conscious attempt to “grow seeds of life for the reconstruction of a human sphere where Christians fully perform their duties as generators of active and creative hope” (Ka Mana 2004:121).

Finally, the Bible must be the chief source because of its dynamic to connect individuals and communities to the very agenda of God. The Scriptures are indispensable in the pursuit of true individual and community holiness. Hiding God’s Word in our hearts is necessary for preventing sin (Ps 119:11). As also articulated by our Lord in his prayer to the Father, “Sanctify them by your truth; your Word is truth” (Jn 17:17). Communities must show the characteristics of the kingdom of God. They must demonstrate the transformative grace of God as a means to remove evil. We who have embraced the faith in Christ must radiate the light of divine love for transformation. We must believe in the power of the Gospel to save and change lives. We must be a community who believes that the God who has begun a good work in us, will continue it to completion in according to his full pleasure. Every community who seeks to flourish as a community must be humbly open to mutual accountability under the authority of Scripture. Such is the sanctifying mission of God.

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### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **SECTION B**

## **Nutritional Value of Manna and Quail in Exodus 16:13-18, As an Act of Divine Providence for Human Flourishing in Africa**

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### ***Abstract***

*A close and studious study of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation reveals vividly that God provides for His people and expects that His people wholeheartedly should rely on Him for divine provision. The book of Exodus demonstrates the power of God to meet His people's needs and deliver them in times of need and danger. Exodus 16:13-18, 35 gave a vivid account of God's divine provision when the people of Israel called upon Him. The nutritional value of quail and manna (Ex 16:13-18, 35) was critically studied, with its lessons examined as an act of human flourishing in Africa. This work employs historical-critical exegetical methods. The finding shows that quail is composed of proteins, lipids, vitamins, and minerals and is low in carbohydrates, while manna is the bread which is 100% carbohydrate. The people of Israel fed on these for forty years without developing any known nutritional disease. They, however, operated according to God's command. The researcher argues that if Christians in Africa can call upon God for their daily needs and obey Him, the Lord will surprise them and give them their lives sustenance. Also, God expects Christians to depend on and rely on Him for all they need to live and will certainly not fail them, and this will help by developing their physical strength for the work of Christian missions and evangelism.*

### **1. Introduction**

Without adequate nutrition, the human body does not function optimally, and this is very true, considering that severe nutritional inadequacy has been found to lead to diseases and even death. The typical African diet is lacking in many ways, from not containing the proper amount of essential nutrients to being too speedily consumed to being only meagerly satisfying.<sup>1</sup> The ability to wake up, think, communicate, hope, dream, go to school, go to church, do mission/evangelism work, gain knowledge, go to work, earn a living, and do all of the things that one likes to do are dependent upon one factor – health, which is invariably dependent on a good diet – also thought of as nutrition.

The foods people eat, as God makes them, contain nutrients. Nutrients are

substances the body requires to perform its essential functions to flourish. Nutrients must be obtained from the diet since human does not synthesize them. Nutrients produce energy, detect and respond to environmental surroundings, move, excrete waste, respire, grow and reproduce. Six nutrients are required for the body to function and maintain overall health—carbohydrates, Lipids, Protein, Water, Vitamins, and Minerals. The Bible might not speak on these food classes but supports the nutritional value added to the body by these foods. In the scriptural passage under examination, God gave the Israelites manna in their wilderness journeys, which suggestively sustained them in health, nourishment, and vitality. Manna (bread) in Numbers 11:9, Exodus 16:13-18, 30, belongs to the Carbohydrates class by constitution Macronutrients. Macronutrients are foods that are required in large amounts in a diet. Carbohydrates comprise carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. The primary food sources of carbohydrates are grain, milk, fruit, bread, and starchy vegetables. In Exodus 16:15, God sent the Israelites bread from heaven which they called *manna*. It was an exceptional food miraculously sent from God to feed the people after the exodus from Egypt. It was a white substance that resembled frost, took the form of thin flakes, and tasted like honey (Ex 16:14, 31; Nm 11:9).

Exodus 16:35 states, “The Israelites ate manna for forty years until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.” It was a wonderful and excellent experience that God sustained them for forty years with manna and quail. Quail is known to be a source of protein, while manna is majorly carbohydrate; other macronutrients and micronutrients may be lacking. The miracle was that they were sustained with it for forty years! This, however, negates the theory or principle of a balanced diet needed by the body to function effectively and be sustained. That quail and manna could sustain them for forty years without developing significant health challenges must therefore be accompanied by a divine hand of God. This is the central concept of why the researcher embarked on this study.

## **2. The Nature and Nutritional Value of Manna**

In the Hebrew Bible, manna is described twice: once in Exodus 16:1-36 with the entire narrative surrounding it, and once again in Numbers 11:1-9 as a part of a separate narrative. In the Book of Exodus description, manna is like a white coriander seed.<sup>2</sup> Ancient commentaries have explained this as a comparison to the round shape of the coriander seed. Again, manna is described in Exodus as being “a fine, flake-like thing,” like the frost

on the ground.<sup>3</sup> It is described in the Book of Numbers as arriving with the dew during the night.<sup>4</sup> Exodus adds that *manna* was comparable to hoarfrost in size and had to be collected before the sun's heat melted it. Numbers describes it as having the appearance of bdellium,<sup>5</sup> adding that the Israelites ground it and pounded it into cakes, which were then baked, resulting in something that tasted like cakes baked with oil.<sup>6</sup> Exodus states that raw *manna* tasted like wafers made with honey.

*Manna*, sometimes or archaically spelled *mana*, is an edible substance that, according to the Bible and the Quran, God provided for the Israelites during their travels in the desert. The understanding of the substance called manna has been greeted with severe misunderstandings. According to George Ebers, the name comes from the Egyptian “mennu.” The *manna* is also designated “bread” (Ex 16:4); it is called “the corn of heaven” and “the bread of the mighty” in Ps 78:24-25, and, in a depreciative sense, the “light bread” in Nm 21,<sup>7</sup> though *manna* is from heaven, according to the Hebrew Bible and Jesus in the New Testament,<sup>8</sup> the various identifications of *manna* are naturalistic. In the Jewish Mishnah, *manna* is treated as a natural but unique substance, “created during the twilight of the sixth day of Creation,”<sup>9</sup> and ensured to be clean before it arrives by sweeping the ground by a northern wind and subsequent rain.<sup>10</sup> According to classical rabbinical literature, *manna* was ground in a heavenly mill for the use of the righteous, but some of it was allocated to the wicked and left for them to grind themselves.<sup>11</sup> The gathering of the *manna* was connected with several miracles: it was collected before sunrise, and despite its hard substance, it melted in the sun. The quantity collected made exactly one Omer for every person, whether one collected much or little. On Friday morning, the portions were double, for the *manna* could not be found on Sabbath. The *manna* was eaten the day it was gathered; if it were left until the following morning, it corrupted and bred worms, though the *manna* gathered on Friday and kept for the Sabbath remained fresh.

It continued to descend during the forty years the Israelites were in the wilderness, but when they arrived at Gilgal on the 14th of Nisan and began to eat the grain grown there, the manna ceased to fall.<sup>12</sup> To perpetuate the memory of this providence, Aaron was told to put an Omer of manna in a vessel and lay it “before the testimony” (Ex 16:17-35). Numbers 11:5 makes it appear that manna was the only food of the Israelites while they were in the wilderness, although references to provisions of fine flour, oil, and meat are discovered elsewhere. From this, two schools of argument

suggest that the manna constituted their main food supply during the forty years or that it became their whole food after the provisions they took from Egypt were exhausted.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere in this paper, it had been mentioned that manna is a bread that is 100% carbohydrate. Bread supplies a significant portion of the nutrients required for growth, health maintenance, and well-being. It is an excellent source of proteins, vitamins, minerals, fibre, and complex carbohydrates. It is also low in fat and cholesterol. Bread is quite bulky, so it takes longer to digest and is, therefore, more satisfying and less fattening than the fats, sugars, and alcohols commonly consumed in excess. Bread is nutritious, including manna, and the differences in nutritional value are insignificant, especially if a balanced diet is taken.<sup>14</sup> To corroborate this with a claim of balance according to God's providence is also the miraculous supply of quails. Maintaining adequate levels of vitamins, minerals, and protein in our diets is essential to remain healthy. The average percentage of our daily nutrient requirements supplied by 100g of any bread shows that bread is an excellent source of many nutrients necessary for a healthy diet. 100g of bread is 2-4 slices, depending on the type and size.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly to the protein comprising amino acids, carbohydrates consist of building blocks called 'saccharides or 'sugars.' When large numbers of these saccharides are joined together, they form polysaccharides found in the foods we commonly think of as 'carbohydrates,' e.g., bread, potatoes, and pasta.

Dietary fibre belongs to the carbohydrate group but is not digestible. This fibre is also found in large quantities in bread. Fibre has an essential role in helping you feel full after a meal. Carbohydrates are also crucial as the primary providers of energy in our diet. Every body cell, including the brain, requires a constant supply of glucose as fuel, most of which is provided by the carbohydrates in food and drink.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. Nature and Nutritional Value of Quails**

Quail is a small bird. It can reach 4.5 to 7.8 inches in length and 2.4 to 4.9 ounces in weight. They are covered with brown, black, white, grey, and blue feathers; specific coloration and arrangement of feathers create a scale-like pattern on some body parts. Certain species of quails have a plume shaped like a teardrop on top of the head. It bobs when the bird is walking. Quails can fly short distances but spend most of their time on

the ground. Depending on the species, quails can be active during the day (diurnal animals) or night (nocturnal animals).

The quail is an omnivore (eats other animals and plants). Its diet consists mainly of seeds, leaves, wheat, barley, berries, and occasionally grasshoppers and worms. Quails produce high-pitched sounds, cackles, and grunts used for communication. Quails bathe in the dust to eliminate pests from their feathers and to keep their plumage clean. Quails run when they are threatened. Some species can quickly reach the sky, while some are motionless when faced with danger. Certain quails are equipped with heel spurs-bony structures used for protection against predators.<sup>17</sup>

Quails are packed with vitamins and minerals. Even with their small sizes, their nutritional value is three or four times greater than chicken. Quails contain 13 percent proteins compared to 11 percent in chicken. In addition, it also contains 140 percent of vitamin B1 compared to 50 percent in chicken. In addition, quails provide five times as much iron and potassium. Unlike the chicken, quail has not been known to cause allergies. They help fight allergy symptoms due to the ovomucoid protein they contain.

Regular consumption of quails can help fight against many diseases. They are a natural combatant against digestive tract disorders such as stomach ulcers. Quails strengthen the immune system, promote memory health, increase brain activity, and stabilize the nervous system. They help with anemia by increasing the hemoglobin level in the body while removing toxins and heavy metals. The Chinese use quail to help treat tuberculosis, asthma, and even diabetes. If you are a kidney, liver, or gallbladder stone sufferer, quail eggs can help prevent and remove these types of stones. The nutritional benefit of quail is unquantifiable.<sup>18</sup>

Because protein is what our body needs to build muscles and use as a long-term energy source, carbohydrates, when consumed and not used by the body, end up becoming fat that we carry. Protein found in quail is of superior quality in that a very high nutrient load accompanies it: “Quail contains 140 percent of Vitamin B1 compared to only 50 percent in Chicken”.

Why is Vitamin B1 essential? B1 is also called Thiamine. Deficiency in Thiamine can cause optic neuropathology, Korkoff’s syndrome,

a condition commonly called Beriberi (involving the neurological, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal systems), malaise, weight loss, irritability, and convulsion. Thiamine is essential and can be obtained easily by consuming quail. Quails provide five times as much iron and potassium.

Why are Iron and Potassium (minerals) essential to the human diet? Iron deficiency can result in anemia. Iron is essential in binding to protein and carrying oxygen in the blood. When iron is not absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract of human beings, deficiency/anemia can result.<sup>19</sup> Quail eggs, providing 5 times the iron of a chicken egg, are a far superior source in a small portion. Potassium, when mildly deficient in humans, typically shows no symptoms. However, symptoms of a lack of potassium intake can present in the form of muscle weakness, muscle cramps, or constipation.<sup>20</sup> Humans lose potassium mainly through excessive fluid losses such as sweating, polyuria (urinating often due to medications or diuretics such as caffeine), and fluid losses from being sick (vomiting).

Quail eggs also contain twice as much vitamin A and B2 as a chicken egg. A list of bodily functions in which vitamin A plays a role might present some help-vision, gene transcription, embryonic development and reproduction, bone metabolism, skin and cellular health, and antioxidant activity. Vitamin B2 is also known as riboflavin. Riboflavin deficiency classically presents itself via the cracked edges of the mouth (Angular cheilitis), photophobia (light sensitivity), dermatitis (dry scaling skin), and red bloodshot eyes (accompanying that photophobia). Lack of riboflavin can cause stunted growth and “failure to thrive” in animals.<sup>21</sup>

The quail egg is more affluent in phosphorus and calcium than a chicken egg. Women and children especially need extra calcium in their diet. Calcium promotes bone health. Calcium is essential for living organisms, particularly in cell physiology, where the movement of many calcium ions ( $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ) into and out of the cell is a signal for many cellular processes. As a primary material used in mineralizing bones and shells, calcium is the most abundant metal by mass in many animals. Phosphorus is essential for life. As phosphate, it is a component of the genes. Quail eggs have been used for thousands of years as a healing food. Chinese medicine uses quail eggs to help with rhinitis, asthma, hay fever, and skin conditions. Quail egg is often in facial and hair products.<sup>22</sup>

Quail eggs have a high HDL cholesterol content (“good fat”), and they are a high protein food providing higher levels of the B-Complex and are a non-inflammatory food.<sup>23</sup> HDL cholesterol helps balance the bad LDL cholesterol in blood levels. So Quail eggs have a good kind of fat. Not all cholesterol is terrible. It is reasonable to add that God always gives his children good things. Giving the Israelites the best meat and eggs for their sojourn was to satisfy the divine attribute of his goodness. The Bible supports this when the Psalmist retorts, *“The eyes of all look to you in hope; you give them their food as they need them, and you fill them with good”* (Ps 145:15, NIV).

#### **4. Exegetical Analysis of the Passages (Exodus 16:13-18, 35)**

Exodus continues the narrative begun in Genesis. The book’s title is derived from the Greek word *Exodos* meaning “exit” or “departure.” It refers to God’s mighty deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and their departure from that land as the people of God.

Two issues related to Exodus background have involved major controversy; the date of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and the book’s authorship. Traditionally Moses is thought to be the writer. There is, however, disagreement between conservative and liberal biblical scholars over the mosaic authorship of the book of Exodus. Modern interpreters often view the book as a composite work by various editors, completed much later in Israel’s history than the time of Moses (called the JEDP theory).<sup>24</sup> However, Jewish tradition from the time of Joshua onward (Joshua 8:31-35), plus the testimony of Jesus (Mk 12:26), early Christianity, and contemporary conservative scholarship, all attribute the book’s origin to Moses.

Furthermore, internal evidence supports Moses’ authorship. Numerous details in Exodus indicate that the author was an eyewitness of the recorded events. E.g., Exodus 2:12, 9:31-32, and a portion of the book testify to Moses’s direct involvement in its writing.<sup>25</sup> E.g., Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27.

Concerning the date of writing, there is no consensus among scholars. An early date (also referred to as the biblical date) is derived from 1 Kings 6:1, which states that it occurred 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon’s reign. This dates to the exodus *ca.* 1445 B.C. Also, in Judges 11:26, Jephthah (*ca.* 1100 B.C.) declared that Israel had occupied this land

for 300 years, which would date the conquest to approximately 1400 B.C. This chronology for the exodus, the conquest, and the period of the judges fits well with the datable history of Israel's first three kings (Saul, David, and Solomon).

## **5. Contexts of the Passage (Exodus 16:13-18,35)**

After the Israelites left Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for over forty years. In the wilderness, they faced several challenges, including battles, the religions of the people they passed on their way(s), weather harshness, lack, and many others. However, God saw the people through and safely and successfully led them to the Promised Land.

Specifically, the context of the passage bothered the period when the people of Israel lacked food in the wilderness. They had complained to Moses, and Moses had, in turn, complained to God, and miraculously, God had provided what to eat for them – Manna and Quails. These mysterious foods (Bread and Meat) sustained the people until they finally and fully settled on the Promised Land. The questions have always been: what are these Manna and Quails? Of what nutritional value are they? Could God still sustain His people in such a miraculous and mighty way today?

## **6. The Text and The Translation**

### *Text in Hebrew*

הַנֶּחֱמַל בַּיָּבֶס לַמָּוֶה תִּבְכַּשׁ וְהַתִּיָּה רִקְבָּבוּ הַנֶּחֱמָה-תָּא סָפְתוּ וְלִשְׁה לַעֲוֹן כְּרִיעַב יִהְיוּ 13  
צָרָא-הָלַע רִפְפֹּכ קַד סָפְסָתָם קַד רִבְדָּמָה יִגְפ־לַע וְהָגְדוּ לַמָּוֶה תִּבְכַּשׁ לַעֲוֹן 14  
אוֹהָ מְהֻלָּא הָשֵׁם רַמְאָנוּ אוֹהָ-הֵם וְעָדִי אֵל יְיָ אוֹהָ נֵם וִיחָא-לָא שִׁיא וְרַמְאָנוּ לְאֶרֶשׁ-יִינָב וְאָרְיוּ 15  
הַלְכָאֵל סָקֵל הַוְדִי נִתָּן לִשְׁא סְתָלָה:  
שִׁיא מְכִיתֶנְשָׁפֵן רִפְסֵם תְּלִגְלָגֵל רַמְעֵ וְלָכָא יִפֹּל שִׁיא וְיָמָם וְסָקֵל הָוְדִי תִנְצֵ רִשְׁא רִבְדָּה הַוְ 16  
וְתִקַּח וְלָדָאֵב רִשְׁאֵל:  
טִיעֲמַמְהוּ תִבְרַמָּה וְטָקְלִי לְאֶרֶשׁ יִינָב נְב־וִשְׁעִי 17  
וְטָקֵל וְלָכָא-יִפֹּל שִׁיא רִיסְחָה אֵל טִיעֲמַמְהוּ תִבְרַמָּה הִידְעָה אֵלָּו רַמְעֵב וְדִמְיו 18  
מְאָב-דַּע וְלָכָא נְמָה-תָּא תִבְשׁוֹן צָרָא-לָא מְאָב-דַּע הָגֵשׁ מִיעֲבָרָא נְמָה-תָּא וְלָכָא לְאֶרֶשׁ יִינָבו 35  
נַעֲנָב צָרָא הַצָּק־לָא:

### *English Translation*

13 In the evening, quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning, there was a fall of dew about the camp. 14 When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” —for they did not know what it was. And Moses

said to them, “That is the bread which הוה has given you to eat. 16This is what הוה has commanded: Each household shall gather as much as it requires to eat—an omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each household shall fetch according to those in its tent.” 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. 18 But when they measured it by the omer, anyone who had gathered much had no excess, and anyone who had gathered little had no deficiency: each household had gathered as much as it needed to eat.

35 And the Israelites ate manna forty years until they came to a settled land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

## **7. Interpretation of the Passage (Exodus 16:13-18, 35)**

*Verses 13-14.*

13 הַנֶּמֶל בִּיבֶס לָמָּה תִּבְכַּשׁ הַתֵּימָה רָקִיבֹו הַנֶּמֶתְמָה־תָּא סָבְתָּו לְלִישָׁה לַעֲתֹו בְּלָעֵב יְהִי־13  
14 יִצְרָאֵה־לֵּע רֶפֶכּ כֵּד סִפְסָחֻמ כֵּד רִבְדָּמָה יִגְפ־לֵע הַלָּהּ לָמָּה תִּבְכַּשׁ לַעֲתֹו14:

13 In the evening, quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning, there was a fall of dew about the camp. 14When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

In the early part of this chapter, we saw how people complained to Moses about the food provision they were lacking, and God heard them (Exodus 16:1-12). God promised he would send food, and the quail came and covered the camp in the evening. This proved how reliable God is when He makes promises. He can never fail at what He promised to do. He sent the quail that evening without delay. His help cannot come later, but at the appointed time, He will surface. The food needs of Israel were provided for by the immediate hand of God. He makes them a feast at night of delicate fowl. <sup>26</sup> Quail, pheasants, or some wildfowl covered the camp, so they might take up as many of them as they pleased. The following day God raised manna upon them, which was to be continued to rain upon them for their daily bread. God gave them all that they needed. God has everything you need to go through life in His hand.

*Verse 15.*

אִי־הָאֵל הָאֵשׁמ רָמֵאֵן אִי־הֶמֶדֶם וַעֲדִי אֵל יְיָ אֵלֶּה נָּמ וַיִּחַצֵּא־לָא שִׂיא וְרָמֵאֵן לִאֲרָשִׁי־יִגְבּ וַאֲרָשִׁי  
הִלָּכָאֵל סָבָל הַלָּהּ וַתֵּן רִישָׁא סָבָלָה:

When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” —for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “That is the bread

which **יִי** has given you to eat.

That which was provided for them was manna, for nourishing and strengthening food without anything else. They called it manna, מַנָּה (man hu) meaning ‘What is this.’ God is in the business of doing surprises in His people’s life. The incredible power of God fed the people; He gave them bread to eat. It is reasonable enough to think of that great power of God which fed the Israelites in the wilderness and made miracles their daily bread. Never was there such a market of provision as this where so many hundred thousand men were furnished daily without money or price. Never was there such an open house kept as God kept in the wilderness for forty years together, nor was such free and plentiful entertainment given of that constant providence of God. The same wisdom, power, and goodness that now brought food daily out of clouds are employed in the constant course of nature, bringing food yearly out of the earth and giving us all things richly to enjoy.

*Verses 16-18.*

שִׂיא מְכִיתֶשְׁפֹּנ רִפְסָמ תְּלִגְלָגֵל רִמְעֵ וְלָכָא יִפֹּל שִׂיא וְנִמְמ וְנִמְקֵל תְּוֹדֵי תִנְצֵ רִשָּׁא רְבֻדָּה תֵּקֵ 16  
וְתִקֵּת וְלִתְאֵב רִשָּׁאֵל:

17: טִיעַמְמֶהוּ דְּבִרְמָה וְטַקְלִין לְאַרְשִׁי יִנָּב נָכְ-וּשְׁעִין 17

וְטָהַר וְלֹא־יִפֹּל שִׁיא רִיסָתָהּ אֶל טֵיעַמָּהּוּ הִבְרָמָהּ הִידְעָה אֵלּוּ רַמְעַב וּדְמִין 18

16This is what הוֹרִי has commanded: Each household shall gather as much as it requires to eat—an omer to a person for as many of you as there are, each household shall fetch according to those in its tent.” 17The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. 18But when they measured it by the omer, anyone who had gathered much had no excess, and anyone who had gathered little had no deficiency: each household had gathered as much as it needed to eat.

They were to gather it every morning as much as each needed for a day. To this daily rain of manna and gathering of manna, our Saviour Jesus seems to allude when He teaches us to pray and gives us our daily bread. We are now taught:

- (1) prudence and diligence in providing food convenient for ourselves and our household. What God graciously gather?
- (2) Contentment and satisfaction with sufficiency. They must gather every man according to his eating. Enough is as good as a feast, and more than enough is as bad as a surfeit. As many that obeyed

dependence upon the providence of God, they gathered what they needed for the day, trusting that God with the following day will bring them their daily bread. As they trusted and obeyed God, they were not disappointed. Those who gathered did not lack what they needed, and those who gathered much did not have a surplus. God deals with them on an equal bases. As we obey God, He makes available all that we need one at a time. <sup>27</sup>

*Verse 35.*

35וְלֶכְתָּה אֲתָם תְּבַשְׂיוֹן אֶת־הַמָּן לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנִי וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא אִתְּךָ מִן־הַמָּן וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא אִתְּךָ לֶחֶם יְנֻבִּי:  
אֲנִי וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא אִתְּךָ לֶחֶם יְנֻבִּי:

35And the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a settled land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

God having provided manna to be his people's food in the wilderness, we are here told how the memory of it was preserved. An Omer of this manna was laid up in a golden pot, as we are told (Heb 9:4), and kept before the testimony or the ark, which it was afterward made (Exodus 16:32-34). Note that eating bread must not be forgotten. God's miracles and mercies will forever be remembered for our encouragement to trust him. The mercy of it was continued as long as they had occasion for it. <sup>28</sup>

The manna never ceased till they came to the border of Canaan where there was bread enough and to spare (Exodus 16:35). The manna is called spiritual meat (1Cor 10:3) because it was typical of spiritual blessings in heavenly things: Christ himself is the true manna, the bread of life, of which this was a figure (Jn 6:49-51).

The word of God is the manna by which our souls are nourished (Matt. 4:4). The comforts of the spirit are hidden manna (Rev. 2:17). These came from heaven as the manna did and are the support and comfort of the divine life in the soul, while we are in the wilderness of this world. It is to gather Christ in the word is to be applied to the soul, and the means of grace are to be used. We must all gather for ourselves in the morning of our days, the morning of our opportunities of which, if we let it slip off, it may be too late to gather.

The manna they gathered must not be hoarded up but eaten; those that have received Christ must, by faith, live upon him and not receive his

grace in vain. However, those who ate manna hungered again and died at last, and God was not pleased with many of them. Whereas, those that feed on Christ by faith shall never hunger and shall die no more; with them, God will be forever well pleased.

## **8. Lessons for Evangelical Christians in Africa**

### *1. God Provides for the Sustenance of His People (vv 13-14)*

As they journey through the desert region to the southeast of the Bitter Lakes, the cruelty and suffering of Egypt are quickly forgotten when the people become hungry. They even suggested that it would have been better for them to have died by the Lord's hand in Egypt rather than starve in the desert. In response, God graciously sent quails in the evening and a bread-like substance in the morning; these were later called manna because the people said what is this.<sup>29</sup>

When the people complained, God miraculously provided for their needs to sustain them. God constantly provides for the sustenance of His people, and He graciously does this exceedingly abundantly beyond all His children ask or think. Here are some lessons from the study for humans flourishing from God's providential acts: God provides abundantly for all their needs- As our loving Heavenly Father, God knows and provides for all our needs - material, emotional, and spiritual.

God provides abundantly for our material needs. The Bible story respecting God's provision for the Israelites teaches believers in Jesus Christ that though as humans, no one has a "divine right" to prosperity, they do not need to feel guilty about the material things God provides for them. Christians in Africa, therefore, should hold these things lightly, remembering that the provisions in the first place belong to God, not to them. They are just managers for Him, not owners. To whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48). Christians need to be careful "not to be conceited or to fix (their) hopes on the uncertainty of riches" and "to be generous and ready to share" storing up treasure in heaven. However, when God blesses them materially, they can enjoy what He has richly supplied them (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

God provides abundantly for the emotional needs of His children. God wants His children to be emotionally whole, so He provides for them. He may not always do it instantly or when people think He should. He often does it by bringing healing to relationships with family members

and others who have hurt them. However, even if they never respond, the Lord teaches them how to forgive and to have every emotional need met in Him. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) describes an emotionally whole person. Fruit takes time to grow, but every believer who walks in the spirit is promised that fruit of emotional wholeness.

God provides abundantly for their spiritual needs. God's ultimate goal is always spiritual. He always has a spiritual reason behind any material blessings He supplies or withholds. In the Bible, His chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, who were to be His channel for blessing all nations, were once in danger of being polluted by the corrupt Canaanites. God had even prophesied to Abraham that his descendants would become strangers and slaves for 400 years in a land that was not theirs until the iniquity of the Amorite was complete (15:13-16). So there came a famine, and they moved to Egypt. These seemingly ordinary circumstances worked out God's spiritual purposes for His people, which He had spoken of almost 200 years before. Things do not just "happen." God uses things to shape Christians to be His channel to convey His blessings to lost people. To do that, He has provided abundantly in Christ for all of humanity's spiritual needs, even when they are unaware of them. God works through trials to mature believers in Jesus Christ spiritually. If Christians at large, specifically the Christians in Africa, call upon Him for their need, it will certainly provide for their sustenance.

### *2. God Surprises his People in His Provisions (v15)*

The Israelites were surprised when they saw the miraculous provision from God. Today God is still in the business of surprising his people. When we think that all hope is lost, that is when God shows up with a surprise. This can be attributed to God providing for needs in His timing, not in/man's timing. Again, God provides in ways that even His children would never expect. A final discovery is that God provides for us through grace, not merit. If Christians in Africa will look up to him will surprise them beyond their expectations.

### *3. God Expects His People to Obey His Commands as they wait upon him (v.16)*

God tested the Israelites by issuing specific stipulations concerning the collection and storage of the manna. To demonstrate their faith in God's provision, the people were not supposed to keep any manna from one day to the next. However, on the sixth day of the week, Friday, double

the quantity of manna was to be collected and prepared; the next day (Sabbath) was to be a day of rest. Some of the people did not heed these instructions. Although they had been delivered from the Egyptians by remarkable displays of God's power, they still lacked total commitment and loyalty to him 45

It has been discovered that obedience always brings blessings. The Lord's simple requests often serve as stepping stones to life's most beautiful blessings. There is so much that humans do not expect that can happen when they say yes to God. Obedience is the essential Christian life:

- a. Obeying God in small matters is an essential step in receiving God's greatest blessings: Very often, God's greatest blessings come from man's willingness to do something that appears very insignificant.
- b. The obedience of one individual always benefits others: God's call to obedience always demands an appropriate response. In giving the appropriate response, God often rewards others—in particular, those closest to the one obeying Him—as a result of their obedience. For example, when a father obeys the Lord, his entire family reaps the reward of God's blessings. Likewise, a child's obedience will bless his or her parents. This does not mean those who disobey the Lord will escape His discipline because of someone else's godly walk. His call to obedience always demands an individual response. However, when people live obedient lives, those who know and love them will sense the peace and joy that God gives. Instead of conflict, there will be contentment—just one part of experiencing God's goodness.

#### *4. Those who obey God will never be disappointed* <sup>30</sup>

Based on the above, whenever God gives a command, he expects his people to obey his instructions. This is the basis for his continuous blessings in the life of Christians. Therefore, God expects the Christians in Africa to obey him in all things constantly. By this, God shall bless them, and their needs will be met. It is disheartening to see that God's people disobey his command; this may be why his blessing keeps on eluding Christians.

#### *5. Obedience to God has Far-reaching Reward for God's People (vv. 17-18)*

Verse 1 indicates they were still going from Egypt to the Promised Land. Verse 2: The Israelites complained against Moses and God for the third time (Exodus 14:10-12; 15:24). Despite all that God has done for them,

they quickly lost faith in His goodness, wisdom, and will for their lives (Num. 14:2; 16:11; 41). Paul warns New Testament believers not to follow Israel's example (1 Cor. 10:10) when serious problems arise; instead of accusing God of neglect and unfaithfulness, we should commit our way to Him, moreover, humbly as for help in resolving the problem trusting Him to act on our behalf.

This bread from heaven is called manna (verse 15); it was an exceptional food miraculously sent from God to feed the people after their exodus from Egypt; it was a white substance that resembled frost, took the form of thin flakes, and tasted like honey (verse 14, 31), (Nm 11:19). The supply of manna eased when the Israelites enter the Promised land and other foods became available (Jos 5:12). Manna was a type of foreshadowing of Jesus, who is the authentic Bread of Heaven. (Jn 6:32; Rv 12:17), that gives eternal life (Jn 6:33-58).

The people were instructed about the bread from heaven to test their willingness to trust and obey God (*cf.* Dt 8:2-3). In the same way, God sometimes orders the circumstances of our lives to test our faith and loyalty to Him.<sup>31</sup> God gave orders to gather only enough for each day to teach the people that their daily existence depended exclusively upon His gift (Mt 6:11).

Through His instructions regarding the seventh day (verses 22-30), God wanted to emphasize that His people were to respond by resting, just as He rested on the seventh day of creation (Gn 2:1-4). God knew from the very beginning that if His people failed to observe the Sabbath, they would deplete both their physical and spiritual strength by continual earthly worries and pursuits; this failure would result in spiritual, godly concern being relegated to a place of most minor importance in their lives (Mt 12:1; Lk 6:2-10).

Although they had been delivered from the Egyptians by remarkable displays of God's power, some still lacked total commitment and loyalty to him. As the Exodus story reveals, the Israelites frequently displayed their obstinacy toward God. Nevertheless, such is the constancy of God that he provides manna for the next forty years; only when the people settled in the land of Canaan did the manna cease (v. 35-36). As a testimony to future generations, an Omer of manna was preserved in a jar (v.33).

As they journeyed (the Israelites) through the desert region to the southeast of the Bitter Lakes, the cruelty and suffering of Egypt were quickly forgotten when the people became hungry. They even suggested that it would have been better for them to have died by the Lord's hand in Egypt rather than starve in the desert (v3-4). In response, God graciously sent quails in the evening (v13) and a bread-like substance in the morning; the latter was called manna because the people asked what it was. God tested the Israelites by issuing specific stipulations concerning the collection and storage of the manna (v 4-5, 16, 23). To demonstrate their faith in God's provision, the people were not supposed to keep any of the manna from one day to the next (v.19). However, on the sixth day of the week, Friday, double the quantity of manna was to be collected and prepared, for the next day (the Sabbath) was to be a day of rest. Some people did not follow these instructions (v 20, 28). Although they had been delivered from the Egyptians by remarkable displays of God's power, some still lacked total commitment and loyalty to him.

As the Exodus' stay reveals, the Israelites frequently displayed their obstinacy towards God. Nevertheless, such is the constancy of God that he provides manna for the next forty years; only when the people settled in the land of Canaan did the manna cease (v. 35-36). As a testimony to future generations, an Omer of manna was preserved in a jar (v. 33).

In the New Testament, Jesus compares himself with the manna divinely provided in the wilderness, "I am the living bread that came down from heavens. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the world's life. (Jn 6:48-58, KJV)."

Studies have shown that Quail and Manna are highly nutritious, with a high level of vitamins, carbohydrates, minerals, proteins, lipids, etc. When comparing quail with chicken, the level of macronutrients and micronutrients in quail is far more nutritious than chicken, and manna is more nutritious than ordinary bread. This bread, called manna and quail, was exceptional food miraculously sent from God to feed the people after the exodus from Egypt.

The supply of manna and quail ceased when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, and other foods became available (Joshua 5:12). Manna was a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who as the true bread from heaven (Jn 6:32; Rv 2:17) gives eternal life (Jn 6:33, 51, 58). If Christians in

Africa could depend solely on God's providence and love, He would supply all their daily needs.

The people were given exact instructions about the bread and quail from heaven (Ex 16:4) to test their willingness to trust and obey God (Dt 8:2-3). In the same way, God sometimes orders the circumstances of our lives to test our faith and loyalty to Him. Christians in Africa are similarly expected to develop a high level of faith and loyalty to God for God to demonstrate His power and authority in their lives. God gave orders to gather only enough for each day to teach the people that their daily existence depended exclusively upon His gift (Ex 16:21; Mt 6:11).<sup>32</sup>

Through His instructions regarding the seventh day (v. 22-30), God wanted to emphasize that His people were to respond by resting, just as He rested on the seventh day of creation (Gn 2:1-4). From the beginning, God knew that if His people failed to observe the Sabbath, they would deplete their physical and spiritual strength by continual earthly worries and pursuits. This failure would result in spiritual, godly concerns being relegated to a place of most minor importance in their lives (Mt 21:1; Lk 6:2-10). This instruction is relevant to Christians in Africa, and they are expected to abide by it to be spiritually and physically meaningful; by this, they will be helpful to Christians in evangelizing the continent and the world generally.

If Christians in Africa solely depend on God for provision and sufficiency, He will equally sustain them. Every obedience to God's command brings an unprecedented reward that is far-reaching. If Christians in Africa obey God in all their ways, the reward will be unprecedented and far-reaching.

#### *6. God's Reward/Blessing for His People has a Lasting Duration (v35)*

As the exodus story reveals, the Israelites frequently displayed their obstinacy towards God. Nevertheless, such is the constancy of God that he provides manna for the next forty years; only when the people settled in the land of Canaan did the manna cease.<sup>33</sup> When God blesses His people, it has lasting effects; it is not momentary; it stands the test of time, and He is dependable and reliable. The manna miraculously sustained the Israelites for Forty (40) years, regardless of the nutritional content of the quail and manna. This must be the miracle that has lasting effects. From this episode, Christians in Africa must realize that only God rewards and that all blessings and rewards, not from God, have no lasting value and

must not be taken.

## **9. Conclusion**

Studies show that quail and manna have nutritional values. Quail as meat contains a high level of vitamins, proteins, lipids, minerals, and a low percentage of carbohydrates, while manna as bread is rich in carbohydrates. These macronutrients and micronutrient, if deficient, leads to nutritional diseases. When the people of Israel cried to God in the wilderness for food, He gave them this wholesome food'. It was strange to them, and they called it manna "What is this." It was surprising to them. Moses said unto them, "This is the bread which the Lord had given you to eat." The Lord responded to their cry and made miraculous food available in the wilderness.

The modalities by which this provision should be handled were provided. God is a God of orderliness, and everything He does must be orderly. "This is the thing which the Lord had commanded; gather of it every man according to his eating? An Omer for every man, according to the number of persons; in your tenth take you every man for them which are in his tent". As they obeyed, they lacked nothing. God provided for them according to their needs. "And the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less." Obedience, therefore, is the key to the supernatural supply of all Christians' needs. Suppose Christians in Africa cry to God for their daily needs, as God surprised the people of Israel and met their needs; their needs will be met. However, obedience remains the key to this divine provision. They were sustained with the same manna for forty years, yet they did not develop any nutritional disease.

Although it is physiologically impossible to feed on the same component of food items without developing one form of the nutritional disease, the critical study of the text shows that the manna sustained the Israelites for forty years without any reports of the nutritional disease this manna must have been a special kind of bread that carried a divine connotation to sustain people for forty years. As Christians in Africa look up to God for their sustenance, He will miraculously provide a divine kind of bread to permanently satisfy their daily needs for the rest of their life. Therefore, human flourishing is in God's desires, and obedience to His commands is critical.

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The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **Is Obedience Better than Sacrifice? An Intercultural Reading of John 12:27-36**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper tackles the question of obedience versus sacrifice, as considered in the larger context of fullness of life in the Gospel of John. The phrasing that presents these two choices implies that one way is better than the other. This paper will show that this may be a valid dichotomy, particularly when seen through the lens of the OT. However, when refracted through Christ, the false dichotomy embedded in the question is clearly revealed. The Africentric intercultural hermeneutic applied in this paper to the text of John 12:27-36 will demonstrate that the answer rests not in an option of “either/or” but in “both/and.” This approach is based on a theoretical framework that encourages a dialogue between the African context and the biblical context and that provides useful parallels and significant differences for engaging with the text of John 12:27-36. It also addresses issues of theology, literature and history. Ultimately, the answer to this question lies in the recognition that for Jesus, sacrifice is the culmination of obedience, because in the New Covenant, he fulfils the Jewish cultus and the sacrificial system. This is what exemplifies fullness of life in his own life.*

### **1. Introduction**

The question, “Is obedience better than sacrifice?”, is intriguing, particularly when considered in light of the theme “Fullness of life in John.” Its sentiments are best remembered from the story of Saul in 1 Samuel in which God equates Saul’s act of disobedience, and his attempt to rectify it through sacrifice, with divination and idolatry. This question implies that one way is better than the other in attaining fullness of life. This would be accurate in the story of Saul and later in Israel’s history. Old Testament prophets affirm that sacrifice without genuine obedience is abhorrent to God (*cf.* Hs 6:6; Ml 1:8; Amos 5:21-27; Mic 6:6ff; Is 1:11-31; Jr 6:20; 7:21f.). Empty sacrificial ritual could never be a substitute for righteous conduct and obedience. The NT also emphasizes this but goes even further. Prominence is given not to the act of sacrifice, but to the heart attitude of the one sacrificing (Mt 12:7). In his confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus puts the sacrificial system in perspective. So, in these

cases, obedience is indeed better than sacrifice.

However, when considering the example of Jesus Christ, this question leads us to a false dilemma. Through an intercultural hermeneutic, this paper will demonstrate that for Christ, obedience leads to sacrifice, and there is no sacrifice without obedience. The text of John 12:27-36 visibly demonstrates the relationship between obedience and sacrifice in Jesus' life and invalidates the question. In essence, the question ought to be a phrase that reads, "Both obedience and sacrifice." For Jesus, sacrifice is the culmination of obedience, because in the New Covenant, he fulfils the Jewish cultus and the sacrificial system. This is what exemplifies fullness of life in his own life.

## **2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

The methodology that will be applied is the 'Four-Legged Stool African Hermeneutic'. This approach has five steps – parallels to the African context, theological context, literary context, historical context, and application. It is possible that this model could be usefully adapted to any cultural context (particularly where the parallels are concerned). However, the hermeneutical principles applied to the various genres are developed specifically from East African oral and written literature.

With regard to its theoretical framework, it is an intercultural model that encourages a dialogue between the African context and the biblical context; it is based on the concept of moving from the known to the unknown, moving directly from theories, methods and categories that are familiar in the African world into the world of the text; it recognizes the assumptions readers bring to the text as a result of their contextual situation ; African cultures (material and non-material) are a significant tool for the interpretive process; it recognizes the value of the theological, literary and historical contexts of the text (here it has some similarities with some Western methods but these are conceptualized from an African perspective). Finally, effective hermeneutics requires a three-way dialogue between the "world behind the text", "the world of the text", and "the world in front of the text." All three stand in a context that must be interrogated and the two horizons of meaning and significance are kept distinct.

## **3. Overview of text**

In this text (Jn 12:27-36), the narrator reports a conversation between

Jesus, God, and the crowd, that highlights Jesus' impending death. This conversation is triggered by the coming of the Greeks who had approached Philip with the request that they wanted to see Jesus (12:21). This is significant in that "the coming of the Gentiles heralds the climax of his ministry; his "hour" has at last arrived ... and it will witness his glorification." In what follows, the narrator weaves presence, obedience and sacrifice effortlessly together – like two sides of the same coin.

*Leg 1: Parallels to the African context (both traditional as well as modern)*

This leg primarily involves identifying parallels between the African and the biblical contexts. It is a bridge that allows us to begin to understand the biblical text from a familiar position and to interrogate our assumptions so that we can begin to correct any faulty assumptions that may hinder the interpretive process. This bridge therefore defines the scope or the boundaries within which meaning may be sought. Because of the two-sided nature of historical conditioning, this inter-dynamic process guides us in identifying both points of contact and differences with the biblical context.

*Leg 1: Parallels to the African context (what is this doing here ... same as Leg 1 ..above)*

We know that the arts embody and express human values and beliefs and the African way of life bears testimony to this. The literature of a people is therefore a window into their worldview. The following story of Wanjiru, taken from the Gikuyu people of Kenya, is useful for uncovering the parallels.

*Long ago there was a famine in Gikuyu land. This famine caused the cows and goats to die. Only human beings were left and even then, it could be seen that they would not live much longer. Now the people asked themselves, "What shall we do?" It was decided that the most beautiful girl, one called Wanjiru, should be sacrificed to God so that the rain could fall. She was brought to a place where there was a very big river, she sang;*

*Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green*

*My father said I should be lost. I should be lost*

*My mother said I should be lost. I should be lost*

*Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green*

*She went down up to the knee, she sang:*

*Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green*

*My father said I should be lost. I should be lost  
My mother said I should be lost. I should be lost  
Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green  
The water reached the waist, she sang:  
Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green  
My father said I should be lost. I should be lost  
My mother said I should be lost. I should be lost  
Rain fall and make this ridge green Make this ridge green  
The water reached the neck, she sang:  
Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green  
My father said I should be lost. I should be lost  
My mother said I should be lost. I should be lost  
Rain fall and make this ridge green, Make this ridge green*

*The head went in. Very heavy rains fell on this land. The grass grew and a lot of food grew and the people began to feel better. Now when Wanjiru went, she found her people who had died before her. These people had a lot of cows and goats. Now they asked her what she would like. She said she wanted cows and goats. She was given many cows and goats and then she was told to lie down in a place. When she woke up she found that she had returned back to her people. She woke up at a place where there was a river and she had her cows and goats. Now when the people saw her they rejoiced greatly.*

The worldview and ideological mentality of the narrator and the characters is revealed as the story unfolds. Wanjiru's willingness to sacrifice herself for the greater good of the community is evident. However, this is not without a certain measure of anguish on her part. The repetition in the song, draws us into her sadness and allows us to experience a catharsis together with her. Despite her dread, she willingly embraces death for the sake of the community. This sacrifice on her part is not without its benefits. As the story ends, we, the listeners, are satisfied with the conclusion – not only does the rain fall, ensuring that God has been appeased and the living are preserved, but Wanjiru herself is rewarded for her noble sacrifice. Here, the cleverness of the narrator reveals itself in a surprising twist. Her ancestors return her to her people in the land of the living, together with the gifts they have given her.

What parallels with the text does this story reveal with respect to the question posed in this paper? Clearly, obedience to God was required to maintain ontological balance and was driven by a worldview of dynamism, rather than love. While it may not be explicitly stated, the immanence of God could only be realized through acts of worship that included sacrifices, offerings, prayers and invocations. Consequently, sacrifice as a theological construct was a part of the worldview of the Gikuyu people. The worldview represented in the story differs from our text in that God is neither distant nor disinterested in the lives of his people. Despite this difference, sacrifice was nevertheless a crucial part of the Jewish religious system. Like the African worldview, it served to bridge the distance between God and mankind. Understanding the African worldview is useful for engaging with the text before us.

A second useful parallel is the obvious resemblance between the requirements for sacrifices in ATR and those spelt out in the law of Moses. The general principles undergirding the kind of sacrifice related to its source (from an honorable person), its colour (uniform) and its quality (perfect in every respect with no deformities whatsoever). Not only were the kinds of animals offered in both cases almost identical (*cf.* Lv 4:3, 23, 28, Lev 4:32), the perfection of the animal was paramount (*cf.* Dt 17:1; Lv 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18; 6:6; 9:2, 3). While the girl in the story conforms to the requirements for a sacrifice, the story has a surprising twist because human sacrifice was not common amongst the Gikuyu. However, in some cultures “it was sometimes practiced in circumstances of extreme need. ... the thinking was that it would be worth sacrificing one human life to save many from dying.” The death of one on behalf of the many is again another bridge that helps us view this text in perspective.

However, certain aspects of the worldview represented here must be confronted. We see a retribution theology being played out. In the Gikuyu culture, angering God or the ancestors by doing or saying things that would cause a rift in the family or community fellowship was bound to invoke their wrath and their swift judgment in the form of disease and other natural catastrophes. Kenyatta calls this the law of give and take. The story of Wanjiru reveals this transactional relationship clearly. Only sacrifice can restore the relationship. Sacrifice in Africa therefore had a propitiatory function. While other texts may more closely parallel this function, this is the most significant difference between the story and the

text before us.

A second difference has to do with the purpose of sacrifice. Sacrifice in Africa was never about sin as understood biblically. The Old Testament idea that we needed to offer sacrifices to acknowledge our sinful nature as opposed to God's holy nature was foreign to Africans. Sin in Africa was relational and involved a breakdown of relationships. Mbiti (date:page) explains that the purpose of sacrifice can be understood in terms of the maintenance of the ontological balance between God and man, the spirits and man, the departed and the living. 17 In the text under analysis, Jesus' sacrifice is intended as an atonement for sin. This is an essential point of difference between the African and the biblical worldview. While the differences in purpose must be kept in mind, this is nevertheless a useful point of entry into the biblical text as we recognize that Jesus' sacrifice is intended to restore the relationship between God and mankind.

A third difference relates to the anthropocentric nature of worship. Rather than extol the greatness and goodness of God, worship was utilitarian. This means that sacrifice was, in essence, self-serving. While this kind of sacrificial system may not be as prominent in modern Africa, the attitude behind it continues to dominate the lives of many believers. The conversation between Jesus and God reflects that rather than serving only the one sacrificing, there is a mutuality between the Father and Son, meaning that both receive glory through one act.

This story therefore orientate us to the text in significant ways. The parallels align us more closely with Jesus' discourse and the differences alert us to potential ways in which we might read wrong meaning into the text.

*Leg 2: Theological context:*

While the African approach is holistic, the spiritual dimension of life is more often than not a factor in an African's interaction with the realities around him/her. This implies that in Africa, biblical hermeneutics is inseparable from theological reflection, as the emphasis is generally to address contextual realities within our society. Because of this orientation to life, an understanding of the text's biblical-theological emphases provides the foundation for the reader, orienting his/her approach to the interpretation of the text and determining the theological boundaries within which meaning may be sought.

### *Sacrifice*

Even though this text does not specifically mention the word “sacrifice,” the idea runs like a thread in the background. The listener is constantly aware that John is alluding to Christ’s impending sacrificial death on the cross. While the extensive theological debate surrounding the doctrine of the atonement is beyond the scope of this paper, a few remarks are necessary to establish the theological context of the text.

In the Old Testament, sacrifice and covenant are integrated. God has ordered a personal and active relationship between Himself and His people that is actualized in the sacrificial order of the Old Testament. Through the sacrificial system, God seeks to reconcile people to himself. Behm states, “Sacrifice, whether it be the gift of man to God, the expression of spiritual fellowship between God and man, or a means of atonement, is always orientated to the presence of God in grace and judgement.” (date:page) The book of Leviticus provides us with a background on the nature of sacrifice. Leviticus 16, in particular, illuminates our text. Here the concept of the sin offering and the scapegoat emphasizes the substitutionary nature of sacrifice. While the term scapegoat has been disputed, the understanding of the passage is this: “the releasing of the goat indicated that the sins of the Israelites had been removed never to visit them again.” In the Gospel of John, the substitutionary nature of Christ’s sacrifice is taken for granted in texts such as 1:29 and in the passion narrative (*ch.* 19) which makes extensive use of Isaiah 53. Viewing the text above in this light emphasizes the substitutionary and sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death.

### *Leg 3: Literary context:*

The third leg is the literary context. It defines the boundaries of meaning. Here one identifies the genre, literary techniques, language (including lexical and syntactical issues) and the progression of the text as it unfolds, as well as in relation to surrounding texts. Because the text under analysis is narrative, certain additional rules apply from African literature.

**Genre:** The recognition of genre is crucial because literary genre determines the rules for reading a text thus functioning as a vital interpretive device in the hermeneutical process. The Fourth Gospel, in general, provides us with challenges in isolating its genre, not least of which are due to its similarities to Greco-Roman ‘lives’ or Bioi. However, because the ‘life’ of Jesus is set in the broader context of Israel’s history, it has an undisputed salvation-historical dimension. Because of this, the genre of this Gospel

may be understood as historical narrative with a theological-biographical character. This text falls into this category as well.

**Literary techniques:** African stories exist in two distinct but interconnected “worlds” - the world of the agents of communication and the world of the story. These provide us with an interpretive key.

*The world of the agents of communication:*

The agents of communication include the narrator and the listener. In Biblical narratives, the narrator is usually the same as the author. Following the classic approach initially proposed by Westcott, it is likely that the author was a Jew, of Palestinian origin, an eyewitness, an apostle, the beloved disciple, John, the son of Zebedee. It is also likely that he was known to his readers and served as a guarantor of the oral tradition that stemmed from Jesus’ ministry. Narrative authority can be seen in the way the story unfolds.

The listener is also usually the same as the original readers in written biblical narratives. The *sitz im leben Jesu* and the *sitz im leben der kirche* must be considered here. Scholars have disagreed as to whether the original readers were Jews or Gentiles. The narrator’s emphasis on the new temple, conflict with synagogues (16:2), and emphasis on Pharisees suggests that “their opposition is somehow related to the opponents his readers face in their own communities.”<sup>x</sup> This suggests a primarily Jewish audience.

*The world of the story:*

**The Story:** Regarding literary flow, the larger section in which this text is found includes several signs that validate Jesus’ messiahship. Coming at the end of this section as it does, this text also demonstrates the Jews’ increasing unbelief even in the face of these signs.

**Plot:** The plot that drives this entire section is the conflict between belief and unbelief in the face of Jesus’ signs. While there are no signs in this discourse, the narrator puts together certain events and conversations that demonstrate that the climax of this plot is Jesus’ death. Setting: The story’s setting is the Passover (*cf.* 11:55). The literary context preceding this discourse reveals that a feast was nearing. The narrator’s presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the symbolism inherent in the Jewish cultus and sacrificial system provides the backdrop to this text.

**Literary devices:** The narrator uses several literary/narratorial and structural devices to propel the plot forward. These include dialogue with very little narration, which allows Jesus to express himself in his own words thus revealing his ideological mentality. It also slows down narrative time, alerting the listeners that this section is important. Dialogue is also a device that the narrator uses to develop Jesus' character.

**Characterization:** The main characters are Jesus and the crowd.

*Analysis of the story:*

That death is the subject is clear from Jesus' statements a few verses before. The narrator reports Jesus as saying, *Ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα ἵνα δοξασθῇ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* (The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, cf. 12:23). This language that links *ὥρα* with *δοξασθῇ* in a purpose clause is significant. The Johannine presentation of the hour of Jesus' death is typically with reference to glorification. The metaphorical language of verse 24 further confirms that death is the subject. Jesus' death during Passover week firmly establishes Him as the fulfilment and "the prototype of the Jewish Passover." The assured and sacrificial nature of his death is therefore not in question. We have noted the parallels to sacrificial death in the story above. These verses therefore set the stage for the conversation that follows.

Beginning with the temporal marker *νῦν* (v. 27), the narrator begins to focus the readers on Jesus' current predicament as he contemplates his impending death. Although the Gospel of John does not have a Gethsemane scene, what follows closely corresponds to it. It is even likely, given the late dating of this Gospel, that the author knew and had reflected on the Synoptic account. Jesus' anguish is apparent with *τετάρρακται* expressing "revulsion, horror, anxiety, agitation." Is there a contradiction in the way that Jesus expresses his thoughts about his impending death? Is it glorification? Or is it anguish and dread? Jesus' anguish is reminiscent of the genre of lament in some psalms (e.g. Ps 6:3; 42:5, 11) and the book of Lamentations "that vents grief and pain while yet looking to God in hope." Moreover, the literary style of this Gospel frequently includes dualisms, and this is no exception. Through his words, the narrator allows Jesus to draw the listeners vividly into the tension of his experience – it is both glorification and anguish. As Ridderbos (date:page) remarks, "The duality in Jesus' approaching death ... comes strongly to the fore: Jesus' death

already belongs to his glorification, but is also the cause of his agitation.”

Throughout the Gospel, the narrator has been consistently developing Jesus’ character. The listeners are thus very much aware of his ideological mentality. Obedience to the Father has been his top priority (cf. 4:32). The question that follows Jesus’ expression of anguish is therefore surprising because Jesus’ very character appears to be at stake. Scholars have speculated as to whether His question (*καὶ τί εἶπω; πᾶτερ, σῶσόν με ἐκ τῆς ὥρας ταύτης*. (and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? 12:27) is genuine or rhetorical. If rhetorical, the petition is presented only to be dismissed. The deliberative subjunctive (*εἶπω*) seems to lend support to the view that it is indeed a rhetorical question. Moreover, given the consistency of Jesus’ character throughout the narrative, it is unlikely that at this point he would entertain a path that does not lead to death. Indeed, the rhetorical nature of the question does not minimise the reality of his anguish. It cannot therefore be a genuine question. In this case, its function is to introduce the following statement – Jesus’ acceptance of his divine mission. The narrator uses this literary device to reveal an important aspect of Jesus’ character. This outward display of inner turmoil reveals that for Jesus, obedience and sacrifice are inextricably intertwined.

The next statement clarifies this. Having asked the question, Jesus immediately turns the focus back on God with the statement *πᾶτερ, δόξασόν σου τὸ ὄνομα* ? need to continue (Father, glorify your name; 12:28). To glorify His Father’s name is “to make the Father’s character visibly evident,” because glory is the manifestation of the Father’s character, of who he is. The characteristically Johannine emphasis on glorification is once again brought to the fore by the threefold repetition of the verb *δοξάζω*, first as an imperative, and then in the aorist and future tenses. Although the reading *σου τὸ ὄνομα* is in all the early and most of the later witnesses, some manuscripts read *μου τὸ ὄνομα* or *σου τὸν υἱόν*, language that is probably influenced by Jesus’ high priestly prayer in 17:1. Given the development of Jesus’ character thus far, the probability for the *σου* being the most likely reading is high. At the same time, the close relationship between the Father and the Son must also be considered. When the Father is glorified, so is the Son and vice versa. For Jesus to pray this prayer, therefore, is to underscore this. One cannot discount that this is an instance of intentional ambiguity or “semantic density.”

The narrator now gives God a voice as he responds to Jesus with the words

*Καὶ ἐδόξασα καὶ πάλιν δοξάσω* (I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again; 12:28). The entrance of God into the conversation alerts us to the fact that this is a significant moment and that we should pay attention. The aorist in this case is typically translated with a perfect force – it is a public acknowledgement of the entirety of Jesus’ earthly activity. The future tense here likely refers to the Cross. The statement demonstrates that the Father is with him and authenticates all he does. Here again we see the twin sides of obedience and sacrifice. God honours Jesus’ impending sacrifice based on a life lived in obedience, but the obedient life was always headed toward sacrifice.

This sound is heard by all present but interpreted in different ways. This authentication may have had a different significance than expected. The crowd was expecting a nationalistic messiah who would deliver them from Roman domination and likely took this “as a sign of God’s approval of Jesus leading them against the Romans.”<sup>X36</sup> Indeed, just a few days prior, they had welcomed Jesus into the city with much pomp. As is characteristic of this Gospel, the plot is impelled forward by misunderstandings. The crowd expected a physical deliverer. God gave them a spiritual one, but they did not understand it.

Beginning again with the temporal marker *νῦν*, the plot continues to move forward. Jesus’ obedience through his sacrificial death is not only anguish for him and glorification (of both him and the Father?), but also ushers in two things: The first is judgement of the world because of unbelief in Him. The second is Satan’s dethronement, the removal of the prince who rules over this world (note the genitive of subordination *τοῦ κόσμου*; 12:31). Again, the literary device of dualism, expressed in an ‘already-not yet’ eschatology comes to the fore. As Jobes (date:page) points out,

The exultation of Jesus on the cross inaugurates a new world order where God’s judgement has been fully executed and where there is no place for the reign of evil. Although the new world has been inaugurated in this age, it will be fully realized only by the promised new heavens and new earth (Is 65:17; Rv 21:1).

Reverting to metaphorical language, Jesus begins to definitively connect the entire discourse with the declaration *Κἀγὼ ἐὰν ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς, πάντας ἐλκύσω πρὸς ἐμαυτόν*. (And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself; 12:32). This ‘lifted up’ terminology has a

two-fold meaning: Both Jesus' death on the cross and his ascent back to heaven. In the Jewish worldview, death by crucifixion was a shame and a curse. From a Roman perspective, it was the ultimate punishment possible and was reserved for the worst criminals. This shared worldview is in the minds of the original hearers of the text. God takes this symbol of shame and punishment, and through the obedience of his son, radically transforms it, elevating it to a symbol of glory that "dethrones Satan and inaugurates the rule of Christ."

Jesus' death has the benefit of securing salvation for all mankind. Indeed, this is confirmed by the narrator in his comment of 12:38, which is an Old Testament citation from Isaiah 53:1, the Fourth Servant Song. This song shows how God is willing to use an innocent death to accomplish peace and healing for the community. However, "all" (*πάντας*) in this text does not indicate a universalist salvation. Rather, it reflects that there is no limit to Jesus' saving power, except the limit of unbelief. Set in this salvific context, the lifting up of Jesus breaks all ethnic barriers. Therefore, In this statement, the Greeks have the answer they seek.

Up until this point, the narrator has not really let us in on what the crowd has to say. Now, he allows them to express themselves in their own words, thus confirming their erroneous theological mentality. While they doubtless expected that the messiah would obey God, a sacrificial death is not part of their theological construct. Their understanding of messianic prophecies from the Law led them to the conclusion that Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah if he was going to face death. After all, the Messiah was expected to remain forever (Ps 11:4; Is 9:7; Ezk 37:25; Dn 2:44; 7:14). The notion of a messiah such as the one Jesus describes (here Son of Man is nearly synonymous with Messiah, *cf.* 3:14) is therefore foreign to them. But, as Jobes (date:page) points out, "in fact, the messianic prophecy found in the Law is transposed to its proper sphere—the eternal reign of the messiah as Son of God, not simply as king of geopolitical Jerusalem."

We would therefore expect that at this point, Jesus would answer the crowd's question directly, thus correcting their wrong theological mentality. Instead, He reverts to the contrasting imagery of light and darkness. Light refers to Jesus (*cf.* 1:9) and the realm in which God reigns (some supporting verses). This is yet another affirmation that salvation comes only through Him. Darkness, on the other hand, is reflective of the world of men who live in rebellion to God. Those who choose to remain

in darkness have only one end – judgement (verses). The conflict between belief and unbelief is thus brought full circle. For the crowd, whose messianic expectations centered on an earthly kingship that would never end, this might have seemed like a “non-answer.” And indeed, having said this, the narrator tells us that Jesus hid Himself from the crowd.

This text reveals that a life of obedience to the Father, no matter how costly, characterizes Jesus’ life. This obedience leads to the acceptance of a sacrificial death on the cross. The benefits of his death encompass glorification (of both Father and Son?), authentication of the Son, dethronement of the prince of peace, and the taking away sin resulting in salvation and reconciliation for all humanity. The fulfilment motif that runs like a thread through this text means that, for Jesus, sacrifice is the culmination of obedience.

*Leg 4: Historical and Cultural context*

In addition to theological and literary concerns, Africans try to make sense of their lives in relation to the historical and cultural contexts in which events occur. This means that “behind the text” issues provide crucial data in the interpretive process. If authorial intent and determinacy of meaning is to be taken seriously, we must respect the alterity or “otherness” of the text.

*Leg 4: Historical and Cultural context (why is this here ...same as above)*

The historical and cultural contexts enhance the meaning of the text above. The Passover feast finds its genesis in the Exodus account (Exod 12:1-28). The lack of blemish of the Passover lamb represented not only the sacredness of its intended purpose. Still, it was also reflective of the moral integrity of the person represented by the sacrifice. The use of a hyssop brush to smear the blood was to be regarded as an act of expiation (v. 22) (*cf.* Lv.14:49ff; Nm 19:18, 19).<sup>X</sup> We understand from this that the Passover lamb had a sacred and expiatory function and its death substituted for the death of the Israelite first-borns. It is in this context that Jesus is presented.

What about the mistaken notion of a nationalistic messiah who would not die but rather liberate the Jews from Roman domination? The titles ascribed to Jesus by the crowd during his triumphal entry (*cf.* Zch 9:9; Jn 6:14-15), reveal that this is a case of mistaken nationalism. Perhaps Jesus’ act of sitting on the donkey as he entered the city only confirmed the image

and expressed his willingness to become the King of Israel. Consequently, this act is understandably misinterpreted by the crowd. However, what the narrator is attempting to do with this quotation from Zechariah, is to communicate that Jesus is the Messiah who comes to redeem his people and that access to God through Jesus is unhindered.

### *The Seat*

These four legs together reveal the probable meaning as it was intended for the original listeners. The seat is where we derive significance. The important feature of meaning as distinct from significance is that meaning (as “boundaries of meaning”) is the determinate representation of a text for an interpreter. On the other hand, significance is the application to the listener’s context expressed in terms that we understand in our own African society. This last step only confirms the tentative application of the text as uncovered in the legs above. Here one must separate the message from the cultural form in which it is communicated and distinguish between trans-contextual and culture-bound truths.

While God would never require us to die this kind of sacrificial death, the text emphasizes a general principle – obedience honours God. Our heart attitude is more important to him than anything we could offer up as a “sacrificial gift.” How do we reflect this principle in our African context? Because of our African worldview, it is easy to drift into a transactional and self-serving relationship with God. Instead, our motive for obeying God in every sphere of life, must be rooted in a genuine heart desire to glorify God.

Second, as a general principle, salvation is always based on our acceptance of Christ and his redemptive work. While sin in Africa has traditionally been understood as the relational breakdown between the physical and the spiritual realms, it is more than that. Sin, at least in this text, is the failure to believe in Christ, salvation is more than just a restoration of the ontological balance between the spiritual and the physical realms, and God does not save us through our sacrifices or our right actions. We must depend on Christ’s finished work of reconciling man and God through belief in him. A corollary application of reconciliation relates particularly to the African context. We are co-reconcilers with God and Christ.

## **4. Conclusion**

This paper set out to show that the question “Is obedience better than

sacrifice” within the context of the theme “Fullness of life in John,” leads us to a false dilemma when considering Christ. In general, in both Old Testament and New Testament, sacrifice without genuine obedience is abhorrent to God. The intercultural hermeneutic that was used provided useful parallels and significant differences for engaging with the text of John 12:27-36. The text, set as it is within the context of the Passover feast, visibly demonstrated the relationship between obedience and sacrifice in Jesus’ life and invalidated the question. As the fulfilment of the Jewish cultus and the sacrificial system, sacrifice for Jesus is the culmination of obedience. The conclusive statement is therefore, “Both obedience and sacrifice.” This is the paradigm that ought to shape our lives.

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### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **A Theological Reflection on How the ‘Wisdom of God’ Translates into a Fulfilled Christian Life (James 1:1-8)**

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### **Abstract**

*There is a unique opportunity for the ‘justified’ person, like James the Just and the diaspora (Ja 1:1), to access the wisdom of God to help achieve God’s purposes for life. This is because the God of the Bible has chosen to fellowship with His Creation and not remain a distant and distinct ‘other’. One question that needs to be clarified among several is how ‘wisdom’ is an attribute of God or more than that?*

*God is all-wise, “the only wise God” (Rm 16:27), within Himself, and yet chooses to share that wisdom with those who will so believe as to “ask God for wisdom” (Ja 1:5). Certain results are generously guaranteed to achieve God’s desired τελειον for our lives. It is not a carte blanche’ request and receive’ anything you wish (Ja 1:5; 4:3) indulgent approach. James reflects closely but not exactly on the words of Jesus (Ja 1:6; Jn 14:14). This follows in the tradition of applying knowledge gained from an authoritative figure.*

*The wisdom gained from God is far more than the knowledge of God. Wisdom includes the application of life in view with a specific overall purpose. Jesus Himself is God’s wisdom revealed (1 Cor 1:30). He brings the wisdom of God from possible abstraction to life itself on earth amidst all the challenges. His life revealed the wisdom of God in terms of how He found meaning in suffering and depended entirely on the Father. This wisdom of God, which we often lack (Ja 1:5), is available from God for those who are single-mindedly determined to live meaningful lives in any and every circumstance (Ja 1:6-8).*

### **1. Introduction**

In approaching the subject of the ‘attributes of God’ there is some discussion in the discipline of biblical and systematic theology. Taking it a step further in isolating the one attribute under discussion within this article – namely the ‘wisdom of God’ – there is an even further interesting comment. Erickson (2013:234) does not list wisdom under his heading of the “Attributes of Greatness” nor does he list it under the “Attributes

of Goodness” (2013:255). Rather he seems to see ‘wisdom’ as more encompassing: “A further factor, in the light of this knowledge, is God’s wisdom. By this is meant that God acts in the light of all the facts and of correct values. Knowing all things, God knows what is good” (2013:246).

On the other hand, Grudem and many others list the ‘wisdom of God’ as one of the biblical attributes. In his list of God’s Attributes (1994:185), he places ‘wisdom’ under the heading of “Mental Attributes” following “Knowledge” and preceding “Truthfulness.” He describes God’s wisdom similarly to Erickson, “God’s wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the means to those goals” (1994:193). Grudem mentions something pertinent to this article, namely: “God’s wisdom is, of course, in part communicable to us. We can ask God confidently for wisdom when we need it, for he promises in his Word, ‘If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given to him’ James1:5” (1994:194).

This research plans to be a theological reflection on how the ‘wisdom of God’ translates meaningfully into the life of a Believer. Vondey (2012:136) summarises the issue in the following words: “The Hebrew understanding of wisdom intimately linked behaviour with the fear of the Lord (Prv 9:10).” My primary text is James 1:1-8 (This will be later linked to 3:13-4:10) which is found in one of the New Testament books of wisdom – which is part of the wider wisdom literature of the Bible. The God of wisdom has chosen to engage with us wisely and further to enable us to enjoy His wisdom. I’ve chosen to begin with James, someone who experienced this for himself and was willing to share it with others.

## **2. James experienced ‘the wisdom of God’ in a new way together with the *διασπορα* (Ja 1:1)**

Though there is some debate regarding the identity of James, the author of the letter bearing his name, there is enough evidence to accept that this person is James the brother of Jesus. James was a Jewish Judaizer and did not initially ‘believe’ in Jesus as the messianic Saviour, “For even his own brothers did not believe in him” (Jn 7:5 NIV 2011). In Mathew 13:55, James heads the list of brothers. What is very significant is that after His resurrection, Jesus chose to reveal Himself to James: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (1 Cor 15:7-8). This encounter with the resurrected Christ seems to have been the defining moment in James’s

life of faith and leadership in the Church at Jerusalem.

Holtz says of James, “He quickly attained to a prominent position in the community (Gl 1:19; 2:9; Ac 12:17; 15:13) and ultimately became the leader in Jerusalem (Gl 2:12; Ac 21:18) (2003:6). The apostle Paul called him a “pillar” (Gl 2:9) and found it necessary to visit James after his conversion and call to ministry towards the Gentiles (Gl 1:19). I am well aware of a more recent trend within biblical scholarship that would question this identity of James, the claimed author of the letter. One example is Strecker, who says: “Although the author calls himself James (Ja 1:1), several factors argue against this claim” (2003:6). I am not convinced that the main point here to dispute James’s authenticity, being the quality of Greek used, is a valid one. This assumes that James could not have grown in his knowledge of Greek over time. Everybody grows in their language and writing ability over time.

Then there is another school of thought, which sees James’s letter as pseudo-epigraphical and authored by someone else in the second century. Nienhuis sometimes argues convincingly and bases this view on a late recognition and mention of the letter. “Though the authenticity of the letter of James was generally taken for granted by many church leaders after Augustine, we have seen that several noteworthy patristic figures recorded for posterity their doubts about the document” (2007:99). The key to the argument is that the first evidence of a patristic actually mentioning the letter is in the writings of Origen (185-254 CE). This is not to say that the letter didn’t exist before this – but it is that the first known mention of the letter of ‘James’ is by Origen. For example, there are instances like that of the fish. The Coelacanth fish was regarded by researchers as extinct and used as an example of evolutionary speculation. There was no mention of them for millennia. Then, on the 21st December 1938, a fishing trawler caught a Coelacanth in its fishing nets off the East London coast. Since then further research was conducted, and Coelacanths were found in the very deep waters of Madagascar. History books have had to be revised, and the theory of evolution has been challenged regarding this unusual fish.

The letter of James has struggled to hold its place within the Canon of Scripture together with some of the General Epistles to have the same early ‘apostolic’ credibility as the other normally accepted canonical books of the New Testament. Questions were again asked during the

Scripture debates during the Reformation. However, the letter of James has stood the test of time, and most – especially in the circle of Evangelical scholarship accept that the ‘original autograph’ would have come from the pen or dictation of James, the first leading pastor in Jerusalem. The letter proves ‘inspired’ to its hearers when it is read and preached. Its context of writing fits an early date, and its message fits the theological scenario of the New Testament.

“James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. Greetings” (Ja 1:1). James – the author, claims to be a believer in the “Lord Jesus Christ”, one of the most expansive titles given throughout the New Testament. He also provides evidence in the letter to be in a position of authority to write to the *διασπορα* of messianic Jewish believers. Ac 8:1 gives evidence of the commencement of this dispersion: “And Saul approved of their killing them. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”

Strecker rightly says: “The purpose of the Epistle of James is to give authoritative ethical instruction to the new Israel of the dispersion and to summon believers to a concrete realisation of the Christian life” (2003:6). Jewish people were accustomed to the wisdom literature of the Bible and the wisdom teaching of their rabbis. As Christians, they needed to step up to their new context – how to live now that they had believed in Jesus and planned to follow Him. Matthew 28:20 gives something of the idea: “Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.” This points to the difference between the Knowledge of God and the Wisdom of God. Wisdom in the present dispensation is knowledge applied in the newly found Jesus tradition. This wisdom enables Christians to live productive, meaningful lives within any context.

### **3. The wisdom of God translated from eternity to time**

While Jesus embodies the wisdom of God in the Word becoming flesh (Jn 1:14), God’s wisdom had formerly been communicated from eternity to time within the Old Testament biblical wisdom literature. Proverbs 1:1-3 says, by way of example: “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behaviour, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge

and discretion to the young – .” The entire book of Proverbs fulfilled this role and continues to do so with even greater effect if supplemented with the wisdom of Jesus Christ.

In turn, a key difference found in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit’s role in the believer’s life, whereby He empowers the application of knowledge and wisdom in the recipient, thereby enabling supernatural living through faith. Ultimately, the wisdom of God is revealed through Christ and the spread of His Gospel.

### *3.1 God is wisdom (Ja 1:1; Rm 16:27)*

The letter of James is part of the wisdom literature of the New Testament (Bauckham, 2003:1483). I want to set the wider New Testament scenario by using two quotations from the Apostle Paul, where wisdom is more comprehensive in scope. “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Rm 11:33). Reumann eloquently explains: “Three divine attributes are lifted up: riches (9:23; 10:12; 11:12), wisdom (hidden but at work in Christ, see on 10:5-10), and knowledge (*cf.* 8:29; 11:2)” (2003:1304). Then Paul ends his Roman letter by singling out ‘wisdom’, “to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Rm 16:27). God is wisdom. God has no equal in this respect. In referring to the entire doxology of verses 25-27 and ending with verse 27, Reumann very aptly says that this is a “doxology (“glory to ....,” v.27) about God, not a benediction from Christ” (2003:1312).

When James 1:1 says: “James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations”, he is planning to represent the wisdom of God – through the paradigm revealed in Jesus Christ – and that which superseded his former tradition of Judaizer wisdom. As a believer and leader of the Jerusalem Church, James saw fit to communicate this wisdom of God’s knowledge applied to life – to all those who were scattered into very challenging, unfamiliar living conditions. Grudem describes how James probably thought: “God is infinitely wise and we are not, and it pleases him when we have faith to trust his wisdom even when we do not understand what he is doing” (1994:194-195).

From a technical perspective, Bauckham (2003:1484) explains how James communicates this wisdom of God in this circular letter. Commenting on the wisdom tradition, he says: “Their most striking formal characteristic is

the short aphorism (of which there are various types: proverbial maxims, similitudes, admonitions, and others)". On the one hand, Bauckham helps in the reading of the letter of James. "In order to read James correctly, it is important to recognise the dominant role of aphorisms." On the other hand, it is equally important to note that the letter is not just a collection of aphorisms. There is a purpose and a structure.

James does not use a typical letter style, using an argument to persuade the reader from one point to another. The important point to note in reading James is that his method is to "invite the reader to pause and ponder" (Bauckham, 2003:1484). See how verse 2 approaches the very difficult subject of suffering: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds." This is another option for possible feelings of pain, betrayal and disappointment. Is there another way of looking at things? Yes, there is.

James crafts the wisdom teaching of Jesus (e.g. Sermon on the mount) – not by directly quoting Jesus (Dunn, 2003:183) – but by alluding to Jesus's teaching. James has, "made the wisdom of Jesus his own and re-expresses it in new formulations of his own" (Bauckham, 2003:1484). So, the letter remains both Jewish in character and Christian in application. The Jewish Christian diaspora needed help quickly living within a primarily international Gentile context (Matt 28:19-20). We will now proceed to explore a sampling of this in James 1:2-8. The first example is 'wisdom amidst trials (vss. 2-4) followed by the 'process of acquiring God's wisdom' (vss. 5-8).

### *3.2 Wisdom amidst trials (Ja 1:2-4)*

This is the first aphorism which is very significant; it sets the tone for the entire book. The subject of this first aphorism is the correct handling of trials and how this can point you in the right direction and help you achieve your destination. The readers are all believers in general – which can also translate to anyone at any time – both then and any time in the future. Bauckham confirms this when he says: "Sooner or later any Christian community will encounter adversities of some kind, and James's advice applies to any such circumstance" (2003:1484). Hebrews 10:33-34 could be the same audience James has in mind: "Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison, and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew

that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.” Significantly, the word *χαρὰς* (joyful) is used here much like it is used in James 1:2.

The goal of this first aphorism; as is the goal of the entire letter – is *τελειον* (1:4; 1:17; 1:25; 2:8; 2:22; 3:2). This word includes one’s future (eschatology), wholeness (sanctification), integrity (ethics) and obedience (discipleship – see 1:8; 1:22-25; 2:8-12; 4:8). Ladd so wisely says: “Christians are subject both to temptations to sin of many sorts and to the pressure of trials (1:2) that may cause them to wander from the faith (5:19); yet they look forward to the Parousia of Christ when they will inherit the Kingdom of God (2:5) and enter into eternal life (1:12)” (1997:638). Uttley (2014:2) clarifies: “James often looks towards the culmination of the Christian hope (*cf.* Ja 1:8-9; 12; 5:7-8).”

So, the key elements of being a Christian are clearly linked together, namely joy (and not necessarily happiness), faith (trust in God and not just positive thinking), endurance (which trusts the words of wisdom), and a fruitful God honouring future. Vondey (2012:138) gives some technical insight into the text here: “The progressive texture of a text is formed by the sequences, or progressions, of words and phrases.” Hebrews 11:39-40 confirms these sentiments: “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they actually be made perfect.” The Greek word here is *τελειωθωσιν*. No Christian is excluded from the challenges of life and faith, though the intensity may differ at times for some. In the same way, no Christian will be excluded or excused from the final day of the Lord when faith becomes sight (1 Jn 3:2).

### *3.3 The process of acquiring God’s wisdom (Ja 1:5-8)*

These verses form the second aphorism – which is a natural consequence of the first. It answers the question of how one can be in the position of “not lacking anything.” Uttley (2014:2) explains: “There is a word play between James 1:4c and 5a.” James answers this question by reflecting on the teaching of Jesus found in Luke 11:9 and Matthew 7:7 (Dunn, 2003:182). The words of James 1:5 are again open-ended, inviting “anyone” who is willing to admit their lack of wisdom. Though this opens the door to all, it is the repentant Believer who more easily admits to this need. “You should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

Luke 11:9 says: “So I say to you: Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Matthew 7:8 explains: “For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Grudem (1994:194) says that it’s a matter of asking and obeying.

There is already a comprehensive database of biblical wisdom in the book of Proverbs alone (see Pr 1:1-7). After that, there are several books of Scripture listed under Wisdom literature as well as many chapters and verses that give wisdom to the reader: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11). Bauckham (2003:1484) goes further to tell of the even wider extent of wisdom literature that people could readily draw on: “Represented especially by Proverbs, Sirach, the wisdom texts from Qumran (1Q26, 4Q184-185, 298, 415-18, 420-21, 423, 424, 525), and Pseud-Phocylides.”

But its *more than* dutiful legalistic obedience to instructions that James and the Jewish Believers were so accustomed to. James is talking about the information of wisdom, further inspired by the Holy Spirit, leading to godly implementation. Single-minded implementation comes from a faith in God that is unwavering. For example, when the Church gave guidelines after the day of Pentecost for the qualities desired to be in the new group of people who would assist the Hellenistic widows to receive their equal portion in the daily distribution equally, Acts 6:3 says that they should be people, “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom (of God).”

James is pointing the diaspora towards their *τελειος*, “single-minded” and “stable” in all that they do. “Furthermore, James contrasted what God gives with what believers receive (or in this instance, what those who doubt will not receive). James urged his listeners not only to ask God in faith for that wisdom, but also not to doubt that they will receive wisdom from God” (Vondey, 2012;139). This leads this research article to a summation.

#### **4. Summation and application (Ja 3:13-4:10)**

Vondey (2012:138) summarises the message of James 1:1-8 in the following way: “The recipients of James’s letter should have joy in spite of trials. The trials are tests of faith, which eventually produce patience, producing a perfect or complete character.” The wisdom of God exists within God; it can be seen in the actions of God, and it can be read about in the Word

of God. Yet it is the pleasure of God to share His wisdom with us so that we can share in its goals and truthfulness. In this summation section, my plan is to follow from these initial verses to explore the parallel passage of James 3:13-4:10. McCartney helps us here: “James here in the second part of James 3 gives expression to the same thing that Paul addresses in 1 Cor 1-3: God’s wisdom( in James’s terms, ‘wisdom from above’) can look like foolishness to the world, but God’s ‘foolishness’ turns out to be mightier than human wisdom (in James’s terms, “earthly wisdom”))” (2009:197).

#### *4.1. Contrasting God’s wisdom with the world (Jas 3:13-18)*

James 3:17 gives a seven-fold (perfection) summation of God’s wisdom as opposed to that commonly found in the world: “But wisdom the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” Moo explains: “James has described what the wisdom from above is not (v.15); now he tells us what it is, with a series of seven adjectives. Or, more properly, he tells us what effects divine wisdom should produce – for almost all of these adjectives describe what wisdom does rather than what it is” (1985:135).

James 3:14 outlines the contrast: “But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.” This development in James’s thinking seems to be more pointed to those among the diaspora who should have known better – the teachers! (see also Ja 3:1-2). “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (3:13). James 3:16 seems to continue pointing in this direction: “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil practice.” Moo says: “‘Confusion’, ‘disorder’ and ‘tumults’ will inevitably break out in the church where Christians, especially leaders, are more interested in pursuing their own ambitions or partisan causes than the edification of the body as a whole” (1985:134).

James had seen this first-hand at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) where ‘Judaizer’ Christian leaders were pitted against Peter, Paul and Barnabas who had personally witnessed the amazing fruit of conversions, signs and wonders among the Gentiles. James became the final presiding officer to bring the Council to some measure of biblical missional order: “The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles

through them. When they finished, James spoke up. 'Brothers', he said, 'Listen to me.'" (Ac 15:12-13).

James had set the pace of peace and openness to God's missional plan and purpose at the Jerusalem Council: "The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written" (Ac 15:15). He now expects leaders and teachers within the diaspora to do the same. "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that those who teach will be judged more strictly" (Ja 3:1). The diaspora in general needed teachers who were like the Lord Jesus Christ in that they practised what they preached. John 1:14 explains: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." James expected more than knowledge of the Gospel and the conclusions reached at the Jerusalem Council. He expected teachers with transformed lives to exemplify the Gospel way within foreign territories.

Vondey ends this section with the following helpful conclusion: "The narrative in 3:13-4:10 shows a progression from example of godly wisdom (3:13) to examples of examples of earthly wisdom (3:14-16) and back to godly wisdom (3:17-18), then on to the outcomes of earthly wisdom (4:1-6) and finally the outcomes of godly wisdom (4:7-10)" (2012:146). This first section or aphorism, as Bauckham better calls it, ends with verse 18, "Peacemakers who sow in peace reap the harvest of righteousness." This is the outcome James expects of all Christians anywhere in the world, especially among the diaspora Christians he was addressing, and more especially he expected this of leading teachers.

As a South African pastor, Buys puts a practical spin on all that has been said above: "In peace with God, we pass up opportunities to justify ourselves, to act in pride or fear and aggression is no longer our first response. We trust God to take care of us. Then, as far as it depends on us, we live in peace with others" (2015:116). With this wisdom, Christian pastors could be modelling this to the entire Church within our country – intending to earn a voice within the entire community.

#### *4.2. A call to intentional obedience (Jas 4:1-10)*

There is some thinking that this section could be a continuation of James 3:13-18, as McCartney (2009:205) comments. Yes, it is true that verse 1 does not begin with the expected vocative, *adeophio*. However, "...here

we may note that like other segments in James (2:14; 3:13), 4:1-10 begins with a rhetorical question and ends with summarising proverbial material, this time is a series of wisdom imperatives (4:7-10).” This micro shift is nevertheless significant because it calls those in teaching roles and, by implication, everyone else towards intentional obedience.

Chapter 4:1-2 outlines the problem more acutely, and in doing so takes us back to James 1:5 (see also Mt 7:7), where we are counselled to “ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” Verse 3, like chapter 3:13-18 reveals misguided intentions. Moo suggests correctly: “Why is this desire ‘to have’ frustrated? Because of a failure to pray properly. You do not have, because you do not ask. Oh yes, you ask, James admits, but your asking is done wrongly, with selfish motives – and it is for this reason that you do not receive” (1985:142). James contrasts “pleasures” with the purposes and plans of God. Jesus clarifies in John 14:13-14 on this point: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it.” Two guidelines are given. First, our prayer requests must glorify the Father in the Son. Second, to ask in the name of Jesus is to ask what Jesus would ask.

In verse 4, James allows his biological and theological ancestry to burst forth: “You adulterous people...” Moo confirms this: “This dependence on the Old Testament is clearly seen in James’s opening address of his readers” (1985:143). Jeremiah said, “As a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD” (Ja 3:20) This theme repeats itself repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, with acute focus on the imagery found in the prophet Hosea (e.g. 2:5; 2:7; 2:16; 2:20).

In verse 4, James now puts “the world” in conflict with our destinies (*telos*) and in contrast to our God-ordained lifestyles. 1 John 2:15-17 as a General Epistle could help here: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” Interestingly, James 4:4 uses *φιλία* (friendship) in terms of relating to the *κόσμος*, whereas John uses *αγαπω* (sacrificial commitment). Linking 1 John 2:17 to James’s overall message is important: “The world and its

desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

James 4:5 reinforces three key elements into an equation of God’s commitment and desire for our relationship with Him: 1. God is jealously (in the best sense of the word) committed to us. 2. God has breathed the breath of life into us as human beings. 3. God has given us His Holy Spirit to confirm His presence. Moo confirms something of the special nature of this verse as well as the difficulty in understanding it: “It is not clear whether James thinks of the spirit which he has made to dwell in us as the Holy Spirit given to believers (*cf.* NASB) or as God’s creative spirit by which he has invigorated mankind (Gn 2:7). In either case, the phrase reminds us that God has a claim on us by virtue of his work in our lives” (1985:146).

The final intentional call to obedience is given in verse 6. “But he gives us more grace” – in order that we humble ourselves before Him. This is an action demanded of all of us, especially the teachers and leaders of the diaspora. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (v. 7). Followed by verse 10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” There is a time and a place to be promoted in life, but this needs to be in the plan and will of God.

## **5. Conclusion**

James 4:11-12 is like an epilogue to the subject of the wisdom of God within the believer’s life. McCartney explains: “The brief subsequent paragraph (4:11-12) begins with a prohibition (like 3:1 and 2:1) and ends with a proverb also, though James has added a rhetorical question as an application to the end of the closing proverb in 4:12” (2009:205). James returns to his personal and pastoral demeanour with which he commenced the letter: “Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it” (4:11).

1. Changed lives are the key to a healthy Church and an effective mission strategy.
2. Changed attitudes is the key to relationships.
3. Changed values – from legalism to love – are the key to contentious issues.

4. Changed minds and hearts towards the relevance and authority of the Word of God is the key to staying the course (teleios).
5. Changed leaders must lead by practical example and not condescending theorising.

James 4:12 wraps up the entire matter in a single statement: “There is only one Law-giver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour” (4:12). It seems that within the Church verbal restraint had been lost (3:1-12). Uncontrolled denunciation was taking place (4:11-12). A worldly spirit had crept in (3:15; 4:1; 4:4). “This flirtation with the world must be seen to be incompatible with God’s desire to have his people’s whole-hearted allegiance (4:4-5)” (Moo, 1985:153). Paul sums it up in Colossians 2:20, “Since you died with Christ to the elemental forces of this world, why, as though as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules.” Further explanation is found in Colossians 2:23, “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

“In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”  
Colossians 2:3

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### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **Good News for the Poor: The Quest for Human Flourishing in the Psalms**

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### ***Abstract***

*The Hebrew Bible reflects a rich association of images and metaphors for human flourishing, not least in the book of Psalms. Beginning with some of these iconic images, the article then turns to focus on seven psalms. In each psalm there is the juxtaposition of two groups, namely the wicked or the powerful and a collection of their victims, namely the poor, widows, orphans and the afflicted. But what is most striking about these psalms is that the writer is making his appeal on behalf of the latter group rather than on behalf of himself. The Psalmist calls out to God to intervene in society and to make his presence known in the form of justice and mercy. The prayers are proleptic as the poet anticipates the actions of God in the re-ordering of our world to create a place where all the people of God can flourish. Key to this appeal, is the bestowal of honour and dignity by means of some anticipated action of God and his agents. The conclusion in this article is that it is the righteous people of God who are to be the vehicle of God’s gracious actions and of bearing the good news of an inclusive human flourishing.*

### **1. The Good Life in the Psalms**

The classic image of human flourishing or more colloquially “the good life” for the people of the Hebrew Bible is to be found in 1 Kings 4:25, which reads, “And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon” (ASV). One can imagine the scene of the farmers and their families, after a hard day’s work in the fields, resting in the dense shade of the fig tree and enjoying the fruit of the vine. Certainly, here is an idyllic pastoral scene and a model for the good life, which would continue for many centuries and other Biblical genres would contribute their own metaphorical images, specifically in the poetic writings. Brueggemann (1989) quite rightly demonstrates the unique way in which the poetry of the Bible, not least the book of Psalms, vividly conveys the mystery of God’s nature and presence.

For Psalms, metaphors for the image of the good life and of being in

the presence of God are linked. Initially, pastoral images predominate, like a tree planted near streams or canals of flowing water (Ps 1: 3), or conversely the green pastures and quiet waters of an idyllic resting place (Ps 23: 2). In later centuries, proximity to the mountain of the Lord in Zion would become the main element for visualising the good life. The Psalmist speaks of spending his whole life living in the house of the Lord (Ps 27:4) or like a bird, building his nest in the temple of God (Ps 84:2-4). The combination of proximity to God and the consequent sense of safety flow throughout the pages of the Psalter, giving birth to such unforgettable images as God our Rock and our fortress (Ps 18:2). Such poetic metaphors underline the sense of safety and security in God's presence.

The theological foundation for such images of the good life for the Psalmist is allegiance to the Mosaic covenant and to the laws found in the Torah. "His delight is in the law of the Lord" (Ps 1) and similar evocations ring through the book of Psalms. We might describe this as part of the summons to righteousness and to lives lived out in the framework of the law and covenant of God. To achieve this purpose, the Psalms sharply demarcate between the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous (*cf.* Ps 1). Ranged on the side of the righteous, is to be found a group of the vulnerable. These people are vulnerable because they have suffered adversity (widows and orphans) or been the victims of misfortune, either personal or social (the poor and afflicted). Their vulnerability marks them as people in need and so deserving of the mercy of God (*cf.* Ps 72 and 109). Indeed, they are also recipients of the good news of God's kingdom, according to Isaiah (61:1-2) and celebrated by Jesus in his Nazareth sermon (Lk 4:18-19). Not surprisingly, the plight of these people forms the basis for several prayers which will be the focus of attention in this paper.

## **2. Prayers on Behalf of the Poor and Oppressed**

The Psalms are a rich source of information about the poor and marginalised of ancient Israel, with a wide range of Hebrew words, rendered as the poor, including *ani* (2x) *ebyon* (3x) and *dal* (2x); the oppressed found 7 times (*daka* 3x, *ashaq* 3x, and *lachats* 1x) and the afflicted found 40 times (*ani* 25x, *anav* 5x and *anah* 10x), making an impressive total of 54 mentions in the Psalms. The references are scattered across several subsections in the whole book of Psalms. This paper will examine seven psalms which are worthy of attention, and which highlight an often-forgotten element of biblical flourishing, namely a concern for the poor and marginalised.

Pennington (2015:np) concludes his article on biblical flourishing with an emphatic statement, “Seeking social justice, racial equality, economic flourishing, and peace ... is not an optional part of the Church’s mission nor a minor alleyway”. Instead, he argues that “These are practices that testify to the reality of God’s coming reign and are in alignment with what God himself is doing” (2015:np). In examining the book of Psalms, Pennington’s comment finds ample support in these writings, as this article will demonstrate, and poses a significant challenge to the view that biblical flourishing is sustainable without the inclusion of social justice.

Discussed here are the following: Psalms 9/10 (treated as one psalm), Psalms 34, 37, 74, 82, and 146. Among the many prayers in the book of Psalms asking for God’s intervention, these psalms stand out, because the Psalmist is not appealing for a personal response from God (as for example in Ps 26, 27, 28) but is making a request on behalf of a separate, identifiable group within the society. These psalms are chosen because they share quite specific characteristics and so, I believe, form a distinct sub-genre, which may be labelled as “Appeals on behalf of the poor and oppressed”. Collectively these people may be described as “those who share the shadow side of life” (Gerstenberger 2001:235), perhaps because they so easily slide into invisibility simply because they are not considered to be worthy of notice.

The first key feature of these specific Psalms is the juxtaposition of two categories of persons. First, there are the victims of abuse, including the vulnerable, like widows, the fatherless and the resident aliens. Added to these are the various words mentions of the poor and oppressed, (I will collectively refer to them as the protagonists) like the afflicted (‘*ânîy* or ‘*ânâv* see Gerstenberger 2001 and Wegner 1997) and the needy (‘*ebyôn* see Domeris 1997) and finally from the semantic domain of oppression those oppressed by violence (*dak*). On the opposite side there are the abusers. (I will use the word antagonists) described as the wicked (*râshâ’*), evildoers (*râ’a’*) and the enemy (‘*ôyêb*). Such terms easily allow for antagonists at either a national level (the enemies of Israel, like Assyria or Babylon) or a local situation (enemies at court, or even neighbours eager to increase their lands).

The seven Psalms discussed here reveal a familiar picture of the vulnerable who have been abused by those who wield power including those who should be protecting them (like the judges). In the process, these people

have been shamed and stripped of their dignity and honour. By citing the vulnerable as worthy of God's intervention, the psalmist recognises the needs of the vulnerable and so deems them worthy of honour in God's eyes and not least human dignity. The psalms effectively become "the universal cry of the poor" (Pleins 2001:429).

What is notable about these prayers is the assumption that because of the inherent nature of God, specifically his justice and mercy, the prayer has already been answered. In other words, they share a proleptic character. Prolepsis is a common feature of the Psalms, as Dahood (1966:54) has demonstrated by the Psalmist's use of the precative perfect, which anticipates a particular response by God. What appears to be a simple statement, becomes instead a powerful prayer for the execution of the justice of God.

Apart from the opposing parties of the antagonists (the wicked) and the protagonists (the vulnerable) and the psalmists use of proleptic appeals for God's intervention, there is a third unusual element, namely the poet's request for God's bestowal of honour (or dignity) on those who are in danger of being shamed. Such an honouring may come by means of some action of God (bestowal of land or defeat of the wicked) or the reversal of shame (so that the wicked or unjust are shamed). Values like honour or *kābad* (Collins 1997) and shame or *būsh* (Seebass 1975; Nel 1997:621-627) play a significant part in the value system of the Hebrew Bible not least in the wisdom writings, as demonstrated by DeSilva (2008). Bechtal (1991) points out the social power of shame, which can be used as an expression of social justice and unfortunately as a weapon against the weak and powerless and the vulnerable (Stiebert 2002).

Each of the six psalms (taking Psalms 9 and 10 together) raises a different impediment to the flourishing of the poor and vulnerable on whose behalf, the poet cries out to God. These impediments range from the loss of hope (Ps 9 and Ps 10); the shaming of the poor (Ps 34); the loss of land (Ps37); the humiliation of the poor (Ps 74); the miscarriage of justice (Pd 82) and finally the struggle of the poor and oppressed to take their proper places within society (Ps 146).

### *3.1 Psalms 9 and 10: Human Violence and the Justice of God*

Psalms 9 and 10 are two parts of a single acrostic psalm (Dahood 1966:54; Terrien 2003:138-145; Goldingay 2006:165) as recognised by the LXX

and the Vulgate (Terrien 2003:142). While Dahood emphasises its nature as a lament (1966:54), the Psalm speaks most clearly as a prayer for divine intervention against the wicked, on behalf of the afflicted (Brueggemann 1995:217-234). In terms of dating the Psalm, Goldingay (2006:169) suggests the time of Nehemiah (mid-fifth century BC). Terrien observes various parallels with the book of Jeremiah, suggesting that period as a possible date in the late 7th and early 6th century BC, for both psalms (2003:144-5). These dates offer similar context for the theme of oppression which plays out in the psalms, including both local and national oppression.

In these two psalms, there is a similar opposition of antagonists and victims. The antagonists include the wicked or *râshâ'* (Ps 9:16-17[17-18]; Ps 10:2,3,4,13,15), the nations from *gôy* (Ps 9:5[6]), the oppressors from *tôk* (Ps 10:7), the enemy or *ôyêb* (Ps 9:3[4], 6[7]), the greedy or *bâtsa'* (Ps 10:3), and evildoers or *râ'âh* (Ps 10:15). Hunting imagery is used (Ps 10:8-10), including the rare Hebrew word *châtaph* for clutch or hound (Goldingay 2016:180), to graphically describe the antagonists as they stalk and hunt down the afflicted and pursue the vulnerable (Goldingay 2006:178-181).

The victims are variously, the oppressed or *dak* (Ps 9:9 [10]; Ps 10:18), the helpless poor or *chêleka* (Ps 10:8, 14), the afflicted or *'ânîy* (Ps 9:12 [13]; Ps 10:2, 9, 12), the poor or *'ânâv* (Ps 9:18 [19]; Ps 10:17), the needy or *'ebyôn* (Ps 9: 18 [19]), the innocent or *nâqîy* (Ps 10:8), and the fatherless or *yâthôm* (Ps 10:14, 18) and the oppressed from *dak* (Ps 10:18).

In his commentary on Psalm 9, Dahood (1966:54) treats the verbs in vv5-7 as precative perfects, namely thanksgiving in anticipation of God's actions and judgement (v4 [5], v8 [9]). The intervention itself is proleptically described as "the Lord will be a stronghold for the oppressed" (v9 [10]), "he does not forget the cry of the afflicted" (v12 [13]), and there is the assurance that "the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of afflicted perish forever" (v18 [19]) (Dahood 1966:54 and cf. Goldingay 2006:177). Miller argues that "no other psalms so fully join the basic themes of the Psalter – the rule of God, the representative role of the king, the plea for help in times of trouble, the ways of the wicked and the righteous, and the justice of God on behalf of the weak and the poor" (2004:188-189).

By the simple process of raising these concerns, on behalf of the

marginalised, the psalmist honours them as people deserving of God's intervention. The process of the honouring of the marginalised found here has two dimensions. The first is in the spelling out of the plight of these people in the context of God's grace. "God as the helper of the fatherless and of the poor (v14) will execute justice on their behalf against their oppressors" (Goldingay 2006:183). In fact, in the process of honouring these people, God takes the initiative by "making decisions" on their behalf (Goldingay 2006:183). Bullock sums up the message of the psalm as "the Lord is the champion of the poor and oppressed" (2015:153). Their voices will be heard (Ps 9:13 [14]) and their hope restored (Ps 9:18 [19]).

The second dimension in the honouring of the marginalised is in the shaming of their antagonists. Brueggemann writes, "The intrusion of Yahweh into social relationships decisively transforms the prospect for both the wicked and the poor" (1995: 231)". In execution of God's judgement, the wicked will be punished (Ps 9:15-20 [16-21]). Paradoxically, the wicked will be caught in the very traps they had set for the innocent (Ps 10:2; Ps 9:15-16 [16-17]). They are not invincible but will die as mere human beings [ *'ênôsh*] (Ps 9:20 [21]). Terrien sums up the message of both psalms when he writes that "justice will vanquish all the oppressors ... yet it is not for the loss of them, but the salvation of the poor that fills the singer with joy" (2003:145).

### *3.2 Psalm 34: Their Faces Shall Never be Ashamed*

Psalm 34, like Psalms 9 and 10 is an acrostic psalm (Dahood 1966:205) and typically has some irregularities (Goldingay 2006:478) and lacks progressive links between the verses (Dahood 1966: 205). In terms of genre, Goldingay notes that not one verse is addressed directly to God making this torah (teaching) rather than a thanksgiving psalm as often thought (2006:478). There are elements of wisdom writings, and the psalm may be described as a wisdom psalm (Dahood 1966:22-24) dealing with issues of social injustice.

Terrien (2003:305-306) writes, "The poet of Psalm 34 however reveals a personal involvement in the scandal of righteous suffering". He postulates (2003:305-306) a date for the psalm as towards "the end of the monarchy, when social injustice flared up at the international as well as national levels." However, the introduction to the Psalm associates it with the life of David (late 10th century). Given the very general nature of the poet's complaints, it is difficult to postulate an exact date for the Psalm based on

the contents. The early monarchy remains a reasonable hypothesis.

Verse 3[4] is an invitation (Terrien 2003:204), which Dahood (1966:205) understands as “the grateful poet inviting the afflicted to join him in his song of praise”. The pattern here of turning through God’s grace, from shame to honour is unmistakable. Goldingay (2006:475-479) discerns three parallel imperatives in verse 5[6], addressed to the afflicted or ‘*ânāwîm* (v2[3]), to look to God, to let their faces shine and importantly not to let their faces be ashamed (*châphêr*). Terrien (2003:301) sees a similar pattern in v 6[7] where the poor man (‘*ânîy*) cried, the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles (*tsârâh*).

The Psalm is marked by the usual juxtaposition between the poet’s protagonists and his antagonists. The protagonists include the afflicted (v2[3], v6[7], v8[9], v11[12]), the poor (v8[9]), those who takes refuge (v8[9]), God’s holy ones or saints (v9[10]), those who seek the Lord (v10[11]), the broken hearted and crushed in spirit (v18[19] and the righteous (v15[16], v19[20]).

The antagonists, include the evildoers (v16[17]), the wicked (v21[22]), those who hate the righteous (v21[22]). Verse 10[11] refers to “young lions” which Walton et al (2000:523) considers a common ancient Near Eastern metaphor for enemies of the writer.

The theme of reversal is especially present in verse 18[19]. Goldingay (2006:476) renders the verse as “Yahweh is near people who are broken inside, he will deliver the crushed in spirit”. He explains that the reference is to those “who are broken inside (lit. broken of heart)”. In this verse we recognise the familiar pattern of God acting as the patron and redeemer/defender of the vulnerable. God will indeed defend the vulnerable from shame (verse 5[6]).

### *3.3 Psalm 37: The Inheritance of the Land*

Psalm 37 is another acrostic psalm (Terrien 2003:322; Dahood 1966:227; Goldingay 2006:516 and Day 2004:244) but with sapiential themes (Dahood 1966:227; Terrien 2003:317; Day 2004:244). The inscription connects the psalm with David, while the content develops the now familiar theme of faithful protagonists against faithless antagonists (Goldingay 516), what Terrien calls “a sapiential homily” (322). Day (2004:244), based on its wisdom (Job-like) theme, and its acrostic nature

opts for a date late in the monarchy. Quite correctly Dahood (1966:228) recognises its intention as “To encourage those depressed by the success of the ungodly”.

There is the regular opposition of antagonists and protagonists in the psalm. The antagonists include the evildoers (v1[2]; v9[10]), the wrong doers (v1[2]), the one who prospers and those who carries out wicked schemes(v7[8]), and the wicked (v10[11]; v12[13] v14[15], v16[17], v17[18], v20[21], v21[22], v32[33], v34[35]), v35[36], v38[39], v40[41]). In addition, there are the enemies of Yahweh (v20[21]), those cursed by Yahweh (v22[23]), descendants of the wicked (v28[29]), and the transgressors (v38[39]).

The protagonists are conversely those who wait for the Lord (v9[10]), the righteous, (v17[18], v18[19]), (v16[17]v21[22], v25[26], v28[29], 29[30], v39[40]), the blameless (v18[19]), those blessed by God [v22[23]); and the man of peace (v37[38]). Importantly for this article there is also the poor *ʾânîy*, the needy *ʿebyôn* (v14b [15]) and the afflicted (v11 [12] or *ʾânāwîm*. In reference to the *ʾânāwîm*, Gerstenberger (2001:234) writes: “The words associated with the root [Heb *ʾana II*] belong to a negatively charged domain of knowledge and experience” and adds “The nouns and adjectives refer to situations inimical to human life. The basic experience appears to be ‘affliction’ in its various forms”.

The opening verse of Psalm 37 encourages the audience “Do not become upset [or angry] about the wicked, or envious of those who work unrighteousness” (Ps 37:1 [2]). Lohfink suggests, “It is possible that the psalm refers specifically to the peasantry, who faced increasing class differences and were in danger of losing their land to great landowners” (1990:394). The climatic verse is verse eleven or verse twelve in the Hebrew. The MT should be rendered as “But the afflicted will possess the land and delight themselves in abundant prosperity” [v12]. Up to this point, in the Psalm, the recipients of God’s good pleasure have been the usual category of the faithful and just, but verse 11[12] and again verse 14[15] draws the circle wider to include the afflicted, the poor and the needy which reinforces the notion that this and the other psalms considered speaks to the issue of God’s honouring of the marginalised.

Lohfink draws out the element of paradox when he concludes that “yet in this Psalm, it is the poor and the righteous who dispossess others and

occupy their land” (1990:371-2). Here is the element of reversal writ large. Goldingay (2006:522) develops this theme: “The idea then is that whereas at the moment the wicked are doing so well that they might be in a position to take over the land of the others, that situation is due to be reversed”. Brueggemann (1995:249-253) reminds us that this psalm carries implications for unjust governments and “colonising powers that appropriate the land of other peoples”.

### *3.4 Psalm 74: Let not the Oppressed Return Dishonoured.*

The tone of the psalm with its references to the burned sanctuary (v7[8]), and to the meeting place (v4[5 and v8[9]) suggests that it follows the destruction of the temple (*cf.* v3-8[4-9]) leading Dahood (1968:199), term the psalm a “national lament” and like Estes (2017:33) and Goldingay (2007:436) connects the psalm to the fall of Jerusalem and the oppression which followed the exile.

The psalm ends with an appeal to God on behalf of the oppressed and afflicted (v18-23[19-24]). Of specific interest for this paper is verse 21 which reads, “Let not the oppressed return dishonoured (*kālam*); let the afflicted and needy praise your name”. This appeal captures the essence of the reversal psalms. God is asked to reverse their present state of dishonour (v21[22], see Estes 2017:33). Once again, there is no merit attached to the victims, meaning that this is an act of grace from God.

The antagonists are the enemies (v3[4], v18[19]) and adversaries (v4[5], v23[24]). As with the Psalm 34, animal imagery is used in verse 4[5] of the adversaries who roar (like lions). The enemy is belittled as the foolish people (v19[20], v22[23]) and their land as habitations of violence. By contrast the victims or protagonists are described as your turtle dove (v19[20]), the afflicted (v19[20], v21[22] *‘ânîy*), the oppressed (*dak* v21[22]) and the needy (*‘ebyôn* v21[22]). Terms which properly belong to the domain of the poor and oppressed are here used of the exiles. This might be explained as a spiritualisation of these terms, but equally of the actual plight of the exiles as they face oppression and poverty in exile (Is 58 and Neh 4). The proleptic tone is evident when the poet gives reason for his prayer as so that the people might praise God (v21). Once again, there is no attempt to justify God’s gracious acts. The assumption is not the merit of those people, but the constant faithfulness of God.

### *3.5 Psalm 82: Unjust Judgement*

The setting of this Psalm is widely recognised (Estes 2017:80; Terrien 2003:588-589; Dahood 1968:268) as the divine council (v1 'ēdāh). of God. Yahweh occupied the seat of honour and was attended by the other members of the council who are described as 'ēlōhîym (Ps 82:1[2] and see Job 1:6:). Scholars are divided between the opinion that these beings were pagan gods (Dahood 1968:270; Terrien (2003:589) or angels (Estes 2017:79).

The keyword of the psalm is *shâphat* (v1,2,3,8 [2,3,4,9]) as the poet calls on Yahweh to counter the injustice of the wicked with his justice including the redemption of the poor. Commenting on the psalm, Mays (1994:271-2) notes “It becomes an axiom of the Old Testament theology that the worship of this Lord must and shall bring justice to the weak”.

A forensic form frames the psalm (Terrien 2003:588-590) beginning with the exordium, followed by the indictment, list of offences and concludes with the verdict. The psalm is addressed to the judges who are in fact on trial for their failure to preserve justice and righteousness (Estes 2017:79). Instead of defending the vulnerable including the poor *dal* (2x), the fatherless *yâthôm*, the destitute *rûsh*, the afflicted 'ânîy and the needy 'ebyôn (v3-4), the judges have sided with their oppressors (v2,[3] v4[5]). For Estes (2017:79) consequently “that is to hold the just and gracious God in contempt”. In fact, Dahood concludes (1968:270) these judges are “quite incapable of defending the poor and rescuing the downtrodden” leading to God’s implicit intervention.

Verses 6 [7] and 7[8] reflect the psalmists hope for an honour and shame reversal and Dahood (1968:270), notes the sense of contrast in the verbs used in verses 6[7] and 7[8], with verse 6[7] reflecting an a priori assumption on the part of the writer “I said you are gods, and all of you are the sons of the Most High” and verse 7[8], the verdict, “You will die as [mere] men, and fall like one of the princes (Heb. *Śar*)”. Dahood (1968:268) calls this the “restoration of universal justice under sole rule of Yahweh as God takes up the cause of those who have been unjustly judged (see also Terrien 2003:589; Estes 2017:79),

Terrien (2003:589) draws attention to the “unusual number of synonyms to describe economic destitution”. The psalmist calls for these victims to be vindicated *shâphat* (v3a[4a]), to have justice *tsâdaq* done for

them (v3b[4b]), to be rescued *pâlat* (v4a[5a]) and to be delivered *nâtsal* (v4b[5b]). These verbs especially the first (vindicate) clearly signals the pattern of reversal implicit in this psalm found especially in God's defence of the vulnerable. Terrien (2003:591) concludes, "The oneness of God, incomparable, calls for equality among all humans".

### *3.6 Psalm 113: God Lifts the Needy from the Ash Heap.*

The psalm is a hymn of praise to Yahweh and forms the first of the Hallel psalms namely Psalms 113-118. (Craigie 146-147; Estes 2017:250). Both the first and last verse contain the instruction "Praise the Lord". The psalm begins with an invitation to the servants of the Lord to join in the praise (Terrien 2003:763). Several scholars (Estes 2017:250; Terrien 2003:763) connect the psalm with the song of Hannah (1 Sm 2:1-10) in its celebration of Yahweh's victory and triumph over adversity.

Verse five poses the question, "Who is like the Lord our God?" and then brings in the defence of the evidence to support the uniqueness and greatness of Yahweh (vv5-9). Yahweh is praised for his ongoing activities on behalf of the vulnerable including the poor *dal* and needy '*ebyôn* (v7) and adds the barren woman or '*âqâr* (v9). As with the other psalms under consideration there is a proleptic dimension as the psalmist looks forward to the future gracious actions of Yahweh among his people. A remarkable juxtaposition is found between verses 5 and 6 in which Yahweh who is great among the exalted powers of heaven, deservedly so, choses to humble himself to be present with the poor in the dust and the needy in the ash-heap (Goldingay 316-317), The NASV offers an alternative text for verse 6 as "Looks far below in the heavens and on earth". Goldingay simply has "Gets down to have a look" (2008:317).

In all the psalms, Psalm 113 contains the clearest statement of the shame to honour reversal: "He raises the poor from the dust ('*âphâr*) and lifts the needy from the ash heap ('*ashpôth*) (v7-8). Goldingay (2008:315) makes clear that the verb should be rendered as "to set them" and not to set me, since "the ending is a connective". Poignantly the final verse includes the barren woman, like Hannah, who becomes "the joyful mother of children" (v9). For the psalmist, such an honouring of the vulnerable and the shamed is worthy of praise, not just for the honouring but for the fact that the almighty Yahweh humbles himself to lift up even those who live on the rubbish dumps. The deeper texture of the verse is an instant reminder of those scenes commonly found today in the cities of the Two-

Thirds world, where ragged children and hungry adults sift through the rubbish in the hope of a dried crust of bread (See Estes 2017:251).

The twin verbs “raises up” (*qûm*) and “lifts up” (*rûm*) creates a poetic resonance but make clear how the honouring is manifested in vivid form in a world bound by a fear of shame and a desperate longing for honour. The poet now takes the honouring to an entirely unexpected level in verse 8 as he explains that Yahweh will “make them sit with nobles, with the nobles of his people”. Indeed, these people who were shamed are destined to share honour with nobles or princes (*nâdîyb*), with the very people who are born to a high status of honour. They are being restored to their “proper place in the community” (Goldingay 2008:318), just as the barren woman becomes the honourable mother finding her rightful place in the home.

### *3.7 Psalm 146: God Executes Justice for the Oppressed*

The final psalm for consideration occurs in the last section of the psalms indicating that the theme of reversal is not limited to any part of the corpus. The psalm is a hymn of praise for God’s gracious acts. In the third strophe (vv 8-9) there is a litany on the name Yahweh (Terrien 2003:910). The psalm is the first of five Hallelujah psalms and following Dahood (1970:130) belongs to the third set of Hallel psalms (Ps 146-150). Verses 3 and 5 suggest to Estes (2017:425) “an audience of worshippers”.

The psalm warns against putting faith in human agents, like nobles (*nâdîyb*) and ordinary people (lit. son of man; v3) and reminds the reader of the blessing and hope which comes to those who put their trust in God (v5). The antagonists are once again the wicked (v9) and presumably the unreliable nobles and others in authority (v3). Yahweh will act to reverse the present situation by dishonouring the way of the wicked and raising up the oppressed (v9). There is probably a sense of irony in the use of the verb ‘*âvath* which carries the sense of be bent or crooked (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 1977:736) and is used here (v9) for disrupting the way of the wicked.

The psalm has a remarkable spread of words to describe the vulnerable. In verse 7, there are the oppressed (‘*âshaq* see Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1977:799), the hungry (*râ’êb*), and the prisoners (‘*âsar*). Goldingay points out that the prisoners in the ancient world. were those incarcerated for political stances rather than civil crimes (2008:710). In verse 8, there are

those who are bowed down (*kâphaph*) with the sense of oppressed, the blind (*‘ivvêr*), and the righteous (*tsaddîyq*). Finally in verse 9, there are strangers (*gêr* - resident aliens who did not enjoy citizen rights so Dahood 1970:340), fatherless (*yâthôm*), and the widow (*‘almânâh*) (v9).

A range of verbs are used to describe Yahweh’s interventions. In verse 7, Yahweh executes justice (*mishpât*), gives food (*lechem*), and sets free (*nâthar*). In verse 8, he opens [the eyes] (*pâqach*), raises up (*zâqaph*) and loves (*‘âhab*). In verse 9, he safeguards (*shâmar*), and he preserves (*‘ûd*). Terrien (2003:911) observes the “affinity between justice and love” in this list of verbs. Out of Yahweh’s love comes his justice on behalf of all those who are wronged, but this justice requires the cooperation of humankind (Estes 2017:426), and out of his actions of setting things right, a deep sense of the honouring of the marginalised.

#### **4. The Role of the Righteous in God’s Grace**

The study found here shows a distinctive pattern present across the book of Psalms in which those who least deserve honour in the eyes of the world, are giving special attention in the eyes of the psalmist, leading to a proleptic cry for God’s intervention and restoration – what this article describes as a reversal process. Each Psalm raised a particular obstacle to the full and free inclusion of the poor and marginalised within the experience of God’s intended flourishing among his people ranging from the loss of hope, the shaming of the poor, the lack of land, the humiliation of the poor, the miscarriage of justice and finally the struggle to take their proper places within society. Each Psalm emphasises the different ways in which God will intervene on behalf of these people to create a full and inclusive sharing of Christian wellbeing and so the experience of the good news promised by Jesus.

The recognition that such people rightly deserve honour and to be delivered from shame, grounds the Psalmist’s belief in the justice and grace of Yahweh. The underlying assumption in this article, is that poverty itself does not grant special status to any individual although it does recognise the person’s need of a redeemer-God (Pleins 2001:422-424).

From time to time, the term “righteous” is used as a synonym for those who have been marginalised. This might lead to the assumption that terms like poor and oppressed are simply synonyms for the righteous ones. While this may in some measure explain the juxtaposition of the

righteous and the wicked (as in Ps 1), it fails to explain the sheer diversity of the marginalised, and the clear appeal to injustice and abuse of the poor and needy found in the psalms considered here. Instead, the evidence of these psalms reflects a reality in which poor and vulnerable people like the widows and orphans suffer at the hands of the rich and powerful, and those simply called the wicked.

Pleins writes (2001:429). “If only in a slightly rhetorical sense, the Psalms preserve for us the universal cry of the poor. In this sense, then, they continue to hold out poverty and justice as key issues for their community and any group that seeks to take up the Psalter to frame its liturgical life.” In the light of the theme of human flourishing these are also key issues for that quest, especially among evangelicals.

## **5. Conclusion**

Clearly, the psalmist believed that not only would God take heed of his cry on behalf of the poor and marginalised, but that those who have means and opportunity, and who seek for righteousness should respond to the needs of those in their own communities (Estes 2017:426; Powell 1996). As evangelicals seek out God’s gift of human flourishing, this article suggests that all those who desire the way of God’s righteousness, who are chosen to be the vehicle of God’s gracious actions are therefore those who are called to be good news to the poor. Since there is no suggestion that the poor and needy merit the favour of God, this in turn implies that the righteous are called to be the bearers of the generous mercy and gracious honouring of God. Only when that impulse is present and active does human flourishing become more than a selfish desire for a comfortable life.

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The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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**SECTION C**

## **“...Be Holy because I Am Holy”: God’s Love and Mercy as the Basis for the Church’s Treatment of Diaspora Peoples**

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### ***Abstract***

*People continue to move at an ever-increasing rate. Diaspora peoples impact nearly every major urban centre in the world. Unfortunately, those on the move—from either forced or voluntary migration—do not always experience welcome and peace in their new homes. Such hardship comes in varied expressions: xenophobic violence; patronising oversight; devaluation of humanity, and inability to communicate effectively to name a few. While such a sinful reality exists, the church finds itself positioned to engage those most often neglected within a community. God demands of his people an obedience that ultimately reflects his character: to “be holy because I am holy.” What does it mean to reflect the character of God—to imitate God—in one’s context? In this article, the authors argue that the call to imitate God is normative for the follower of Jesus. Further, such a command must be more than mimicking actions; rather, the Christian must reflect the character of God. In particular, the authors see God’s love and mercy as foundational attributes of God for the church to imitate to engage the diaspora community meaningfully. The article explores God’s mercy and grace in terms of the expression of compassion both in the acts of rescue and the establishment of community. Further, God’s love and mercy are seen in God’s expectations of his people to be a “blessing to all nations”. Having challenged the reader to hear the call to imitate God as normal, and to hearken to the call to imitate God as acts of obedience that flow from the attributes of God, the authors challenge the reader to heed the call to imitate God in practical expressions of love and mercy. God calls the church to imitate His love and mercy in three ways: incarnational acts of compassion that meet the immediate needs of the diaspora community; the intentional creation of community within the church that welcomes and incorporates believers from among diaspora peoples; and equipping the diaspora peoples in the church as missionaries.*

### **1. Introduction**

*“Looking through rose-coloured stained-glass windows;  
Never allowing the world to come in.*

*Seeing no evil and feeling no pain.  
Making the light as it comes from within so dim...  
the light's so dim." Petra (1982)*

*"...be holy because I am holy." <sup>1</sup> (Lv 11:44; 1 Pt 1:16)*

Prejudice continues to be expressed throughout the world. For many diaspora peoples prejudice too often dominates the experience of life in a new country although it may be encountered in a variety of expressions: xenophobic violence; patronising oversight; devaluation of humanity, to name a few. For many diaspora people, life is filled with uncertainty and need. For some, the move to a new place is one marked by fear of abuse or mistreatment. Such reality ought to be mitigated by the presence of the church. Truly, the followers of Jesus ought to make a significant difference in whatever location they are found. Those places where the church intersects with the immigrant should result in moments of profound demonstration of the breadth and depth of the love of God to all peoples in all places. With the repeated declaration "Be holy because I am holy" (Lv 11:44, 45; 19:2), God set a standard for his people that was to encompass the entirety of life. The declaration was not relegated to the "sacred" life of the tabernacle; rather, all life became declared "sacred" and set apart to God. This reality was made clear by God as he summarized his expectations: "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own" (Lv 20:26). Lest followers of Jesus somehow perceive this command as relegated to the Old Testament community, one finds that the Holy Spirit repeated the command for the church through Peter: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy.' (1 Pt 1:14-16). This declaration remains God's standard for his people.

There is expectation, then, for the follower of Jesus to express clearly the character of God in all areas of life—in all one does. To imitate God demands one engage with others in a manner that also reflects God. The church, then, should be the true sanctuary of life to a people caught in the uncertainty of migration—whether voluntary or forced. The response to the needs of diaspora peoples, however, can often become reduced to a set of actions to undertake—almost in a checklist mentality. Food given, check... shelter provided, check... clothes found, check... and one can

add a great many more actions that are critically important from skills training to advocacy. While most help is needed and welcome, one should think critically of this simple cause-and-effect approach. Such engagement needs to move beyond a set of actions to express a fuller understanding of God’s command of his people to “be” holy. How does “holiness” that is imitative of the holiness of God in the life of the Christian—both individually and corporately—possibly impact those who find themselves displaced from a home country? Before considering practical steps for the church’s engagement with diaspora peoples, therefore, one needs first to grasp the significance of this command to imitate God. Simply stated, this expectation from God for his people is a statement of normativity for the Christian—to truly reflect the image of God in a broken world. While one can rightly state that God is beyond our ability to comprehend fully, God has revealed himself to us—through his word—so that one can gain a clearer picture of the expectations of this command. Having understood the call to imitate God, the follower of Jesus needs, second, to unpack aspects of God—in this case, the love and mercy of God—that speak directly to this challenge of engaging diaspora peoples to understand better the scope of such a call. Finally, having considered the call to imitate God and defined the nature of God’s love and mercy, one must explore appropriate actions for the church that reflect God’s love and mercy while considering the needs of diaspora peoples.

## **2. Hearing the Call to Be Imitators of God**

Following the Exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel who had been rescued by God from a life of slavery and oppression gathered in the wilderness. God who delivered them, also offered covenant—the promise that they would be his people and he would be their God (see Ex. 29:45; Lev 26:12). In defining the nature of the life of his people, God established himself as the pattern or the model for their life. The expectation of holiness on the part of the Israelites was because God is holy. God’s people, then, were expected to imitate God. The call to “be holy because I am holy” consistently accompanied actions that would set Israel apart from all other nations. The uniqueness of God was seen, in part, in the unique life of God’s people. Imitation of God was commanded. The Holy Spirit provides a “holiness code” for the behaviour of the Israelites in Leviticus so that their actions of obedience might reflect their new nature as the people of God. God’s people were to be set apart from every other nation in the manner of their living—to be holy (Lv 20:26).

For the follower of Jesus, this command is made even more clear. Jesus, himself, will express a core element of discipleship in the act of sacrificially following: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24). Later, Jesus will state this truth even more bluntly: “...anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:27, emphasis added). The Holy Spirit through John declares: “Whoever claims to live in him (Jesus), must walk as Jesus did” (1 Jn 2:6). There is a normalcy to obedience for the follower of Jesus, but that obedience is essentially an imitation of Jesus. Jesus is not only the object of our faith, but the “author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2) upon whom the Christian is to set their gaze so that they may run the race laid out for them. Jesus is the one who demonstrated faith as well as the one in whom our faith is placed so that we have a model to imitate. The disciple of Jesus is called to imitate Jesus in various areas of life: serve one another as Jesus served (Jn 13:12-15); love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34); forgive one another as God has forgiven us (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13), to name a few. 1 Pt 2:21 relates one of the more interesting pictures: when considering the enduring of suffering, the Holy Spirit reminds us that “...Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” The term translated “example”, *hypergrammos*, is a term for “drawing lines used to help children learning to write” (Schrenk, 1985: 119). Tracing lines to help a child learn to make letters correctly here challenges the disciple to see “the tracks that Christ has left as examples for us to follow, not in imitation, but in commitment to his way of suffering” (Ibid.). Every aspect of life is to be subject to the model of Christ. Jesus declares that those who love him—his disciples—will obey his commands (Jn 14:15). Jesus sets the agenda for his people. Jesus defines the expectations of his people. The follower of Jesus must follow Jesus!

The apostle Paul through the Holy Spirit admonished the church at Corinth to “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). A more literal rendering of the verse carries more force: “Become imitators of me just as I also (am) of Christ.” The word used—*mimētēs*—does carry the idea of intentional imitation. In this passage, the context calls into focus a variety of issues that had caused division in the church due to individual believers celebrating their freedom and causing others to stumble. The Holy Spirit through Paul challenges them to observe his actions to keep the focus on the glory of God so that many may be saved. Paul, then,

commands them to become imitators of him as he is an imitator of Christ. The authoritative pattern, however, is not simply Paul; rather, the ultimate goal is the imitation of Christ. One is an imitator of Paul only inasmuch as Paul is an imitator of Jesus. Obedience is intimately connected to the understanding of imitation as seen in the following verse where Paul rejoices in the church’s “holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.” Similar emphases can be found in the other occurrences of *mimētēs* as well as the verb form (*miméomai*—to imitate) especially in the other Pauline letters (1 Cor 4:16; Eph 5:1; 1 Th 1:6; 2:14) so that one can argue “The NT as a whole does not teach imitation in the primary sense of imitating an example but rather in the predominant sense of discipleship, i.e., of obedience to the word and will of the Lord...” (Michel, 1985:532).

While the act of imitating and the expression of holiness can rightly be described in terms of obedience to the commands of God, there is a critical element that must be understood. The action depends upon “being”. Consider the declaration of Paul to “imitate” him. The statement is most clearly a call to “become” an imitator. The force of the imperative combined with the intransitive nature of the verb brings an interesting perspective into focus—the emphasis is on the state of being more prior to the action. The verbal force is on becoming. The end objective is the imitation. The overall force, thus, can be expressed as an emphasis on a state of being resulting in obedience! Similarly, when considering the declaration of God to “be holy” the reality is that the actions do not define the child of God; rather, the nature of being holy defines the actions God commands. The “being” precedes the actions. Jesus declares to his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world...” (Mt 5:13a, 14a). These are statements of realities that have expected impacts and results in the manner of living. Consider the Holy Spirit’s admonition for the Christian in Ephesians: “Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus...” (Phlp 2:5) before the actions are stated. More clearly, consider the Holy Spirit’s declaration in Eph 5:1: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” The starting point is the call to imitate God in a manner of being—as dearly loved children—resulting in normative actions—a life of love—that were modelled by Christ! A step of being, then, exists that precedes the acts of imitation. This truth reminds the Christian that one is created in the image of God. For those who have been redeemed, the ability to reflect the

image of God has also been redeemed. The call to imitate, then, is a call to imitate the very character of God—to reflect the image of God. One must grasp the scope of this call to imitate the character of God so that one can obediently live a life of love and mercy.

### **3. Harkening the Call to be Imitators of God**

God's command for Israel to be holy on the basis that God, Himself, is holy establishes the baseline of normativity of life for the follower of God. Discerning the depth of such a declaration and its role in the church's engagement with diaspora peoples, however, requires further intentional engagement. When tested by the Pharisees to provide the greatest commandment, Jesus replied that the first and greatest commandment is "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37). When considering one's responsibilities and actions toward others, the call to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22:39) tends to be the focus. The truth, however, is that the highest moral imperative for any human, and for the Christian in particular, is to love God (Winger, n.d); therefore, the love of neighbour rightly flows from the love of God. Love of God, however, is not simply abstract worship. Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 where God had already established this command as foundational for the life of the Israelites. God followed the declaration with instructions to saturate their life with these commands—teaching these laws to one's children, decorating one's house with them, and meditating daily upon them. Consider the scope of this imperative to love God in Deuteronomy—heart, soul, and strength. The Hebrew words used provide great insight for the follower of Jesus. Heart refers to the centre of all the parts of a person: the physical life; the intellect—not just one's knowledge, but how one makes sense of the world; emotions; and one's volitional process—the place where choices are made (often influenced by desire) (Bible Project "*Lev*", 2017). Soul describes the entirety of a person. Literally, the word means "throat" and refers to the whole person (Bible Project "*Nephesh*", 2017). Strength is the most important to grasp as the word is the adverb of degree that is usually translated as "very" or "much" and is used to magnify or intensify other words. In this context, it can intensify the total capacity—as much as possible! The Bible Project translates the term "muchness" as this final thing you use to love God is actually not a thing at all, but it is everything: every possibility, opportunity, and capacity that you have to honour God and loving neighbour (Bible Project "*Me'od*", 2018). The

Christian, then, is called to devote one’s whole body and mind, feelings and desires, futures and failure (with all one’s *heart*), **and** physical existence with all our capabilities and limitations (with all one’s *soul*), **and** to the greatest degree possible (with all one’s *strength*) (Bible Project, 2017 and 2018). Truly, the greatest moral imperative for the follower of Jesus is this command to love God. The call to imitate God, then, is intimately connected with the command to love God and becomes an act of worship. Imitation is not simply a list of actions to mimic but is directed by the very character of God. Love of God will be expressed in the treatment of one’s neighbour; however, the act of loving God does presuppose an understanding of God and impacts how the love of neighbours is fulfilled. Consider some foundational attributes of God that provide direction for the church’s engagement with diaspora peoples: love and mercy.

### *3.1 God’s Character Embodied in Love and Mercy*

As mentioned above, God’s initial command involves a declaration of his holiness—be holy because I am holy. Throughout Scripture, God is declared holy—most notably in the threefold declaration of heavenly beings: “holy, holy, holy” (see Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). The word highlights the uniqueness of God in contrast to all of creation. “God’s holiness expresses his divine perfection” (Procksch, 1985: 16). All attributes of God are expressions of God’s perfection. Due to space, not every attribute is considered here; rather, God’s attributes of love and mercy have been identified as particularly instructive for the church’s engagement of diaspora peoples.

As with holiness, love is not simply an action of God; rather, as the Holy Spirit declares in 1 John 4:8: “God is love.” Grudem considers God’s love to mean that God “eternally gives of himself to others,” (2020, 237). John 3:16 provides a perfect example of this understanding of God’s attribute of holy love: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God’s love, then, is eternally enacted.

God’s mercy—while often seen as a specific expression of love, can be defined as God’s “goodness toward those in misery and distress” (Grudem, 2020: 239). Quite often, mercy expresses an *undeserved* goodness. Throughout Scripture, one encounters humanity’s cry for divine mercy: in response to sin (Ps 51:1); for healing (Mk 10:47); on behalf of others (Mt 15:22); and for hope of salvation (Lk 18:13).

Other authors consider God's goodness to encompass both God's love and mercy. Within the discussion of God's holiness, constant goodness, and compassion, Oden mentions God's "unchanging love" (1967: 112). Oden also defines God's goodness, or "the divine goodness," as "that attribute through which God wills the happiness of creatures and desires to impart to creatures all the goodness they are capable of receiving" (1967: 116). Grudem considers God's goodness to mean that "God is the final standard of good and all that God is and does is worthy of approval" (Grudem, 2020: 236). In both definitions, one can see the relation of God's goodness to God's love and mercy. Although God's love and mercy exceed our human equivalent because God is infinite and holy, the follower of God is called to reflect these attributes in their lives. God has, thankfully, not left us clueless.

### *3.2 God's Compassion Expressed in Love and Mercy*

God has expressed his love and mercy within the context of human history. In truth, the whole of salvation history is a narrative of God's extension of love and mercy intersecting human history—most notably in the history of the people of Israel and in the history of the church throughout the world. In the call to imitate God, God's demonstration of love and mercy provides invaluable insight. While one could explore a great number of illustrations and examples of God's expression of love and mercy, only two key aspects will be considered both for the sake of time and for their applicability regarding the church's response to diaspora peoples.

The first aspect to consider is God's role as the one who rescues. Throughout the biblical narrative, God redeems people. Whether in the deliverance of an individual or a people, God acts on behalf of humanity. The greatest example in the Old Testament is found in the Exodus story. God hears the cry of Israel who is oppressed by Egypt and bound in slavery. God's miraculous rescue of Israel from slavery establishes a new identity with the Israelites. Three impacts of the exodus event are noted in the biblical narrative. First, God used the event to identify himself to his people. Over forty times, the refrain, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt" is used so that it becomes the primary identification of God to Israel (Davis and Mulenga, 2022: 111). The description occurs at essentially every critical turning point for Israel: when calling a judge, before the start of the monarchy, as the prophets proclaim judgment, in the face of exile, in the anticipation of return from exile (Ibid.: 112). This expression of God's love and mercy is the foundational identity of

God to his people: the God who rescues! Second, this event becomes a foundational experience in the corporate worship of Israel as they are the people who were rescued (Ibid.). Finally, the remembrance of God’s merciful rescue provided confidence in times of suffering and trial (Ibid.). The climax of salvation history is seen in the sacrificial death of Jesus on behalf of all humanity. God rescues us from our sin, not based on our character, but because of his love and mercy. The primary expression of God’s love and mercy, then, is seen in the move to rescue.

A second crucial expression of God’s love and mercy is the creation of community. God not only rescues Israel but establishes a covenant with them and promises to be their God and for them to be his people. While God had made covenants with individuals (i.e., Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham), this occurrence was the initial covenant with a larger community—an entire people. God establishes an identity for his people connected to his holiness, but as an expression of his love and mercy. As God will remind Israel, they were not chosen because of their greatness, but because of God’s love: “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you...” (Dt 7:7-8a). In the New Testament, God creates a more expansive people in the church establishing both Jew and Gentile as one community. One can find many different expressions of this new reality: the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12ff), the household of God (Eph 2:19), living stones built into a spiritual house (1 Pt 2:5), a holy nation (1 Pt 2:9). A secondary expression of God’s love and mercy, then, is seen in the creation of community.

In considering the call to imitate God, both aspects of rescue and community must be considered. For diaspora peoples, both advocacy and family are needed.

### *3.3 God’s Commission Enacted in Love and Mercy*

God’s love and mercy toward Israel was not seen only in the rescue from slavery and the creation of a new people, but also in commissioning his people with a purpose to make known the God of Israel. In the call of Abraham, God established the global perspective for his creation of a people—that all the peoples on earth might be blessed through him (Gn 12:3). Throughout the history of Israel, God welcomed other peoples, individually and corporately.<sup>2</sup> The presence of foreigners among the Israelites seems prevalent enough that God creates laws and regulations

regarding the treatment of foreigners in their midst (see Lv 19:33-34).

In the Gospel of Mark, consider Jesus' encounter with the demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes. Following his deliverance, Jesus sent him out to tell his people about his rescue so that he went away and proclaimed throughout the cities of the region what Jesus had done (5:19-20). Following his resurrection, Jesus commissions his disciples to proclaim the gospel message to all regions (Ac 1:8) and to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). As the church grew, this command to make disciples was not exclusive to Jewish believers; rather, every believer was commissioned. The design of God is new people entering the church community and being equipped to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. Any imitation of God's love and mercy, therefore, must also include the equipping for the purposes of God.

#### **4. Heeding the Call to Be Imitators of God among Diaspora Peoples**

The Christian is called to imitate God intentionally in one's life as a normal expression of one's faith. The command is not simply a duplication of action, but a reflection of the character of God enacted. God's love and mercy should be of particular focus as they are attributes most readily understood in the expression of God's engagement with humanity throughout history. While this expression of God's love and mercy by the church should be directed toward all people, at the present time, diaspora peoples typically fit into categories of greatest need. Why diaspora?

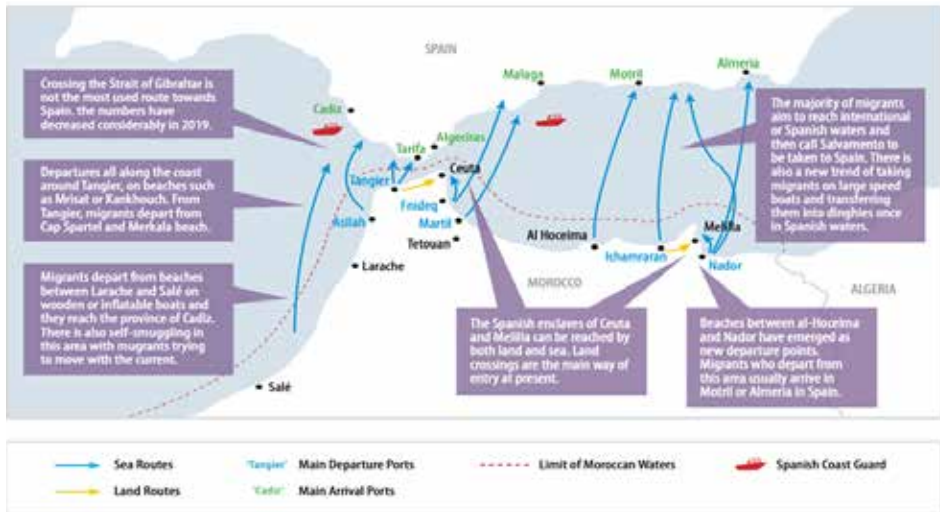
The growth of people on the move has increased exponentially across the globe through both forced and voluntary migration. This reality must be of interest to the church in Africa. Hamilton notes:

“In 2019, the number of uprooted people in sub-Saharan Africa reached record levels with 33.4 million people of concern to UNHCR [United Nations High Commission on Refugees]—39% of the global total including 6.3 million refugees—57% children—and 18.5 million IDPs [Internally Displaced Peoples].” (“Report”, 2023)

As indicated, diaspora does not mean that one has crossed a border into another country. As recent statistics from the UN highlight, seventy-five percent of all new IDPs are located in sub-Saharan Africa (Bullington, 2023). One does, however, encounter large numbers of African peoples seeking to cross borders into neighboring countries or beyond. Those people seeking to move out of Africa and into Europe risking their lives

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for the opportunity to provide a better life for their family or themselves. Hamilton (Blog 48, 2023) highlights the primary sea routes taken as an illustration of the difficulty of such journeys:



The success rate of such journeys is minimal as two or three of every five boats attempting to cross at Gibraltar are lost at sea (Ibid.). Those attempting a land crossing over the Sahara desert have an even higher fatality rate. While the desire to find a “land of plenty” fuels the attempts and many who fail become part of the growing resident migrant population (Ibid.), most migration is forced due to war or disaster.<sup>3</sup>

Migration within the continent is similarly marked by dangers and fatality. One family matriarch recently related the story of her family’s forced migration from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with her small children that included prolonged marches and even crossing the Zambezi River in makeshift boats made of cardboard (Etaka, 2023). Unfortunately, life for the African diaspora within a neighbouring African nation does not necessarily mean a life free of difficulty or marked by peace. Consider the difficulties experienced by African immigrants living in South Africa in 2022. In their world report for 2023 published earlier this year, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted a spike in xenophobic sentiments last year (HRW, 2023). With the continued effect of the lockdowns from COVID-19 felt in the economic downturns and growth in unemployment, many foreign nationals were seen as the source of the problem: “Vigilante groups such as ‘Operation Dudula’ and ‘Put South Africa First’, conducted door-to-door searches for undocumented foreign nationals groups”<sup>4</sup> (Ibid.). While South Africa does have a strong record on legal rights

for refugees and asylum seekers and the United Nations High Council on Refugees (UNHRC) notes that although (as of April 2022) SA hosts over 240 000 refugees and asylum seekers, serious difficulties continue (highlighted by HRW's closing paragraph in their report on Xenophobia in SA) (Ibid.):

In mid-2022, some government refugee reception offices reopened for the first time since their 2020 closure. However, many refugees and asylum seekers faced language, access, or technical barriers to using the online system for applications or permit renewals. Despite the government's extensions of permit renewal deadlines several times between 2020 and 2022, the ongoing barriers to registration and documentation caused asylum seekers and refugees to face risks of evictions, police harassment, and deportation, as well as difficulties opening or maintaining bank accounts, accessing basic services, and enrolling their children in school.

The reality of such large movements of people both within Africa and from Africa to the world necessitates that the church act intentionally.

How does the church intersect with such movements of people? What is the role of the church toward the foreigner, the migrant, the diaspora? God commanded action of Israel that provided guidelines for the church: *"When the alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."* (Lv 19:33-34). "This verse is a particularly strong example of the unbreakable connection in Leviticus between the moral force of the law ('love the alien as yourself') and the very being of God, 'I am the Lord your God'" (TOW, \_\_\_\_). Note that the reasoning for these actions is based upon the identity of Israel as the people of God. God simply states the rationale as his being—I am the LORD your God. Do not oppress any foreigner in your midst because one belongs to a God who is holy. Several actions are mentioned. First, they are forbidden to mistreat the foreigner. Second, they are commanded to include them into community; moreover, they are instructed to love the foreigner as themselves. Overall, they are reminded of God's love and mercy toward them when they were slaves and are called to enact that same response to the alien in their midst. In the New Testament, one finds examples of God's love and mercy towards foreigners in Jesus' healing of the centurion's servant (Lk 7:1-10), his discussion with

the woman at the well (Jn 4:1-45), and the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), and his healing of the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter (Mk 7:24-29). Arguably, the following also display God’s love and mercy towards foreigners: God leading Peter to visit the centurion’s home (Ac 10), guiding Philip to the eunuch reading through Isaiah (Ac 8:26-39), setting aside Paul for ministry to the gentiles (note “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you gentiles”; Eph 3:1), and performing the miracle at Pentecost (Ac 2:1-41). Every command God has ever given for His people to not overlook foreigners, or which commissions His followers to go to foreigners, and all the Bible’s statements of the breadth of God’s love for all peoples reflect God’s love for the foreigner as well as the people of any given land (consider Jn 3:16). In considering God’s love and mercy, the church in responding to diaspora peoples must act with compassion, create community, and commission for ministry.

#### *4.1 Incarnational Compassion*

The sentiment can be expressed that one cannot hear the gospel clearly when one is hungry (or choose any number of human needs). To that end, the church that seeks to imitate the love and mercy of God towards the foreigner, the immigrant, and the diaspora people, must express compassion such as has been modelled by God. Very often, these peoples experience times of greatest need during their journeys to their eventual new communities. The church should bear in mind, however, that although these foreigners have arrived in a “safe” place to live, it does not mean that they no longer have need.

God’s compassionate expression of his love and mercy is most clearly noted in his redemptive activity toward his people. Such actions involved not only the deliverance from sin, but also the rescue from slavery. Historically, Christians (often in connection to the church) have led both combating societal evils such as slavery (Dickerson, 2019: 139-160) and also creating societal benefits such as free public schooling (Ibid.: 161-175), hospitals (Ibid.: 107-125), and higher education (Ibid., 87-106). To seek human flourishing is not counter to the gospel proclamation; rather, the two move together in step with love and mercy.

Consider a couple of relevant passages from the New Testament. In the story of the good Samaritan, after the expert of the law who questioned Jesus responds by acknowledging that the Samaritan behaved in a neighbourly manner, Jesus said, “You go, and do likewise” (Lk 10:37).

This command isn't just applicable to that one man at that one time but, rather, is a call to be heeded by every follower of Jesus. Christians should act as proper neighbours, loving our neighbours as ourselves (v. 27), knowing that such an act crosses cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries. Concerning the scope of such love, the parable itself provides the example of caring for the needs of one another in emergencies (and one can argue that Christians should show love in less dramatic circumstances as well). Second, although it does not mention the sojourner or foreigner, James 1:27 highlights the importance of caring for the disenfranchised of the community, in this case, the widows and the orphans.<sup>5</sup> "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Ja 1:27). This verse does not simply speak of only visiting the widows and orphans but rather of caring for them "in their affliction," essentially loving them as (one should) a neighbour. While not a specific call for the treatment of diaspora people, the verse does not specify that orphans and widows must come from a single people group or nationality, thus implying they may come from any and all people groups and nationalities. The emphasis, again, is on the disenfranchised—and the foreigner in a community is often considered outside the concerns of the larger society. The church, then, is charged with engaging the needs of the diaspora community as acts of love and mercy. But, to understand the needs, one must engage with the community. Often the need expressed is not what the church may first consider. One example is noted from a pastor who had recently moved to Cape Town from another province in response to a call. In conversation around ministry plans, he indicated that he wanted to start an AIDS ministry since that was a huge need in the area whence he came. After moving through the community with a needs survey, no one in the community mentioned AIDS ministry as a need; rather, the concern was for the children of the community. As a result of this information, the pastor became involved at the local primary school, resulting in both a meaningful impact for families and an unprecedented welcome by the community.

Note, again, God's instructions to Israel regarding the treatment of the foreigner in their midst. Not only were they to avoid mistreating the alien, but to love them as themselves. God continues with practical instructions to ensure they have access to food: "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings

of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (Lv 23:22). Part of the responsibility of the church is to ensure that those within their community have their basic needs met (here the community of faith in particular, but applicable to those with whom one engages regularly).

Stories exist of challenges and encouragement for the African diaspora both outside of the content and those within the content. In considering the African diaspora in Europe, Hamilton notes the condition of the church in Italy where “churches are present in almost every location where one might find immigrants” (Blog 37, 2022) and work is engaged; however, the church at large is suffering from “compassion fatigue, which happens when people and systems become overwhelmed for a significant length of time” (Ibid.). The Italian context is not unique in that one finds essentially four types of immigrants in the diaspora: (1) legal migrants; (2) those awaiting judgment on their asylum applications; (3) those who have been denied asylum and are now in the country illegally; and (4) those who are under the control of traffickers and are working in either farms or the brothels (Ibid.). One problem for the church is that the categories are not neatly discerned as all are found in the same neighbourhoods, each with a very significant need. How, then, does the church begin to move redemptively in such a context in the face of compassion fatigue and significant needs? Hamilton argues for three actions: better networking among churches—even beyond the local context—to coordinate (and share) the work more effectively; the global church must recognize the destination site of immigrants as a critical mission field as these areas are often easier to access than the countries of origin; greater partnership between African churches in diaspora to serve as intermediaries in developing relationships with indigenous European churches (Ibid). These recommendations are valid for those engaging African diaspora within the continent as well.

One must, however, remember that God is the God who rescues and moves, and not think that everything is dependent upon our abilities and resources alone. One encouraging story is found in the context of the diaspora community in South Africa. The lockdowns that accompanied the COVID-19 protocols for South Africa were particularly hard for the diaspora community. The protocols enacted from mid-March 2020 required that every person stay on their property except to shop for food or medicine, or to go to an “essential” job. Many of the diaspora community did not have such jobs as most were encouraged to be entrepreneurs so

ran booths or shops in the community. One missionary who had been teaching a free English class in one of the city halls suddenly found that all her students were severely impacted. While they reached out to her for help, she was at a loss and called all to pray together for God's provision. Almost simultaneously, an individual from the missionary's home country reached out asking specifically about the diaspora community. When the missionary was able to relate to the situation, the individual committed themselves to challenge other church members from their community. As a result, donations began to arrive. Another problem remained, however, as one could not gather in groups even for some form of food distribution. The missionary, however, contacted a local grocery store chain and enacted a plan to purchase vouchers that could be sent to the phones of the class members. Every week people prayed, donations arrived, and vouchers were purchased. This process continued for the entire six months of the strict lockdown! (G. Davis, 2023). Like the manna in the wilderness, over 200 people were fed by the acts of compassion imitating the love and mercy of God.

Other compassionate acts of love and mercy can be expressed. For example, advocacy for immigrants in the face of laws that need to be challenged or even connecting those seeking asylum with groups such as refugee rights lawyers. Sometimes, immigrants struggle to obtain medical care; in response, churches can organize clinics utilizing local doctors. Acts of compassion allow the church to move from an isolated institution to an incarnational people among those in need. Such acts become imitative of God because they engage need redemptively while expressing concretely love and mercy. The act of compassion should never be the end goal in and of itself; rather, the goal is the worship and edification of God. Therefore, the church must seek to create genuine community.

#### *4.2 Intentional Community*

God establishes new family and communities of faith. The impact of such community can be noted in the terminology used by God. The Holy Spirit through John reminds us "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! *And that is what we are!* ..." (1 Jn 3:1, emphasis added). Throughout the New Testament familial language is used for those in the church. Such language is truly reflective of the new community God has created. If the church is to imitate the love and mercy of God toward diaspora people, then a goal must be the

invitation and inclusion into the family of God for all who have been redeemed by Christ and are following God.

For the church, genuine community is only possible among people of faith. Those who have been redeemed and follow Jesus have a unique fellowship. For true community to be established between the church and diaspora people near them, engagement must include the proclamation of the gospel as well. The presence of diaspora peoples in a city provides a unique opportunity for the church in the fulfilment of the great commission. While one may not easily go to all nations, the urban church is finding that “all nations” are coming to their neighbourhoods! Consider the World Watch list for 2023 produced by Open Doors. Of the 50 countries where Christians face the most persecution and hardship because of their faith, 19 are in Africa including 5 of the top 10 most difficult nations.<sup>6</sup> (Open Doors, 2023). People from each of these African nations (and over 40 for the entire 50) are living in Johannesburg! (Holiday, 2023). While not every urban centre will have such a large representation, each will have people from nations that missionaries cannot easily enter. A missiological shift must take place for the church, then, as their own cities and communities become an “international” mission field. One of the largest mission sending agencies in the world enacted a major shift beginning in the late 90s and strengthening today when they moved “to a people-group strategy... dissolving regional structure overseas to function through overlapping global affinity groups... in order to release missionaries to engage the unreached people groups of the diaspora” (Rankin, 2015: 199). Diaspora has changed the global dynamic of people groups around the world. This truth is critical for the church to grasp. To help create a greater understanding of the implications of this reality for the continent of Africa, the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism held a special Diaspora Consultation on Africans in Diaspora and Diaspora in Africa last year in Cape Town.<sup>7</sup> The urban church—especially in diaspora destinations such as South Africa—is uniquely positioned to engage the nations with the gospel. Quite simply, the church is presented with “great opportunities for ministry when people move from countries where there is little freedom to present the gospel to other countries that have no such limitations. For example, there is greater freedom to evangelize Moroccans in Spain, Turks in Germany, and Chinese in South Africa than in their home countries” (Downs, 2015: 78). If the church desires to imitate the love and mercy of God as demonstrated by God’s creation of community of all peoples, then the church must take seriously this

opportunity the growth in the diaspora has provided. It is fair to note that not every member of the diaspora is outside the community of faith. Due to the continued persecution of Christians on the continent--1 in 5 Christians in Africa experience some form of persecution (Open Doors, 2023)—many Christians have been forced to leave their homes; therefore, the church can welcome Christian brothers and sisters from diaspora into full fellowship.

Genuine community also demands meaningful shifts in perspective. Consider two critical shifts. First, the foreigner amid the church cannot be seen by the larger fellowship as only the recipient of the church's help. Recall God's command to Israel that "...the alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself..." (Lev. 19:34a). While help and aid can most certainly be rendered—and ought to be if there is need in the body, one cannot be seen only as a project of help. Rather, the church must see the diaspora believers as full members of the community serving within the body by exercising their ministry gifts for God's glory and kingdom. Second, inclusion of diaspora within the church body must move beyond surface diversity. Sometimes a church might celebrate the various peoples within the congregation without really providing depth of community. In one instance, a church celebrated that they had elected elders from among the diaspora in the church; however, upon deeper probing, the church did not really allow those elders to function in that capacity within the larger congregation but unconsciously limited ministry to their language/people groups within the church. Thankfully, that is no longer the reality, but it required the leadership to develop a healthier and more biblical understanding of the church as the body—all its members working together. Stevens expresses this goal well in his biblical theological examination of the church as God's "New Humanity" (2012). He provides a "special focus on being a church of the nations and for the nations... particular emphasis is placed on the crucial importance of shaping our corporate identity as God's multi-ethnic people" (Ibid.: 107).<sup>8</sup> As part of the body of Christ, every member of a local congregation has gifts given by the Spirit to be exercised in the church for the glory of God and the advancement of God's kingdom and mission. The church must equip all members for ministry and provide space for service.

#### *4.3 Equipping for Missions and Commissioning as Missionaries*

The continued growth of diaspora movements globally provides another

unique opportunity for the church: equipping the next generations of missionaries. Just as one expression of God’s love and mercy was his desire for all nations to be blessed through his people as seen in Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples, the church that imitates God faithfully, must also have a desire for all to come to be saved. One aspect of the church’s intersection with the diaspora in their midst that must be considered is the potential missional impact. This impact can be illustrated with three perspectives.

The first dimension to consider (hinted above) is the opportunity to equip the diaspora within the church to reach the immigrant population in one’s own city. Anyone who engages in compassion ministry can express as truth that word of help travels quickly.<sup>9</sup> This word travels because of the connectedness of the diaspora community. The church needs to understand that the gospel can also be spread along these same lines of communication. To facilitate such communication, the church must take the task of equipping and training seriously. In one Bible study group of Congolese women earlier this year, the teacher spent a few weeks providing evangelism training. During the following week’s Bible study, the entire group went into the community to have gospel conversations. The excitement among the members was tangible! They had shared the gospel with fellow diaspora effectively and competently as obedient followers of Jesus. Among the young adult group of a local church in Cape Town, one member of the Young Adult Bible study who is from Angola and is studying at a local college began taking the material taught, translating it into Portuguese, and leading a Bible study at the campus of his school. While many people groups are present in a city, the easiest way of engagement is still through someone from the same people group with the same language abilities. Hamilton notes that in the context of Morocco, the African diaspora has more freedom to engage the diaspora community with the gospel than the established church (Blog 52, 2023)! As the church welcomes the diaspora into the local body of Christ, the church must equip those who come to faith to be able to share this gospel message with others—especially their diaspora community—and see them as local missionaries.

A second dimension of training to consider involves those immigrants who are only in the church for a season and intend to return home. Many of the larger urban centres host universities and colleges that attract international students. While those students are members of a local church, the church

must ensure that they are equipping them to think missionally. When they return home, they will have opportunities for new engagement. Upon the completion of studies, many will be seen with a higher status than when they left home. Many will have new areas of influence and opportunity. The church must equip the students to serve God faithfully in their new circumstances. This shift requires that the church train those members as missionaries to engage in the missionary task. Further, the church should take the role of a sending church with those who are going. The same young man from Angola mentioned above travelled home recently for three weeks between semesters and had the opportunity to lead three Bible studies. The local discipleship leader has been intentional in equipping all the members to share the gospel and disciple others. This young man is a business student but has new opportunities as he travels home. Those immigrants who immigrate for short-term work provide another example. One church in a small town in South Africa had a surprising number of Filipino members who were working as engineers and construction experts on a power plant. These workers explained that they regularly travelled to countries for work which lasted 1-4 years. One of the Filipino workers explained that he saw himself as a missionary with his construction work as a platform. The church needs to help more members gain such a perspective. The church needs to gain this perspective!

A final group for consideration is those who will be leaving the church for other destinations. These may be diaspora members of the church that will resettle in the country that is not their place of origin or these may be local members who will be immigrating to a new country. The African church has a tremendous capacity to impact the global community. Hamilton argues that “the mantle of ministry is being passed from the West to the South, and Africa is ready to heed the call. It is truly a historic moment” (Blog 38, 2022). He cites three key observations (Ibid.): (1) “the African church has an incredible influence on the lives of her migratory members... If disciplined properly, these [workers and students] will travel legally around the globe... each being a transmission agent of the gospel” (Ibid.); (2) “the African church has perhaps the largest mission-sending capacity of any continent... As Africans, they can go almost anywhere and find support upon arrival. Why? Because African migrants are literally everywhere”<sup>10</sup>. (Ibid.); (3) “the African church is becoming well established in many migrant transit locations... making a difference in the lives of migrants, her members are ministering to their neighbors [sic],

and many are coming to faith” (Ibid.). The church needs to become more intentional in training its young adults as missionaries as this demographic is most likely to immigrate. One growing trend and potential for African students is the opportunity to study abroad as many nations in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia are actively recruiting students from African nations for their state universities (Hamilton, “Report”, 2023). If the church is to capture God’s passion for the lost and God’s desire to see “all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all...” (1 Tim 2:3b-6a), then the imitation of God’s love and mercy toward the diaspora must include actively equipping them to reach the nations.

## **5. Conclusion**

The call to love one’s neighbour is best expressed as it flows from one’s love of God. Similarly, the expectation to imitate God is best expressed when it precedes actions with imitation of the attributes of God. Humanity’s creation in the image of God provides the foundation for the ability of the Christian to reflect God’s character, to be salt, to be light, and to be holy because God is holy. God’s attributes of love and mercy, then, are foundation in the expression to love one’s neighbour!

In the current environment, one’s neighbour is increasingly likely to be a member of the global diaspora. These neighbours often face unique challenges and needs while bringing unique abilities and perspectives. As the church moves to engage with the diaspora, the call to model God’s love and mercy must be heard, hearkened, and heeded. One must hear with understanding the expectation to imitate the LORD. One must hear with a desire to unpack the meaning and implications of patterning one’s life after Jesus. One must also, however, hearken the call to imitate. Beyond hearing to understand, one must hear with the intention to obey (compare words, 2023). Grasping the expanse of God’s love and mercy through God’s expression of compassion, acts of redemption, and commission to service. Ultimately, having an understanding and intention to obey proves meaningless if one does not heed the call. Truly, the church is placed to reflect godly love and mercy to the diaspora in its midst.

To heed such a call should instruct the missiology of the church. The expectation of this call not only includes the engagement in meaningful advocacy on behalf of the diaspora to combat injustices they face and

acts of compassion that addresses their needs and challenges, but it also includes the diaspora into the local body of Christ.

The church is truly positioned in a “great commission” moment in time. God’s perspectives often seem contrary to what seems obvious to humanity. Consider the story of Jericho from the book of Judges. In chapter six, the reader is informed that the city “was tightly shut up... No one went out and no one came in” (6:1). While this description is presented as if it was a problem, God responds “See I have delivered Jericho into your hands...” (6:2). God had gathered all the people into one place and provided a plan. For many, the increasing presence of diaspora in a city is seen as a problem; however, one might rightly declare that God has gathered all the peoples into one place! In light of the diaspora, the church must plan for all three types of diaspora missions as outlined by Wan (*as cited in* Downs, 2015: 78):

1. Missions to the diaspora: reaching the diaspora groups themselves
2. Missions through the diaspora: diaspora Christians reaching out to their kinsmen wherever they are.
3. Missions by and beyond the diaspora: motivating and mobilizing diaspora Christians for cross-cultural missions.

In John 4:4, the Holy Spirit relates that Jesus “had to go through Samaria.” Despite generations of animosity between Jews and Samaritans and the lack of understanding by his disciples, Jesus looks upon the woman at the well and the Samaritans of the town with compassion. The result of Jesus’ detour was many of the Samaritans in that town believed in him (v. 39-42). In considering the diaspora in its midst, may the church heed Jesus words to his disciples: “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (v. 35b).

## **6. Notes**

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are from the *New International Version* (NIV)
2. One finds instances of both individuals such as Rahab (Jos 6:22) and Ruth as well as entire people groups such as the Gibeonites (Jos 9). Although the Gibeonites acted with deception to fool the Israelites into entering a covenant with them, God does not punish Israel. To the contrary, God honours the commitment of Israel when they move to rescue the Gibeonites from persecution

(Jos 10) as well as avenging the Gibeonites after Saul had persecuted them (2 Sm 21). The Gibeonites acted to create a covenant with Israel because they had heard of the LORD (see verses 9-10, 24). Rahab had similar statements concerning the LORD (see Jos 2:9-11). A common theme seems to be those peoples who recognize God and seek God are welcomed.

3. UNHCR highlighted several “major situations or operations in Africa in 2019” (Moving from North and West to East and South): MALI—164,500 Malian refugees; 844,400 IDPs in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Western Nigeria; 40,000 returnees; NIGERIA—285,000 refugees in the Lake Chad region; 2.3 million IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria, north Cameroon, and Southwest Chad; CAMEROON—54,300 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria; 670,400 IDPs in Southwest and Northwest Cameroon; DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO—916,800 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers; 5.01 million internally displaced; 2.1 million IDP returnees; 58% children; CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC—610,300 refugees; 669,900 internally displaced; 137,200 refugee and IDP returnees; SOUTH SUDAN—2.2 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries; 1.67 million internally displaced; 99,800 refugee returnees; 276,500 IDP returnees; 63% children; SOMALIA—773,800 Somali refugees in neighbouring countries and Yemen; 2.65 million internally displaced; 6,200 refugee returnees; BURUNDI—333,600 Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries; 33,300 internally displaced; 21,200 refugee returnees. (Hamilton “Report”, 2023).

4. The HRW report also noted “Xenophobic sentiments in the country were further reinforced by prominent political figures... In January 2022, [one politician] visited restaurants in Johannesburg’s Mall of Africa to assess the ratio of South African to foreign nationals employed by businesses there” (HRW, 2023).

5. For a more complete examination of this passage and its implications for the church, see R Davis, “Pure Religion.” *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology*. Issue 23 (2014), 1-15. For a similar focus on engaging the disenfranchised, see R Davis, “‘But I tell you...’ Implications of Jesus’ Instruction on the Value of Life in Matthew 5:21-26 for Christians in a Polarized Society.” *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology*, Issue 30 (2021), 146-171.

6. 2. Somalia; 4. Eritrea; 5. Libya; 6. Nigeria; 10. Sudan.

7. Previous consultation was held to consider European diaspora and this year a consultation was held in Seoul to consider the impact of diaspora in Asia and Asians in diaspora.

8. In considering Paul’s statements on the equality of all people within the church (cf. Col 3:11; Gl 3:28), Stevens argues that the levelling of status for men/women;

slave/freed; Jew/Gentile does not level all distinctions of culture or ethnicity; rather, he notes that these distinctions “*must no longer have primary defining force*” (2011: 121, emphasis in original). He further clarifies that “Christ calls us past our ethnicity, but not out of our ethnicity. Furthermore, the renewal of the New Humanity is not *irrespective* of differences of ethnicity and culture, but inclusive of such differences” (Ibid., emphasis in original).

9. Hamilton notes that this reality of the rapid multiplication in compassion ministries is also compounded by African culture that demands hospitality is shown to the neighbour. Small African diaspora churches in Spain, for example, struggle with the tension between caring for the community’s needs and the congregation’s needs noting “If an African comes to your door, it would be a sin... culturally and biblically... to turn them away. But... there will be ten tomorrow if they help one today. Those ten would turn to a hundred the next day. Without some measure of control, every church would become overwhelmed” (Blog 53, 2023). Hamilton went on to note that their solution was insightful: “Their solution was to make it known that they did not engage in public service to the migrant community. But... with incredible wisdom... they encouraged their members to seek ways to love their neighbours. They found that the congregation, being migrants, themselves, knew how to best care for their friends and co-workers. By resourcing their members to do that kind of ministry, they empowered them to hare the gospel with a high level of credibility and effectiveness” (Ibid.)

10. In considering the presence of African migrants around the globe, Hamilton relates “a joke told around Mali that when Neil Armstrong planted the US flag on the moon, a Soninke tapped him on the should and asked him if he wanted to buy another one!” (Blog 38, 2022)

11. For a more complete engagement on the topic, see Wan’s foundational work: *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, revised edition (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011).

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### **Author’s Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him/her in the writing of this article.

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## **A Critical Theological Examination of Little's Creation-Order Theodicy's Soteriology in Light of the Coexistence of Gratuitous Evil with the Benevolence and Sovereignty of God**

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### ***Abstract***

*This research, entitled "A Critical Theological Examination of Little's Creation-Order Theodicy's Soteriology in Light of the Coexistence of Gratuitous Evil with the Benevolence and Sovereignty of God", sought to evaluate the soteriological provision in the theodicy. Upon identifying inherent weaknesses in the soteriology, the research aimed to revise Little's Creation-Order Theodicy to account for a soteriology that is in harmony with the coexistence of gratuitous evil with the benevolence and sovereignty of God.*

*The integrative theology methodology proposed by Lewis and Demarest was utilized for the research. The chosen methodology allowed for the integration of information from various disciplines. The methodological steps followed were: (1) evaluation of Little's theodicy, (2) evaluation of major Christian monotheistic theodicies, both historical and contemporary, (3) exegetical analysis of pertinent biblical texts, (4) construction of theologically formulated revisions to the Creation-Order Theodicy, (5) apologetic interaction of the revised Creation-Order Theodicy with major Christian monotheistic theodicies, and (6) evaluation of theological relevance of revised the Creation-Order Theodicy.*

*The research culminated in a revised Creation-Order Theodicy. Most significantly, the revised theodicy contained a soteriology that provided salvation for all who would be saved. The following biblically, theologically, and logically sound revisions were incorporated into the original Creation-Order Theodicy: (1) a soteriological understanding of God's benevolence, (2) the actualization of the world in which all who would be saved are saved, (3) dichotomization between the best way to the best possible world from the best of all possible worlds, to include qualifying and quantifying criteria for each, and (4) a consistent position on the gratuitous nature of evil.*

*The revised Creation-Order Theodicy provided a paradigm shift on how to counsel the suffering, how to engage a fallen world, and the development of a new theological curriculum.*

## **1. Introduction**

The Creation-Order Theodicy is the work of Dr. Bruce Little. Little explores and defends the possibility of the coexistence of gratuitous evil with the sovereignty of God (Little 2013: 46-49). Antithetical to greater good theodicies, Little argues that God's benevolence is not undermined by the existence of gratuitous evil and is expressed through God actualizing the best of all possible worlds (Little 2005: 150-152). However, Little's theodicy fails to provide for the salvation of all who would be saved, a deficiency that is considered a fundamental weakness in Little's work. This research aimed at resolving the primary soteriological deficiency identified in the Creation-Order Theodicy.

In constructing a resolution to the soteriological deficiency identified in the Creation-Order Theodicy, revisions were necessary regarding Little's position on actualising the best of all possible worlds, and the lack of consistency on the nature of gratuitous evil. Little's stipulation for what constitutes the best of all possible worlds was determined to be incongruent with a biblical understanding of the benevolence of God. It negated a sound soteriology (2 Pt 3:9). Little's criterion for the best of all possible worlds only requires that God achieve the optimal balance between good and evil, and between the saved and the unsaved. Such an optimization could render a person saved in one world, but unsaved in another world. Their salvation, albeit through their libertarian free choice, would be a function of which world God chose to actualize. Revising the criterion of which world God would actualize, could remedy the optimization shortfall. By changing the criterion of which world to actualize to all who would be saved, no one would be lost as a function of God actualizing the world. In consideration of the benevolence of God, such a criterion would be reflective of the manifestation of his benevolence and coherent with the biblical record.

The initial research required an analysis of the chosen theodicies and was conducted based on the fundamental elements of Little's theodicy. The fundamental elements were: (1) evil, (2) creation-order, (3) benevolence and sovereignty of God, (4) libertarian freedom, (5) soteriology, (6) middle knowledge and the best of all possible worlds, and (7) gratuitous evil.

After analyzing Little's theodicy and identifying its critical deficiencies, the alternative theodicies were evaluated to see if they contributed to rectifying the soteriological and other associated deficiencies identified in Little's Creation-Order Theodicy. Upon completion of the theodical analysis, no resolution was found to the soteriological deficiency identified in the Creation-Order Theodicy.

After a careful analysis of Little's Creation-Order Theodicy, historical and contemporary major monotheistic theodicies, and the biblical text; a revision to the Creation-Order Theodicy that incorporated a soteriology that provides for the salvation of all who would be saved was constructed. The proposal of a sound theodical soteriology required a coherent understanding of the coexistence of gratuitous evil with the benevolence and sovereignty of God. The biblical text informed the position that the research would maintain regarding gratuitous evil, and the benevolence and sovereignty of God. The new theodical doctrine, once introduced back into the framework of the Creation-Order Theodicy, offered soteriological resolution, and provided for the simultaneous coexistence of gratuitous evil with the benevolence and sovereignty of God.

## **2. Analysis Of The Fundamentals**

### *Evil*

Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Little defines evil as a privation (Little 2005: 134; Augustine 1955, § 2.19.53; Aquinas 2014, § 1.49.1; Geisler and Bocchino 2001:233). Ontologically, God could not create a non-contingent and perfect creation because only God is necessary and perfect. Although God created humanity as close to perfect as possible, the contingent human cannot be equal to the necessary and perfect God (Little 2005:134-135). The contingent nature of humanity creates the privation of creaturely perfection and thus the potential for evil (Little 2005:141-142). While the act of creation does make evil possible, evil is not necessary (Little 2005:135).

### *Creation-order and Sovereignty*

Creation-order, the "*modus vivendi*", is the structure whereby humanity interacts with God, (Little 2005: 135; 2010: 84-92). Creation-order stands in contrast to the macroevolution and natural order approaches proposed by Dembski and Hasker respectively (Dembski 2009: 42; Hasker 2008: 139). Within the creation-order, there are rules by which humanity must abide. Humanity's choices are limited within the creation-order (Little 2010: 87).

The limitations set the parameters for humanity, while simultaneously allowing humanity to have full libertarian free choice within the set of available choices. The individual has an authentic mind and can act volitionally, thus being fully culpable for their choices. Similarly, the physical laws of nature are part of the creation-order (Little 2010: 90). The predictability and regularity of the laws of nature throughout the universe allow humanity to live safely and harness the power of the physical world.

Also, within creation-order is covenantal ordering (Little 2010: 91). Within the created order, God has limited himself by adhering to covenants (Gn 9:11). The covenantal ordering bears directly on understanding and applying God's sovereignty. Those who hold to a meticulous providence understanding of God's sovereignty, such as Irenaeus and Augustine, insist that everything that happens in creation has a purpose (Irenaeus 2016, §2982; Augustine 2013, Loc. 5954-5965). The justification for God allowing evil to happen is that he has a purpose for each evil, either to bring about a greater good or prevent a worse evil. Little argues that the meticulous providence understanding of God's sovereignty would, in effect, make God responsible for the evils he prohibits (Little 2005: 181-182).

Antithetical to the meticulous providence understanding of God's sovereignty, Little suggests that God has voluntarily, without any external influence, decided on how he would interact with humanity (Little 2005: 136). God, being necessary, is ontologically different from contingent humanity (Little 2005: 136; MacGregor 2005: 1). To have a truly volitional relationship with contingent humanity, God sovereignly gave humans the ability to make real choices. Little and Olson agree that the construct of such a relationship requires that God, within the time and space of creation, self-limit the full expression of some of his attributes (Little 2005: 136; Olson 2009: 44). Scholars such as Fouts, Hendryx, Highfield, and Haas, consider any self-limitation of God to be a weakness which denies God of his sovereignty (Fouts 1993; Hendryx 2018; Highfield 2002; Haas 2011:13).

### *Benevolence*

Little denies the greater good understanding of God's benevolence, namely that God must bring about a greater good or prevent a worse evil to justify each evil he allows (Little 2005: 112-113). Instead, Little suggests that through his middle knowledge consistent with his benevolence, God will

actualize the best of all possible worlds. God's benevolence would require the actualization of such a world (Little 2010: 95-99). Little stipulates that the best of all possible worlds will have the optimal balance between good and evil, and the optimal balance between the saved and unsaved (Little 2010: 121). Based on a definition of God's benevolence being the expression of his unselfish concern and welfare for humanity, it is argued that Little's criterion for the best of all possible worlds is irreflective of God's benevolence (Ryrie 1999: 44; Erickson 1998: 318-319). Little uses the optimal balance between the saved and unsaved as a standard of God's benevolence (Little 2010: 121). It is maintained that a standard that merely achieves the optimal balance between the saved and unsaved could render a person saved in one contingent world and unsaved in another. Even though each person freely chooses whether to accept or reject God, their salvation could be directly impacted by which world God chooses to actualize, even though the optimal balance between the saved and unsaved would be achieved. Therefore, the researchers propose that if God's benevolence is understood as being concerned for the welfare of all of humanity, then the manifestation of his benevolence would provide for the salvation of all who would be saved. Further, Craig suggests, that God would lovingly actualize those who reject him into their least culpable set of counterfactuals, while still honouring their libertarian free choices (Craig 1995: 9). Such a manifestation of God's benevolence would determine which world he actualized.

### *Libertarian Freedom*

Libertarian freedom is the concept that God has given humans the ability to make free choices within the two or more possibilities that are available to them (Little 2010: 14). In deciding between the available choices, humans exercise moral evaluations. Although God, through his middle knowledge, knows what decisions man will make, God does not determine the decisions (Little 2010: 94). Libertarian freedom is congruent with the understanding of God's self-limiting sovereignty. Libertarian freedom conflicts with the predestination and deterministic views of reformed scholars such as Calvin (Calvin 2010, Loc. 896). Hasker notes that under the compatibilist view, a person's choices have been predetermined, yet that person is held responsible for their moral choices (Hasker 2008: 153).

### *Soteriology*

Little's soteriology opposes an Augustinian type of gratuitous election and predestination-based soteriology. Augustine and Aquinas held that

God gratuitously elected to predestine some to salvation and others to reprobation (Augustine 2013, Loc. 171311-171321; Aquinas 2005: 580). Little's soteriology eliminates God's gratuitous election and predestination of individuals as the causation for who is saved and who is unsaved. Instead, Little's soteriology is demonstrated through his argument that the actualization of the best of all possible worlds would include the optimal balance between those who are saved and those who are unsaved (Little 2005, 155). Little explains that those who are unsaved are unsaved by their own libertarian free will choices and God is not responsible for their choices (Little 2005: 138,155,157,184). It is found that Little's criterion of achieving the optimal balance between the saved and unsaved to be a deficiency in his soteriology. The optimal balance between the saved and unsaved could be achieved depending on which world God chose to actualise. However, a particular person could be saved in one world yet unsaved in another world, although the optimal balance between saved and unsaved was still obtained. As a function of obtaining an optimal balance, Little's soteriology does not account for the salvation of all who would be saved. Therefore, it can be contended that God, being benevolent, would want as many people to be saved as is possible.

Like Little, Craig argues for the actualization of the best of all possible worlds, with the best world containing the optimal balance between the saved and the unsaved (Craig 1989:184). However, Craig also contends for the existence of Transworld damnation, the state of being whereby "any person who freely does not respond to God's grace and so is lost in every world feasible for God in which that person exists" (Craig 1989:184). Craig's theory of Transworld damnation suffers from shortcomings. The most significant shortcoming of the Transworld damnation theory is that it is based on facts that are not in evidence. Craig's entire theory rests on assumptions of counterfactuals that cannot be proven. Scripturally, 1 Samuel 13:13 and Matthew 11:23 indicate that counterfactuals can result in different outcomes. We do not know those outcomes; therefore, it can be concluded that Transworld damnation cannot be evidentially demonstrated. It is impossible to definitively state that an individual would be lost in every possible counterfactual situation. Thus, neither Little nor Craig provides a soteriology whereby all who would be saved are saved.

#### *Middle Knowledge And The Best Of All Possible Worlds*

Little has adopted a belief in the middle knowledge of God (Little 2005: 147). The concept of middle knowledge was introduced in Molina's

Concordia (Molina 2004, §4.52.9). Middle knowledge is the knowledge that God has of the undetermined acts of “His free moral agents in all possible circumstances” (Little 2005: 146). Also subscribing to a belief in God’s middle knowledge are Flint and Laing who use the term ‘counterfactual’ to describe the nondetermined acts of God’s free moral agents (Flint 1998: 40; Laing 2018, §8151).

Through God’s middle knowledge, his knowledge of all counterfactuals, Little postulates that God chooses which world to actualize (Little 2005: 147). Further, God must choose to actualize the best of all possible worlds due to his omnibenevolence. The best of all possible worlds, according to Little, would be that world which contained the optimal balance between good and evil as well as the optimal balance between the saved and unsaved (Little 2010: 121). Craig, alongside Little, proposes that the criterion for the best of all possible worlds is the achievement of the optimal balance between the saved and the unsaved (Craig 1989: 184). Molina, the architect of the theory of middle knowledge, determined that God’s selection of which world to actualize would be determined solely by his sovereignty and gratuitous predestination regarding the saved and unsaved (Molina 2004, §4.14.13.53.2.13; 2009, §7.23.4 – 5.1.11.7-10). Laing, also a proponent of God’s middle knowledge, denies that God must actualize the best of all possible worlds (Laing 2018, §5115). Laing reasons that God will actualize the world that best meets his purposes. Appealing to mystery, Laing asserts that we cannot know the goals and purposes that God intends, therefore we cannot accurately ascribe the criterion of what the best world would be.

Rennie argues against adopting the theory of middle knowledge, insisting that God would only have a probable knowledge of contingent choices in lieu of a certain knowledge of them (Rennie 2019: 5)

Geisler likewise argued against the existence of middle knowledge (Geisler 2010: 143-144). Geisler maintained that middle knowledge would undermine God’s sovereignty ( Geisler 2010: 143). Additionally, Geisler contended that middle knowledge required a linear progression of God’s knowledge, God knowing things and then making decisions accordingly (p. 148). In lieu of a linear progression of knowledge, Geisler maintained that God knows all things intuitively and simultaneously, not progressively. Regarding Geisler’s claim that middle knowledge would require a linear progression of God’s knowledge, and can be argued that

God's middle knowledge is likewise intuitive and simultaneous, not requiring any linear progression of time or knowledge.

In defining the best of all possible worlds, Little puts parameters on defining what constitutes the world. Little defines the world as existing from the beginning of creation to the full manifestation of the kingdom of God throughout eternity (Little 2005: 147). Although Little contends that he has defined what the best of all possible worlds is, the world that has the optimal balance between good and evil as well as the optimal balance between the saved and the unsaved, I argued that his terminology does not give definitive qualifiers or quantifiers as to what the best would be. To require only the optimal balance between the saved and the unsaved could result in an individual being unsaved in the actualized world, where they would have been saved in an unactualized world. Little's optimal balance criterion does not provide individuals with the best soteriological situation.

Geisler, Bocchino and Corduan developed a dichotomized definition for understanding the best of all possible worlds (Geisler and Bocchino 2001: 235; Geisler and Corduan 1988: 345). Geisler and Bocchino denied that this actualized world is the best of all possible worlds (Geisler and Bocchino 2001: 235). Instead, Geisler, Bocchino and Corduan, maintained that the actualized world is the best way to achieve the best of all possible worlds – heaven (Geisler and Bocchino 2001: 235; Geisler and Corduan 1988: 345). Geisler, Bocchino and Corduan stipulated that the actualized world must have the most moral value and achieve the greatest good possible. However, they failed to consider the salvation of humanity as a qualifier or quantifier in determining what world would be the best world to achieve the final, best of all possible worlds. Additionally, they failed to offer any means to assess whether the actualized world is the best way to achieve the best of all possible worlds.

Regarding heaven, the best of all possible worlds, Geisler and Corduan explained that a sinless heaven is better than any existence on earth where there is sin (Geisler and Corduan 1988: 313). The state of being in heaven where there is no sin is a quantifiable measure of what is best. No sin is better than the smallest amount of sin. Although argued that Geisler, Bocchino and Corduan did not successfully quantify or qualify the best way to the best of all possible worlds, it can be argued that dichotomizing the actualized world from the future world in heaven is

a valuable construct in building a soteriologically centered revision of Little's Creation-Order Theodicy.

### *Gratuitous Evil*

Little affirms the possibility of the existence of gratuitous evil (Little 2013: 46-49). In rebutting any greater good reason for God to allow evil, Little offers a six-point argument: (1) to fight for social justice would be to undermine the greater good that would be obtained if the evils went unchallenged, (2) the greater good makes God dependent on evil to do good, (3) there is no way to positively measure the value of the good that is associated with a particular evil, (4) it is a logical fallacy to argue that the end justifies the means, (5) a greater good reason requires an overly deterministic operation of God's sovereignty, and (6) if the greater good reasoning were valid, then the greater the evils that are allowed, the greater the corresponding goods will be, so evil should never be stopped. Borofsky contends the argument for the existence of gratuitous evil answers questions and resolves issues that the greater good theodical position does not (Borofsky 2011: 6).

Although Little argues convincingly for the existence of gratuitous evil, Little equivocates on his stance stating that even if most evils were gratuitous, it would not mean that all evils are gratuitous (Little 2013: 45). The researchers maintain that Little's equivocation is problematic. Having argued competently for the existence of gratuitous evil, and against a greater good rationale for evil, Little undermines his own argument by giving allowance for non-gratuitous evil. If, as Little presented, the argument against the greater good pertains to one evil, it should pertain to all evils.

Hasker likewise endorses a belief in gratuitous evil (Hasker 2008: 203-207). However, Hasker reaches his conclusion from an open theistic perspective. MacGregor also believes in gratuitous evil (MacGregor 2012, 174). Building a strong argument for gratuitous evil, MacGregor presents propositions similar to those in Little's argument (MacGregor 2012: 171-172; Little 2013: 46-49). Contrary to the equivocating position held by Little, MacGregor holds a consistent position regarding gratuitous evil, namely that all evil is gratuitous.

Unlike Little, historical and contemporary greater good theodicians deny the existence of gratuitous evil. Historically, theodicians such as Augustine,

Aquinas, Molina, and Leibniz all held to a greater good justification for evil (Augustine 2016, §XI, 7187; Aquinas 2014, §1.2.2; Molina 2004, §4.3.53.3; Leibniz 1996, part 1, pp. 62;86). The argument was simple, God must bring about a greater good or prevent a worse evil for every evil that is allowed. Similarly, contemporary theodacists Geisler, Bocchino, and Craig, have held to a greater good justification for evil (Geisler and Bocchino 2001: 239; Craig 2016: 3). Craig bases his argument on the epistemic distance between God and man; man simply does not know the mind of God and his purposes for allowing evils (Craig 2017, §958).

### **3. Formulation Of A Soteriologically Centered, Revised Creation-Order Theodicy**

Little's Creation-Order Theodicy provides a strong theodical framework, yet it is considered it to be deficient in several aspects. The proposed revisions of the Creation-Order Theodicy provided rectification of the following deficiencies: (1) a definition and outworking of God's benevolence that better reflects the biblical text, (2) a soteriology that provides for the salvation of all who would be saved, (3) dichotomization of the best way to the best of all possible worlds from the best of all possible worlds, offering qualification and quantification for both timeframes of existence, and (4) a consistent position on the existence of gratuitous evil.

#### *Benevolence and Soteriology*

Little claims that God demonstrates his benevolence by creating the best of all possible worlds, consisting of the optimal balance between good and evil and the optimal balance between the saved and the unsaved (Little 2005:150;153; Little 2010:121). The contention is that a proper understanding of God's benevolence and his choice of which world to actualize must be soteriologically based. The researchers contended that the witness of scripture requires that the salvation of all must be considered (2 Pt 3:9; 1 Jn 4:10) arguing that the benevolence of God would not be satisfied by him actualizing a world that only achieves an optimal balance between the saved and unsaved, such a world would result in the inadvertent eternal damnation of some people. Such people may be saved if God selected a different world to actualize.

Therefore, it is proposed that God's benevolence is best demonstrated by assuring that all who would be saved are saved. No person who would ever be saved under some counterfactual circumstances would ever suffer eternal damnation. Given the infinitude of counterfactual possibilities,

resulting in an infinitude of possible worlds, it is logically possible for God to actualize a world in which all who would be saved are saved. Further, as a continued demonstration of his benevolence and in respect of their libertarian free choices, he would actualize those who reject him into their least culpable existence (Craig 1995: 9).

Dichotomize the best possible way from the best of all possible worlds. Little's definition of what constitutes the world is that which begins at creation and lasts throughout the manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth for all eternity (Little 2005: 150). While encompassing the entirety of the timeframe proposed by Little, it is proposed that the dichotomized framework provided by Geisler and Corduan (Geisler and Corduan 1988: 356) to be more acceptable. The dichotomization results in the following timeframes: (1) the actualized world as the best possible way to the best of all possible worlds, and (2) the future world of heaven as the best of all possible worlds.

While the sum of the dichotomized timeframes is equivalent to Little's timeframe, the dichotomization offered value and clarity. By dichotomizing the timeframes, a qualifiable and quantifiable definition of 'best' could be developed as was pertinent to each timeframe. The definition of best, as applied to each timeframe, clarified the totality of the theodicy as it undergirds the attributes of God while simultaneously providing for the salvation of all who would be saved.

#### *Qualify And Quantify The Best Way To The Best Of All Possible Worlds*

The researchers contend that the actualized world must be the world that contains all who would be saved if it is to be the best way possible. In defining the term 'best' as it pertains to the actualized world, the qualifier is those who would be saved, and the quantifier is all. Reflecting the biblical record, 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 John 4:10 it is argued that God's benevolence is most realized in his provision for the salvation of humanity. This argument rests on the premise that the number of people that comprise humanity is fixed, there are no contingent human beings. Therefore, the most benevolent situation in the actualized world would be for everyone who, through their libertarian free choices, would ever be saved to be saved.

Further, those who reject God's salvation would benevolently be actualized into their least culpable set of counterfactuals concerning their libertarian

free choices. Given the infinitude of counterfactual combinations, it is logical for God, through his middle knowledge and reflective of his omnibenevolence, to be able to actualize such a world. As defined previously, the actualized world is the best way to achieve the best of all possible worlds.

*Qualify and Quantify the Best of All Possible Worlds*

The best of all possible worlds is the future kingdom in heaven. In heaven, there will be no sin and all who would be saved are saved and will reside with God for eternity. Because the actualized world, as defined, contains all who would ever be saved under any counterfactual combination, heaven will likewise be populated with all who would ever be saved. Heaven will not be limited to a population resulting from an optimal balance of saved versus unsaved people. No person will suffer eternal damnation due to God's choice to actualize one world in lieu of another. By actualizing the world in which all who would be saved are saved, God provides the best way possible to guarantee the best of all possible worlds, the future world in heaven.

For those who, through their libertarian free choices, choose to reject God's plan of salvation, they will also experience their best eternal situation. Those who reject God will have their choices in the actualized world permanentized in eternal damnation. By actualizing such individuals into the counterfactuals that will make them least culpable, God thereby mitigates their punishment as much as possible, while respecting their libertarian free choices. Such an arrangement upholds God's benevolence and his demand for justice.

*Gratuitous evil*

Both Little and MacGregor demonstrate sound arguments against the greater good justification for evil and the existence of gratuitous evil (Little 2005:124-126; MacGregor 2012: 171-172). It is contended that all moral and natural evils are gratuitous as they pertain to God and, as such, do not infringe on the attributes of God. Evil is a privation, and because humankind is created, and thus ontologically not equal to the necessary and perfect God, humanity is subject to privation. Privation resulting from the ontological difference between God and contingent humanity, does not make evil necessary, it only makes it possible (Little 2005:135).

Logically, if Little and MacGregor's arguments against the greater good

justification for evil apply to one evil, they must apply to all evils (Little 2005: 124-126; MacGregor 2012: 171-172). Given the soundness of the arguments presented by Little and MacGregor, and in consideration of the biblical account in Lk 13:1-5, thus incorporating the position that all evils are gratuitous in my revisions of the Creation-Order Theodicy. The position on gratuitous evil included the self-limiting understanding of God's sovereignty and negates the meticulous providence sovereignty model held by greater good theodacists. When considered within the creation-order, the self-limiting sovereignty of God, as explored in Gn 9:11, along with the libertarian freedom of man, coexist with gratuitous evil (Olson 2009: 44). The gratuitous nature of evil does not infer that God is powerless to come against any moral or natural evil. Instead, because of his sovereign choice to establish and abide by a creation-order, which includes the self-limiting manifestation of some of his attributes, gratuitous evils are allowed in the passive sense. It is therefore maintained that gratuitous evils do not infringe on any attribute of God; they in fact, uphold the attributes of God.

#### **4. The Soteriologically Centered, Revised Creation-Order Theodicy – A Summary Presentation**

The soteriologically centered, revised Creation-Order Theodicy was based on the following two premises: (1) through his middle knowledge, God knows all counterfactuals, and (2) no person is contingent, God set a definitive number of people that he would create. In every possible world, every person would exist.

Knowing all counterfactuals, God chose to actualize the world in which all people who would ever be saved are saved. Further, for those who are unsaved, having rejected God by their own libertarian free choices, God actualized them into their least culpable set of counterfactuals, mitigating their retribution as much as possible. This construct demonstrates the benevolence of God and preserves the libertarian freedom of humanity.

Because the actualized world contains all who would ever be saved, and the unsaved are in their least culpable set of counterfactuals, the actualized world is the best way to achieve the best of all possible worlds. The actualized world can be considered the best because it can be qualified and quantified. Regarding qualification, the best refers to the state of being saved and the state of being least culpable. Regarding quantification, the best refers to all who would be saved and the mitigation of culpability of

all who would be unsaved. Therefore, the actualized world is the best way possible world to achieve the best of all possible worlds, the future world in heaven.

The future world in heaven is the best of all possible worlds. The future world can be considered the best of all possible worlds because it will contain all who would ever be saved under any set of counterfactuals. Further: (1) the saved will reside with God, (2) there will be no sin, and (3) evil will not exist. Those who are unsaved and will suffer eternal damnation, they will have their retribution mitigated as much as possible while having their libertarian free choices honored. The future world in heaven for the saved is qualifiably and quantifiably the best. The qualifiers are salvation and sinlessness. The quantifiers are all who would be saved and no sin. Likewise, for the unsaved, the state of eternal damnation is the best possible world. The qualification is the mitigation of punishment, and the quantification is all unsaved people receiving the most mitigation possible.

In the actualized world, God set up a creation-order, the *modus vivendi* whereby God and humanity can have a truly volitional relationship (Little 2005: 136 –137). Within the creation-order, God bound himself to self-limiting covenants. Because he freely entered the covenants, they do not impinge on his sovereignty. The self-limiting understanding of God's sovereignty negates the need for meticulous providence and makes possible libertarian free choices by humanity and the associated consequences.

Lastly, the soteriologically centered, revised Creation-Order Theodicy maintained that all evil is gratuitous as it pertains to God. With the actualization of the world in which all who would be saved are saved, and the unsaved have their punishment mitigated as much as possible, any gratuitous evil that should transpire would have no relevance to the benevolence of God, his benevolence being measured on a soteriological basis. Further, any gratuitous evil that should transpire would not undermine the sovereignty of God, God having sovereignly self-limited the manifestation of some of his attributes in the actualized world, and sovereignly bestowing libertarian freedom on humanity. No evil is necessary for God to bring about any good. While God may choose to bring about a good despite an evil, the evil is still gratuitous.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Little's Creation-Order Theodicy, while demonstrating many strengths, failed to account for the salvation of all who would be saved. This research intended to formulate biblically, theologically, and logically sound revisions to the Creation-Order Theodicy that would result in a theodical soteriology that provided for the salvation of all who would be saved. In formulating such a theodicy, the following major revisions were incorporated into Little's original theodicy: (1) redefinition of God's benevolence, (2) actualization of the world in which all who would be saved are saved, (3) dichotomization of the best way to the best of all possible worlds from the best of all possible worlds, providing qualification and quantification criteria for each, and (4) adoption of a consistent position on the gratuitous nature of evil. Further, the framework of the revised theodicy biblically, theologically, and logically accounted for the following: (1) the concomitant attributes of God, (2) the actualization of the best way possible world and gratuitous evil, (3) natural evil, (4) the cross, (5) eternal damnation, (6) miracles and prayer, and (7) the eternal state of all people.

In consideration of future research, the revised Creation-Order Theodicy should be evaluated within the disciplines of pastoral counseling, missiology, and Christian education. Adopting the revised Creation-Order Theodicy as an informing frame of reference could generate a paradigm shift in how to counsel the suffering, how the church engages in a fallen world, and how curriculum should be developed.

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#### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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